

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Kevin Whatley
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is run by a private organisation. It is registered to accommodate up to six young people of either gender who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home aims to support young people to return to family, move to foster carers or to move on to independent accommodation. The organisation has its own school which is registered with the Department for Education.

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 receive good levels of care, support and guidance. Individually focused programmes of care assist young people to make progress. Young people say they feel safe and looked after. Positive and meaningful relationships between staff and young people assists to improve levels of self-esteem, confidence and behaviour.

A comprehensive approach to care planning, assessment and review ensures the specific and changing needs of each young person are met. The home is good at keeping young people as safe as possible and in reducing their risk-taking behaviour/s. Young people are given every opportunity to express how they feel and have their views considered in daily living.

The home is managed well with the needs of young people at the forefront of practice and development. A number of improvements have been made since the last inspection, notably in regard to risk assessment, the promotion of healthy lifestyles and increased staff morale.

One minor shortfall was identified whereby some key-working reports did not evidence the comments of young people; this does not impact negatively on the care provided.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure all young people communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support; in particular that they are given opportunities to read and comment on their key-work reports. (NMS 1.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Outcomes for young people are good. Young people share positive relationships with staff, gain valuable awareness of their negative behaviours and make progress in developing their levels of confidence. Such progress is particularly good for those young people with poor starting points. Social workers confirmed that young people benefit from staff who display high quality communication skills. This enables young people to build up long trusting/professional relationships and significantly improve their self-esteem.

Young people have their health care needs met and benefit from living in an environment where healthy lifestyles are consistently encouraged.

Young people are able to express their views easily and have a number of avenues to contribute to the running of the home. Young people say they understand how to make a complaint and were seen to communicate openly with staff. Young people noted, 'you do get your say and staff listen to what you have to say.'

Young people make progress in addressing their negative actions and reducing their risk taking behaviours; in some cases progress is significant. The structure and strategies put in place to support the young people to manage their behaviour enables them to become more settled, leading to a significant decrease in risk-taking behaviour. If there are incidents of note, young people benefit from close staff support. This has been particularly beneficial in reducing the levels at which young people run away from care. One social worker stated, 'the skills taught to the young person by staff have been invaluable and had totally changed their attitude to life.'

Young people receive individualised support and encouragement and engage in further education and training. An established culture ensures young people attend school, training schemes or seek employment. Attendance rates are good and staff provide close support to ensure young people engage in their learning. Such a positive atmosphere culminates in young people being motivated to participate in constructive pursuits and ultimately gain valuable life skills and experiences.

Young people who are older have independence programmes put in place which helps to prepare them for life outside of the home. This enables them to learn self-care skills, while continuing to gain support and guidance from staff. Programmes

include living on a budget, cooking and seeking employment. Social workers stated that the work completed with young people greatly assisted them when they moved on into semi-independent living.

Quality of care

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

Young people receive a good quality of care. The importance of developing meaningful relationships with young people is a key aspect of practice in the home. The strength of such relationships enables young people to explore their own issues in an appropriate manner. This includes learning mutual respect for staff, each other and the wider community. Behaviour is good with positive relationships amongst staff and young people helping to create an environment where appropriate behaviour is expected.

The views and wishes of young people are considered well and incorporated into decisions which affect their daily lives. Regular meetings take place where young people have a chance to discuss a range of issues in the home. This includes practical concerns, such as deciding the week's menu, to more emotive aspects of group living, for instance expectations of behaviour and respect. Young people also have regular opportunities to discuss matters with staff through one-to-one key-work sessions. These are recorded and young people have an opportunity to read and comment. However, several of these sections were left blank; this shortfall did not impact on the care provided to young people.

A suitable complaints procedure is in place with young people having considerable opportunities to raise their concerns. No complaints have been made since the last inspection. The process has been further improved with the implementation of a 'grumbles book'. This initiative allows young people, who do not wish to make a formal complaint, to nonetheless have their issues addressed fully by the management team. As a result the importance of expressing an opinion and having it acknowledged and resolved is embedded in the culture of the home.

Care planning is a strength of the home with the individual needs of young people being fully assessed and reviewed. Staff confirmed they are actively involved in discussions around the needs of young people before they are admitted. This ensures a coherent approach to care planning where the skills and knowledge of the whole staff team are considered. High quality care plans incorporate all available information and provide a holistic approach to meeting the specific needs of each young person. This includes taking a full account of their cultural backgrounds and identities; in particular the importance of maintaining appropriate contact with family and friends in their home area. Care plans provide staff with clear guidance as to how to meet the assessed needs of young people which they follow in practice. Regular reviews of care take place with young people being encouraged to participate wherever possible.

