

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Gavin Thomas
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is owned and managed by a local authority. The house is situated in a residential area. The town centre and its amenities, which include a cinema, sports centre, park and library, are a short bus ride away.

One of the key objectives of the home is to provide individually tailored care plans to support and help prepare young people for moving on to semi/independent living. This is enhanced through the provision of a semi-independence flat which supports transitional plans for young people moving on.

Extensive work is undertaken to engage young people in meaningful activities and work experience placements.

All young people are accommodated in single bedrooms and benefit from adequate living space and a large rear garden, which young people help to maintain.

The local authority is currently reviewing the numbers of registered places. At the time of this inspection, six young people were living at the home and all six contributed towards this inspection.

Summary

This was a full unannounced inspection. All of the key national minimum standards were assessed including some additional standards. The six young people resident, were keen to contribute to this inspection. All of the Every Child Matters outcomes and organisation were assessed.

Very few completed surveys were received. However, the comments made were very supportive about the quality of the staff team and their effectiveness in supporting young people.

This inspection found that the support, care and guidance tailored to young people's individual needs are all outstanding. Staff are very strong as a team, for ensuring that young people receive the types of support and attention they need. The many benefits of this setting include the strong links with educational facilities and preparing young people for semi and independent living. Young people live in an environment where they are not judged or criticised. Young people respect the behaviour and safeguarding systems. Although they sometimes find this challenging, young people are fully aware that these systems are within their best interests. The staff are good at staying in touch with young people once they have moved on. These arrangements are mutual and some ex-residents have established a good rapport with young people.

Staff and young people feel reassured and appropriately supported by a strong management team. The relationships between staff and young people are also very caring and attentive. As a result, this helps staff to manage very complex and challenging situations involving young people.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no actions or recommendations made at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people eat well and are very proud that they grow and eat their own vegetables. Young people say that they enjoy the selection of foods and have no qualms about helping to prepare meals. The menus show that young people's diet consists of a broad selection of fresh and homemade meals. Young people look forward to a weekly take-away meal which is a treat following house meetings. The kitchen and food storage areas are well organised and presented. As a result, food safety is well observed and monitored through labelling and proper storage. Significant work is undertaken with young people occupying the semi- independence flat and preparing to move on. This includes young people budgeting and planning their meals, shopping, cooking and taking full responsibility of safety in the kitchen.

Staff are strong advocates for ensuring that young people's health needs are met. For example, staff engage in frank discussions with young people about their health and well-being. Staff are also good at challenging decisions and ensuring that young people receive the care and services they require from external resources. As a result, young people are thriving and historical health related issues have reduced substantially over recent months. Young people say that they are pleased with staff support and arrangements for accessing health services. The quality of young people's health records is outstanding. These are clearly linked to associated records such as risk assessments and other in-house tailor made documents.

Robust procedures are in place for ensuring that young people's medication is safe. This includes the quality of record keeping, storage and disposal. Where appropriate, young people are fully supported to manage their own medications. The safety of these arrangements are monitored through effective risk management strategies. Staff are suitably trained and supervised for ensuring that the correct medication procedures are followed.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The arrangements for ensuring young people's privacy are carefully monitored. This includes the provision of single bedrooms and supporting young people to respect each other's space. Young people also have keys to their bedrooms and ample space is provided for young people to meet with their visitors in private. A telephone booth is provided for young people and this is appropriately furnished and private. Policies and procedures on privacy and confidentiality are effective in practice. For example, confidential information is stored and archived appropriately and handovers and shift planning meetings are conducted professionally.

The numbers of complaints received by the home are very few. Recent complaints are in relation to internal matters and records of these complaints and outcomes, show that complaints are taken very seriously. Young people are confident that their concerns are taken seriously and they would not hesitate to speak to any member of staff. Young people are provided with details of external agencies involved in their care and well-being. This means that young people are not restricted to making complaints only to staff working at the home. Contact telephone numbers for Ofsted are included in the Statement of Purpose but not the address.

Safeguarding procedures are consistent and effective in practice. All staff attend various forms of training related to safeguarding. In turn, this enables staff to understand young people's needs and support them through some very complex and high-risk situations. Young people are benefitting immensely from the significance of work undertaken by staff to keep them safe.

Young people are very aware of bullying behaviours and the different types of bullying. Staff are skilled in identifying trends and patterns of behaviours and responding to situations before they escalate. Young people say that bullying types of behaviour are very much in the form of name calling and teasing. This however, is addressed in a variety of ways to help young people learn more appropriate ways of forming relationships as they prepare for young adulthood.

