

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Sandra Jacobs-Walls
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This home is run and managed by the local authority. The home offers care and accommodation for up to eight young people of either gender who have emotional and, or behavioural issues.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

This home is well managed and staff work positively to ensure the safety and well-being of the young people. The relationship between staff and young people is based on trust and respect and this helps sustain placements. The young people are making good progress given their starting points when initially admitted to the home.

Young people's educational attendance and achievement is good and staff work proactively to support and encourage young people's engagement with education. Young people live healthy lifestyles and their behaviour is generally good. Staff's use of restraint is rare and sanctions are fairly and appropriately imposed. Staff's promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory.

Staff have a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and young people feel safe in placement at the home. Young people know that any issues or concerns will be dealt with appropriately by staff. Young people receive clear information about making complaints, but do not feel the need to do so. Bullying is not an issue for the home. The frequency of young people being absent without permission or deemed to be missing is on the decline.

Young people's case records are well maintained, containing a good account of their life history. Staff work in effective partnership with other professionals which enhances the likelihood of placement success.

The young people live in a safe and secure environment and their care is provided by staff who are professionally committed to their welfare. Managers monitor all aspects

of the home's functioning and are committed to improving service delivery and outcomes for young people.

However, this inspection notes some shortfalls. These relate to improvements to the home's existing development plan, improvements in the recording of link work sessions and the documentation of imposed sanctions. The home's Statement of Purpose and children's guide require revision and staff must actively pursue missing key information from placing authorities. These shortfalls, however, do not impact negatively on the positive outcomes for young people.

Areas for improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
5 (2001)	keep under review and where appropriate, revise the Statement of Purpose and the children's guide (Regulation 5(a))	01/08/2012
34 (2001)	establish and maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals. (Regulation 34(1)(a))	01/08/2012

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that information about young people, in particular records of link work sessions is recorded clearly and in a way that is helpful to young people when they access their files (NMS 22.5)
- ensure that where sanctions are used, young people are encouraged to have their views recorded in records kept by the home (NMS 3.18)
- ensure that the home's development plan outlines planned changes for the home that address identified weaknesses (NMS 15.2)
- ensure that the results of all statutory reviews are recorded on young people's files. (NMS 25.8)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

The outcomes for young people are good while in placement at the home. Young people receive individual care that meet their needs, as outlined in their placement and care plans. Placements are well sustained; some young people have lived at the home for a number of years. Young people develop a positive self-view and readily accept the contribution staff have made to their general development. Young people actively work on their emotional resilience and confidence building and talk openly about the improvement the placement has made to their lives.

Young people are aware of the objectives of the placement and their identity needs are addressed. Staff's documentation of key information is comprehensive and good efforts are made to retrieve relevant information from other children's teams within the department. This ensures that young people, staff and other local authority personnel are in agreement with the purpose of the placement.

Young people live healthy lifestyles while living at the home. They are promptly registered and have good access to primary health care services and any specialist services as required. The home employs a cook and young people eat healthy diets and enjoy food they prefer. They also participate in physical activities that facilitate exercise. Young people have access to good mental health services, which ensure their emotional well-being is satisfactory.

All current residents attend educational provision and generally are achieving academically. Young people understand the importance of achieving their educational potential and are committed to meeting educational targets. Young people benefit from staff's effective liaison with the departments educational team and this enhances young people's learning. Where school placements are disrupted, young people have ready access to home tuition, which is a very useful resource.

Contact arrangements are supported by staff, and young people benefit from the continuing links with their families. These arrangements are subject to any limitations set out in care plans. Contact can take place at the home if required, and staff ensure that the parents are welcomed and made to feel at ease. Young people enjoy the home's flexible attitude towards visits from friends and understand any boundaries are in place to ensure their safety.

Historically the home has accommodated children of a younger age than those young people currently in placement. Young people are supported by staff to complete simple household chores and attend to personal hygiene and self-care skills. This enhances their independence and helps develop practical life skills.

Quality of care

The quality of the care is **good**.

Young people have experienced a variety of traumatic events that resulted in their move to this home. A key area of work undertaken by staff is to identify individual needs and to work towards addressing these effectively. Young people receive

personalised care that helps them develop their self-confidence and deal with the issues that affect their emotional well-being. Staff pay satisfactory attention to issues of identity. The relationship between young people and staff is good. Each young person is allocated a link worker who is responsible for working with them on their placement plan.

Young people are aware of the purpose of their placements and indicate that the staff provide quality care which meets their needs. One young person comments: 'I enjoy living here. It's usually peaceful and staff deal with issues well. All staff are fine. You can sit down with them and chat. They don't push it. They have good tolerance even though I am a pain.' A member of the staff team comments about her role: 'I enjoy seeing young people progress. Some of them are damaged emotionally and are very unhappy. We invest time, energy and effort. It's great seeing the ice break, barriers coming down and young people relaxing in our company.'

Staff are aware and respond effectively to young people's challenging and risky behaviour. Staff devise relevant risk assessments that include strategies to be employed to combat unacceptable behaviour. These are largely effective as in recent months the frequency of critical incidents and risky behaviour has reduced.

