

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC040642
Inspection date	03/12/2013
Inspector	Jennie Christopher
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	25/02/2013
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The children's home is owned and managed by a local authority. It provides accommodation for up to seven young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

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**.

Young people are positive about their home and say that staff support them well to overcome barriers and challenges in their lives. Young people feel they are listened to and believe that staff are concerned for their well-being. Young people progress in many areas of their lives through positive relationships with staff in a comfortable and nurturing environment.

The home's management and senior team effectively guide and motivate staff who are well trained and supported through formal and informal supervision. Young people benefit as a result of their consistency of approach. Young people are continually supported to live in a group and to value others opinions and beliefs through discussions and meetings. Bullying is raised as a concern; however young people feel staff manage issues that arise if they are unable to do so independently. Young people are actively involved in consultation and service development through house meetings and individual work.

Staff strive to form extremely effective relationships with young people's parents, families and carers as well as with a wide range of specialist services; thus ensuring a comprehensive approach to care and placement planning. Social workers comment that communication is effective through the provision of fortnightly reports.

The management and staff strive for improvement in the care and the service young people receive. The acting manager and senior staff identify the strengths and value of living in the home. Weaknesses, when not recognised, are tackled promptly once identified, including the areas for improvement noted during the inspection. These

include: ensuring young people are consulted during the Regulation 34 monitoring process; recording young people's views on sanctions consistently in records and gaining telephone verification of references for all staff.

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
34 (2001)	ensure that monitoring of the matters listed in Schedule 6 includes consultation with children accommodated in the home, their parents and placing authority. (Regulation 34(3))	31/01/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure that where any sanctions are used, young people are encouraged to have their views recorded in records kept by the home (NMS 3.18)
- ensure telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references when recruiting people to work in the home. (NMS 16.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people's individuality is promoted and valued. Staff's consistent positive regard enables young people to develop positive attachments, further developing the foundations for appropriate relationships with peers and family. Young people generally make positive progress in all aspects of their lives, in relation to their starting points, through individualised care and support. As a result of their placement in the home, young people are enabled to improve their confidence, self-esteem and form a greater understanding of their personal history.

Proactive health awareness, through direct work and displays, ensures young people have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles in relation to their needs and lifestyle choices. Young people mostly enjoy good health with limited use of prescribed medication. When appropriate young people are assessed as being able to self-medicate to promote their well-being and independence. Young people are discouraged from smoking and advice on cessation programmes is readily available.

Young people are actively supported and encouraged to have a greater understanding about the causes of their risk-taking behaviours and work positively to replace them with more positive behaviours or activities. Parents comment positively about the progress their children make in reducing risky behaviours. As a result, incidents of self-harm have dramatically reduced. Substance misuse and being missing from care have reduced for some young people since living in the home, but remain a significant concern for others. Where young people continue to struggle with risk taking, specialist police and support agencies engage with both the home and young people individually or as a group.

Attendance in education, training and employment is very good. Joint working between the home and education enables young people to progress and achieve in line with their peers. Those who struggle with education or gaining employment benefit through support from both staff and external agencies; which helps them overcome their barriers to engagement. Young people who have recently moved on from the home continue in education and training and remain in contact with the home and staff. Young people have positive relationships in the community, accessing leisure activities and maintaining friendships for example.

While living in the home young people learn a wide range of practical skills, such as household cleaning tasks, budgeting and cooking meals. In conjunction with this, they learn essential self-care and life skills in preparation for moving on to independence. The use of the independence flat when young people are ready to take the next step towards independence is coveted by young people. Those currently using this area are progressing significantly and say they feel 'more prepared' for their next step when they leave the home.

Quality of care

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

Young people progress in relation to their starting points as a result of their constructive relationships with staff. Young people feel staff are concerned about their welfare and say they, 'try and make things better' for them. Young people are consistently positive about staff. Interactions observed were nurturing; this helps to develop young people's interaction and social skills. Young people are encouraged to express themselves and be an individual.

Consultation with young people through house meetings and informal sessions ensures their views are sought and when possible acted upon. This forum also enables young people to manage disagreements and issues as a result of group living. Observation of meetings demonstrated an appropriate level of respectful challenge with staff intervening when required. Meeting records evidence how young people's views have positively impacted upon the running of the home and care they receive. Young people are encouraged to be involved in their reviews and care planning.

Staff have very high aspirations for all young people in their care. The well-being and development of individual young people is central to all planning. Staff endeavour to work as a team to ensure consistency of approach. On-going training in specific concerns and behaviours young people are displaying continues to develop their work with young people.