Absence without authority is addressed very seriously and when appropriate, involves external agencies. The prompt action taken by staff gives young people a consistent message about the home's responsibility and duty towards their care. There have been high numbers of recorded incidences over the last year. However, the trends and patterns of these behaviours have reduced significantly with the young people currently resident at the home. Comprehensive records are kept in relation to young people being absent without authority. The quality of this information shows how young people are supported during and after each incident.

Staff are committed to providing extensive types of support, which enables young people to manage their behaviours responsibly and safely. In doing so, this creates an environment where challenging situations and behaviours are discussed and explored very openly with young people. Young people say that the staff team are the best because staff will stay with them for as long as necessary. Young people also say that they feel safe at this home because staff make it a safe place to live. The quality of behavioural management records is unquestionable. These records are linked to all aspects of care planning and risk management strategies. All staff attend updated training on physical intervention techniques. However, restraint and other forms of physical intervention are very rarely used. The use of sanctions are used to help young people reflect on behaviours which are not acceptable and could present a risk to their safety. Young people say that sanctions are fair.

Health and safety systems are robust. The style of recording health and safety checks carried out has improved since the last inspection. This means that outcomes of checks undertaken are much clearer and easier to track. Updated risk management documents are in place. This provides vital information for staff to follow in the event of a crisis. Young people are familiar with fire evacuation procedures and the numbers of fire drills carried out to date this year are within keeping of the national minimum standard. Fire safety is prioritised and faults are remedied without delay. An unsuitable object is used to keep one of the doors propped open in the semi-independence flat. However, prompt action has been taken to remedy this.

Extensive work is undertaken when recruiting new staff to ensure that they are safe and suitable to work with young people. This includes a selection process which involves young people's input. Suitability references are verified and updated Criminal Records Bureau checks are obtained prior to new staff commencing employment. Visitors are appropriately screened by staff to ensure that young people are not placed at risk.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The types of support offered to young people are wide ranging and unquestionable. Young people say that staff go 'over and above' their required duties to support them at any time of the day or night. In addition, young people are guided and supported to access a range of community-based activities. These activities are clearly linked to preparatory work with young people as they plan to move on. Key worker meetings are consistent and tailored in accordance with young people's needs. This is a 'two-way' process and enables young people to identify what they want to gain from key worker meetings. Details of external professionals and agencies are accessible to young people. This ensures that young people are not restricted to the staff team for advice and support.

Young people's education is fully promoted and educational experiences in a wider context are outstanding. Staff are committed to young people's education and in doing so, they work very closely with schools, colleges and alternate education provisions. Staff are persistent and dynamic in their approach when offering young people support to secure further education and work placements. Former residents who stay in touch with the home are excellent role models for young people. Their achievements are examples to young people about the benefits of persevering with their education and work placements.

In addition to academic support, young people benefit immensely from the vast range of other learning opportunities available to them. This includes culture, diversity, caring for the environment and citizenship. These are achieved through young people's participation in holidays at home and abroad, visiting places of interest and learning about different cultures and acceptance in society. Young people are planning and looking forward to two camping trips this year.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are pleased with the way in which their care needs are met. Young people's placement plans and associated records such as daily observations are comprehensive and carefully monitored. This is indicative of some of the exceptional work undertaken for ensuring that young people's assessed and changing needs are met. All aspects of placement planning are linked to statutory, organisational and local processes. This ensures a consistent approach to identifying young people's needs, how they are met and by whom.

Young people's reviews are carried out within a timely fashion. Young people's choice to participate in their reviews is optional although they are encouraged to do so. This includes young people's engagement in the planning, consultation with their independent reviewing officers and attending their review meetings.

Extensive work is carried out with or on behalf of young people to enable them to re-establish, maintain or build positive relationships with families and significant others. Young people say that they are very pleased with the support they receive. This includes the depth of support they receive from staff to help them through some very complex and emotional situations. Young people's 'contact' records have recently been modified. These records are much clearer and succinct for evaluating outcomes and effectiveness of contact arrangements for young people. Sufficient space is available for young people to meet with their visitors in private. Young people also enjoy the company of ex-residents who stay in touch and visit the home on a regular basis.