The home ensures that young people have ample opportunities to share their wishes and feelings about their placement and the general running of the home. Young people comment that they feel staff listen to them and take their views seriously. Young people regularly meet with staff for link work sessions with their designated member of staff. However, documentation of these sessions is often insufficiently detailed and so does not assist young people to fully understand discussions held around placement issues.

The home's placement and care planning procedures are consistent and robust. Staff work effectively with placing authorities to ensure comprehensive background information is available in order to ensure that the service can meet young people's needs well. Staff's recording of placement plans clearly outlines the areas of work required in order to meet individual needs. Staff then provide very personalised care, in line with established placement objectives. This helps to enhance the sustainability of placements.

Young people have good access to information about the home's complaints procedure. Relevant information is available in the home's children's guide and elsewhere. Information includes the contact numbers of national advocacy groups, the local authority's complaints department and Ofsted. Staff also encourage young people to engage with independent advocates, and some young people do. This further ensures that their views and best interests remain paramount. Young people understand how complaints are made; since the last inspection, no complaints have been received against the service.

An important aspect of the quality of care provided is in respect of the health needs of the young people. Young people live healthy lives while in placement. Young

people's health care plans are in place and these give a good indication of individual health care needs and the resources required. The looked after children's nurse is utilised by the service for annual health assessments, advice and support. Young people have good access to this service. Staff ensure that, soon after placement, young people are registered and have excellent access to primary care services. This is important to ensure young people's physical, emotional and psychological health needs are well addressed. Staff keep clear records of medical appointments and treatment outcomes and encourage young people to take an interest in their personal health. Staff ensure that specialist services are available, for example, relating to sexual health issues, enuresis, and drug and alcohol prevention. Staff work closely with local mental health services, such as Child and Adolescence Mental Health Services and art therapy resources, to ensure young people's psychological health needs are met.

The home employs a chef and the service ensures that young people receive well-balanced, nutritional and varied meals. Young people enjoy meals they prefer and confirm that the home offers ample choice at meal times. Staff encourage young people to participate in activities that promote physical exercise. The home's extensive garden area includes a swimming pool which young people enjoy and have good access to when the weather permits. Staff ensure that young people have access to other means of exercise and that young people have holidays away during school breaks.

The staff support and encourage young people to value their education and participate fully in educational activities. As a result, all young people are currently engaged in education, some recently completing GCSE examinations. Staff have an effective working partnership with the department's educational team. This includes a 'virtual school' resource that is responsible for the coordination of educational provision for looked after children. Staff of the home and members of this team work industriously to identify and secure appropriate educational resources that meet young people's individual needs. Collaboratively, these efforts result in young people's improved attendance at school and educational success for most. Where young people do not attend school, provision is made for home tuition to take place on site. This is of clear benefit to young people whose education can continue, uninterrupted.

During the inspection a member of the education team was on site, meeting with a young person. They said of the home's staff team: 'They have a good awareness of the educational needs of young people. They are united, synchronised and everyone is aware of what's going on for the young people. Staff are professional about their job and communicate well with each other and other agencies like myself. They have young people's best interest at heart and are focus on the end target.'

Young people's case files contain an educational section that evidences staff's keen efforts to promote good educational opportunities. Key work sessions and statutory reviews routinely explore issues pertaining to young people's education. Files evidence information about people's educational issues and progress, school transfer, exclusions and attendance information. The home's premises provide a good learning

environment. There are quiet places within the home for young people to carry out homework. Computers are available for homework and research purposes and the home is well equipped with books and other learning materials.

The home is appropriately located, well maintained and comfortably furnished. There is a well-kept, extensive garden area to the rear of the home which accommodates a swimming pool and active play apparatus. The building's communal areas and individual bedrooms are well equipped and decorated. Staff encourage young people to personalise their private bedrooms, which they do. Young people are happy with their surroundings which meet their needs well.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Young people feel protected and are safe while in placement at the home. Safeguarding is a strong feature at this home and young people are confident that staff will ensure their safety and well-being. All staff are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and they have completed the appropriate training required by the council. There are clear and comprehensive child protection policies and procedures which inform and support staff practices. The home's staff group demonstrates a good understanding of child protection policies and procedures. Equally, there are clear and effective policies and procedures in place to address the management of allegations. These are also very familiar to the staff group. There have been no allegations made against the service since the last inspection.

Young people benefit from staff's good understanding of policies and procedures that address young people who are absent without authority or are deemed missing. In recent months the frequency of these incidents have been high. Of late, however, the number of incidents involving young people who are absent has reduced. Young people are familiar with the action taken by the home when they are missing. They benefit from clear protocols between staff of the home and relevant police teams in an effort to quickly identify their whereabouts and influence their safe return home. Local police teams have a good working relationship with staff and this assists with the coordination of young people's safety when they are away from the home. Staff and police take appropriate action when young people are missing and this action is dependent upon the assessed risks posed to the individual young person. Staff maintain comprehensive records of all incidents and of the action taken. Managers of the service monitor well all related instances and take note of developing trends in order to combat risky behaviour.