Staff support educational and training placements with robust communication between home and education and training providers. Those not in education or training, or awaiting the start of their next course enjoy constructive activities during the day, such as life skills and sporting activities. Young people who are attending college have a common room area stocked with education supplies and snacks. This is deemed a privilege which other young people aspire to. The changing needs of young people are continually monitored and plans are updated fortnightly by staff in consultation, where appropriate, with parents, social workers and other relevant professionals.

Young people attend all required medical appointments either independently or with staff. There are close links with mental and emotional health specialists, such as Community Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and substance misuse services to support staff. This ensures a consistency of approach in supporting young people's emotional well-being and responses to unwanted behaviours and substance use. Medication is stored appropriately and there is a thorough system to ensure safety when administering medication. In case of emergency, there are several first aiders on site at all times.

Young people have access to independent advocates when required and know how to make complaints and who to complain to. Further information on how to access a range of advocacy and emotional and health support services is clearly displayed. The home's proactive response to young people's complaints has ensured swift resolution and change where necessary.

The generally well-maintained building is undergoing redecoration and modernisation. It is homely with safety in mind. There are many areas for independent or group interaction.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say they feel safe in the home and while they raise bullying as a concern, they feel that staff do all they can to manage incidents. Young people's welfare is promoted and staff endeavour to protect young people from abuse or harm, including educating young people about the risk of exploitation. Staff are confident in processes to follow should they be concerned for a young person's safety or welfare and are aware of child protection procedures. Policies within the home are proactive and updated in response to lessons learned locally and nationally; including identifying signs of exploitation and substance use. Staff are aware of individual vulnerabilities and work closely together and with specialist

agencies to ensure the safety of young people.

Young people do go missing from care and there are robust measures in place when this happens. Triggers are identified and explored with young people and risk assessments and placement plans updated to reflect this. Specialist police officers say they meet regularly with the home to help protect young people who are at risk of exploitation when they are missing. Detailed plans identify supportive and protective factors for those at risk of harm, substance use or offending. Incidences of being missing from care and other risk-taking behaviours, such as self-harm and offending, have dramatically reduced and in some cases ceased. However, substance use is still a significant concern for some young people. The home works closely with community police officers in order to disrupt the supply of substances to young people in the home. Individual files contain up-to-date photographs of young people in case of emergency.

The organisation's recruitment policy is thorough and ensures young people are protected from harm by usually robust personnel checks. However, not all staff files contain evidence of reference verification.

Individualised positive behaviour plans reward young people through positive reinforcement and rewards. Sanctions are proportionate, although often young people's views are not sought regarding the effectiveness or their feelings regarding the sanction. Young people are encouraged to reflect on their behaviour in group meetings and through an increasingly restorative approach to incidences of unwanted behaviour or actions. Young people are supported to reflect and consider how future responses could be different. Proactive responses to unwanted behaviour and conflict resolution between young people has led to restraint not being used for several years.

Young people are safe from fire and other hazards in the home as a result of thorough checks and procedures. Young people's risk assessments are robust and thoughtful which ensures young people take age-appropriate responsibility and enjoy activities and take controlled risks in line with individual behaviours and vulnerabilities.

Leadership and management

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

The home is being managed by the assistant team manager since the Registered Manager resigned in November 2013. The acting manager has an excellent understanding of the home and young people. They are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the home which are monitored through effective and evaluative monthly scrutiny of the building and records. These clearly demonstrate the impact of living in the home has for young people and their outcomes. However, there has been a failure to identify non-compliance with the requirement of a regulation in, as young people, their parents and stakeholders views are not sought during the quality assurance process. Reports in relation to visits made to the home to monitor its

conduct in line with Regulation 33 are sound. The comprehensive development plan identifies key areas for improvement, including how recommendations from previous inspections and external monitoring have been implemented in practice.

The provider meets the aims and objectives as set out in the Statement of Purpose and staff, young people and parents understand the functions, purpose and ethos of the home. The young people's guide contains information on external advice and advocacy services alongside what they can expect from living in the home.

The home demonstrates excellent multi-agency working to improve outcomes for young people. Mental and emotional health services, drugs workers and specialist police officers, amongst other services, are actively involved to ensure the best possible care and outcomes for young people. Services that are not performing are challenged appropriately. Young people are supported to complain, when necessary, about services they receive or issues within the home and have successfully affected change as a result. There have been no complaints from the community and relationships are positive.

Many of the staff team have worked in the home for a long period of time and although there is currently a reliance on bank and contracted agency staff, the team is consistent and enthusiastic. However, on occasion, due to levels of staffing work is reactive rather than proactive. Staff feel their training needs are met and that they benefit from evaluative support and supervision. Yearly appraisals are home specific to ensure an appropriate level of challenge and focus on development in line with the service as well as individual needs. Newly appointed staff complete a thorough induction programme specific to the service, alongside the Children's Workforce Development Council's induction standards.

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* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.