Young people are consulted on a wide range of matters both formally and informally. This gives young people an opportunity to contribute to key debates and decisions about the running of the home. Young people's weekly meetings are taken very seriously and outcomes are documented and presented to young people. Although young people have mixed views about the benefits of these meetings, they all agree that coming together as a household is useful. They are also of the opinion that sometimes they 'expect too much too soon' following house meetings. As a result, young people say that they fully understand that some of their requests and suggestions may need time to be sorted or considered.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The provisions and arrangements for preparing young people to move on to semi or independent living are outstanding. One of the key features being the provision of a two bedroom self-contained flat situated in the house. This flat is an excellent opportunity for giving young people the opportunity to experience independent living. A robust process is in place for young people to apply and qualify for occupancy of the flat. Tenancy and on going support arrangements are meaningful and effective in practice. The support includes weekly meetings, support with budgeting, safety and spending time wisely and constructively.

The benefits of young people living in the flat provides them with realistic expectations for when they move on. However, this does not ease the anxieties and expressions of 'feeling alone' once young people have moved on. As a result, outreach work and contact is maintained with some ex-residents for a variety of reasons. In light of these examples, the Registered Manager and the staff team are strongly advocating the necessity of satellite services as extension of this home for young people once they have moved.

The communal areas of the home seen were immaculate, well kept and homely. Young people are encouraged to take great pride in their home. As a result, they get to choose colour schemes, fixtures and furniture.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

A comprehensive Statement of Purpose is in place. This has recently been revised and updated. This document covers all of the criteria as set out in schedule 1 of the children's homes regulations 2001. A young people's guide is in place. This document is informative although a minor change is required to update the contact number for Ofsted.

Staff say that they receive regular one-to-one supervisions and annual appraisals of their work. This is confirmed through records examined, which are of good quality and shows the depth of matters discussed. A very robust process is in place for supervising new staff throughout their probation. Written records demonstrate the quality of monitoring and supervision for ensuring that staff remain suitable during the early stages of their employment. Staff benefit from the various forums for monitoring and evaluating their performance and work with young people. These include weekly team meetings except in school holiday time, daily handovers and shift planning meetings.

Staffing levels are maintained in accordance with the staffing policy. This ensures that young people are appropriately supervised at all times. Staff deputising in the absence of the Registered

Manager are suitably qualified and experienced. Staff are professional in their approach and have a very good understanding of young people's needs and the running of the home. Young people say that the staff at this home are 'the best'. The Registered Manager is suitably qualified and experienced with demonstrable experience in child care. Young people say that the Registered Manager is 'the best in the country'. Young people say this is because the manager does not lie to them and nothing is too much for her to do where they are concerned.

At least 80% of the staff team have achieved the National Vocational Qualification level 3 or 4 in the Caring for Children and Young People. Newly appointed staff have also completed the Children's Workforce Development Council standards. All staff have access to a wide range of training courses to support their continuous professional development. This means that young people can rely on a staff team who are fully supported by management and suitably trained to meet their needs. Staff are pleased with the types of training and management support that they receive. Staff also say that team work is good and they can rely on mutual support from each other.

Visits required under regulation 33 are carried out within the required timescales. Reports for these visits give examples of how the ethos of the home is carried out in practice, while providing a high quality service to young people. The criteria for these visits includes conversations with staff and young people and the assessment of key records. This ensures that the criteria as required under national minimum standard 32.2 are fully met.

Robust systems are in place for monitoring and evaluating performance and outcomes for young people. This includes a current team development plan which clearly sets out goals and objectives for everyone this year, including young people. Internal monitoring processes undertaken by management are vigorous and as a result, recent changes have been made to the style of recording. Staff welcome these changes and as a result, the quality of recording and reporting has also improved.

Young people's individual files are organised and presented to exceptionally high standards. The files include all of the criteria as set out under schedule 3 of the children's homes regulations 2001. Additional information includes young people's booklets titled 'How you gonna live'. These booklets are supplementary to young people's care plans with very personalised objectives and tasks in preparation for semi and independent living. Young people's information is appropriately stored. This promotes young people's privacy and confidentiality.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Young people benefit from the make up of a staff team which is diverse and balanced. The staff team is stable, confident in their approach and rise to given challenges with openness and sensitivity. Staff are extremely knowledgeable about young people's needs. As a result, they are skilled in how they manage situations and comments by young people around race, sexuality and diversity. The vast array of opportunities available to young people to help them learn about acceptance and growing up in a multi-cultural society is highly valued. This includes the types of foods young people cook, learning about self-respect and countering bullying behaviours. The effectiveness of intervention is often known through conversations with young people after they have moved on.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- update the Statement of Purpose and young people's guide to include the address for Ofsted (NMS 16)
- ensure that positive steps are taken to keep young people, staff and visitors safe from risk from fire and other hazards in the semi independence flat (NMS 26.1)
- update the young people's guide with the correct telephone number for Ofsted. (NMS 1)