Where young people are deemed to be engaging in high-risk behaviour, additional systems are in place to address and assist minimise this behaviour. When such incidents occur, staff alert all key professionals and are prompt in convening professionals' meetings to explore and address young people's vulnerability. This is demonstrated well where young people are suspected of being victims of sexual exploitation. Multi-agency professionals participate in intervention and strategy meetings and devise effective planning to help keep young people safe from harm

and abuse.

Staff complete individualised risk assessments that help identify triggers that may lead to challenging or poor behaviour. Staff promote positive behaviour and efforts in recent months have been largely successful. One young person comments: 'I can now manage my anger. I'm in a new, better environment and staff help me to control myself. When I'm not behaving well, staff will talk to me and get me to relax. Sometimes they remove the other kids from the area. It works.'

There is a very low incidence level of physical restraint used at the home. There is a positive emphasis on de-escalation of difficult or tense situations involving young people. Staff always attempt to engage verbally with young people, rather than respond to behavioural situations through the use of restraint. Staff base their approach on the positive relationships built up with the young people to diffuse difficult or tense situations. Since the last inspection there has been one incident of restraint. Staff maintain clear documentation of such incidents; records are compliant with revised legislation. All staff have received training in de-escalation techniques. Staff's use of sanctions is careful and staff record all instances when sanctions are imposed. Staff records, however, do not include the views of young people about the sanction.

Managers and the organisation's human resources department ensure that there is a robust recruitment and selection procedures in place which promotes the safety of the young people. All applicants for employment are fully vetted and cleared before taking up their positions at the home.

The home is physically a safe environment for the young people and staff. There are suitable windows in all rooms with restricted openings. Entrance doors are equipped with good quality locks to prevent unauthorised entry. All required safety checks on fire, gas, electrical and domestic appliances have been carried out. Staff ensure that fire drills are regularly undertaken. These measures ensure the safety of everyone living and working at the home.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the children's home are **adequate**.

The management of the home is satisfactory. Managers of the home have been in post for an extensive number of years and are committed to ensuring that young people are well cared for and that the home is operating efficiently. The home's Registered Manager has extensive residential child care and management experience.

The home's Statement of Purpose states clearly the aims and objectives of the service. However, the document is in need of revision in order for it to be in compliance with the current regulations. Currently information about the staff group, arrangements for training and supervision and an organisational structure is missing. The document also makes reference to a former, now defunct, regulatory body. The

home's children's guide also requires revision. Currently this document does not accurately reflect the age range of young people admitted to the home and it fails to include the contact details of the Children's Rights Officer, as required. However, all requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection have been satisfactorily resolved. The home is financially viable.

The organisation has a clear complaints policy and procedure in place, which are well known to young people. Staff maintain good records of all complaints and these are managed in accordance with written guidance. Since the last inspection the service has received no complaints.

The organisation demonstrates a capacity to continually improve; however, this is not well evidenced in the home's development plan. This document, in order to be effective, should be better linked to the finding of managers' monitoring reports which give a detailed overview of areas identified for improvement.

The home's monitoring systems are satisfactory and young people benefit from the home's commitment to improving its service provision. The home is subject to monthly Regulation 33 unannounced monitoring visits. These are conducted consistently and subsequent reports are sufficiently detailed. Management's response to identified weaknesses is prompt. The service ensures these monitoring reports and notifications are promptly forwarded to Ofsted for review. Additionally, the Registered Manager completes monthly Regulation 34 reports. These are periodically forwarded to Ofsted for review. However, these monitoring reports are not fully compliant with all matters as outlined in Schedule 6 of the regulations. This is necessary in order for the service to be fully compliant with the relevant legislation.

The home's staffing numbers are sufficient to ensure the service's safe operation. The staff group is diverse in terms of gender, race and skill mix. The staff group is well established, with most staff members having worked at the home for a significant period of time. The team is cohesive and works effectively to meet the needs of young people. Communication and support is very good amongst the team and staff clearly enjoy caring for young people. One senior member of staff comments: 'I love working with the kids. I've got a good rapport with staff and kids. The team is effective, we're able to apportion tasks that meet their individual skills. We're a close team, but able to maintain professional boundaries.'

Staff are very well trained to carry out their duties and a comprehensive training schedule is available for staff to improve their skills and competences. Formal supervision for staff is well established and these meetings identify their training and developmental needs. The staff team is positively motivated and supported by the home's managers. Staff receive annual appraisals. One staff member comments, 'I'm privileged just to be part of the team, a part of the process. I'm surprised how much I've grown.'

Staff ensure records are stored securely and their approach to confidentiality is good. Staff ensure the service obtains comprehensive, key information from placing authorities during placement negotiations and the care planning process. This is

important to establish placement outcomes. However, the service does not currently benefit from staff's robust perusal of other key information from placing authorities. This includes outcomes of statutory looked after children reviews and minutes from key professionals' meetings. This is important to ensure that staff have access to records that outline case decision-making.

This inspection finds that, despite identified weaknesses in the management of the home, the service is well run. Identified shortfalls in this area of the home's operation do not negatively impact on the outcomes for young people, which are good.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the *Inspections of children's homes – framework for inspection* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.