The health care needs of young people are met well. The home links with external

health care professionals to provide a joined up approach to meeting health needs. All routine medical appointments are planned and staff support young people to attend them. Close liaison with the local looked after children nurse results in young people being visited by them at the home on a regular basis. This allows for specific health care advice and guidance, such as sexual health, to be provided in the comfort and security of the young person's own environment. The home has also become a completely smoke free zone where any young person or member of staff have to leave all of the grounds, including the car park, should they wish to smoke.

The educational and learning needs of young people are suitably addressed. The home harbours a pro-learning culture with an appropriate expectation placed on attendance and engagement. The organisation has their own school which young people of statutory age attend. Older young people are assisted to attend college, while others are helped to secure further training or employment options including joining the army cadets and enrolling on recruitment courses.

A good range of activities are made available which provides young people with opportunities to pursue their own interests and enjoy new experiences. Regular trips take place to local leisure centres and places of interest with young people often benefitting from valuable one-to-one time with staff. Excursions also take place to theme parks with young people able to stay away with staff as part of short and exciting breaks. This enables the continued development of relationships and young people gain useful life skills in social settings. Young people are helped to follow their own wishes, for example going fishing, playing pool and helping to walk dogs at a nearby rescue centre. This results in positive and worthwhile interaction with the local community and a clear sense of achievement for young people.

Young people are provided with a good standard of accommodation. The home is suitably maintained and repairs are completed when required. Young people are able to personalise their rooms and had their views considered when the home was recently re-decorated. A reasonable amount of space is available both inside and out with the environment being furnished in a homely and comfortable fashion. Gym equipment has recently been purchased and situated in a building within the grounds.

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 living at the home and staff work hard to ensure their safety and well-being. Staff are trained to address issues of child protection and understand what actions to take should concerns arise. Recent training has included the risks of young people being targeted for sexual exploitation, notably those in care. Good links with the local police ensure the known risks and vulnerabilities of young people are shared appropriately to keep them safe. The organisation has recently launched their own online safeguarding site. This provides young people living in any of their homes a discreet route to disclose any concerns directly to the person responsible for child protection within the organisation. No child protection

concerns have arisen since the last inspection.

A robust recruitment process ensures that all staff are suitably checked before they work at the home. This includes care staff, support staff and external contractors such as gardeners.

Young people who have a history of running away from care are assisted to reduce such behaviour. Close liaison with all those responsible for the well-being of the young people concerned ensure a planned response. For example, agreeing strategies should a young person return to their home area without permission. When necessary staff travel and collect young people, ensure their safety and assist them to settle back into the home on their return. Young people are subsequently given opportunities to talk through the reasons why they left without permission, such as in one-to-one key-work sessions. This has led to young people gaining valuable insight into their own problems and, with support from staff, they talk about their feelings rather than run away.

The risk young people may be to themselves or others is thoroughly considered and planned for. A comprehensive process ensures all potential risks and vulnerabilities are assessed and reviewed at regular intervals. Risk assessments take full account of known issues, including self-harm, violence and sexual exploitation. Care plans provide clear intervention strategies which staff implement in practice. Such an approach has helped young people to reduce the negative ways in which they deal with feelings of frustration or anger. For instance, through encouraging young people to walk away from confrontational situations and to learn to think about the consequences of their behaviour. This has resulted in them being able to identify for themselves the occasions when they need to find space away from others, leading to a significant decrease in them causing criminal damage.

Positive behaviour is promoted with young people benefitting from living in a home with firm yet fair boundaries. Behaviour during the inspection was good with staff utilising the meaningful relationships they share with young people to help them behave well. No young person raised concerns that bullying was a problem. Staff are mindful of the group dynamics and are swift in challenging any derogatory or negative comments or attitudes. All staff are trained in the use of physical intervention; the level of restraints in the home is low and this is only used when absolutely necessary. Young people who had previously engaged in behaviour which required such interventions have been assisted to considerably reduce the times when they react aggressively or violently. The atmosphere in the home is calm and settled with an emphasis on de-escalation and communication clearly a core principle of staff practice.

The arrangements for the health and safety of young people and staff are taken seriously to ensure their welfare. Routine tests and servicing of gas and electrical appliances and fire fighting equipment is regularly completed. Evacuation drills take place every month which ensures everyone living and working in the home understand what to do in the event of a fire.

Leadership and management

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

The home is effectively managed with the specific needs of young people the focus of care practice. No requirements or recommendations were made at the last inspection. The Registered Manager is suitably experienced and displays a keen understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of service provision. Such insight has ensured the stability of the home through a period of transition which has included a number of staffing changes. The Registered Manager demonstrates appropriate aspirations to improve further and to build on the progress the home has made during the past year. Placing social workers commented positively on the way the home is run, in particular the commitment shown to meeting the individual needs of young people.

A comprehensive monitoring process is in place which ensures all aspects of the home are routinely reviewed and evaluated. The Registered Manager completes an in-depth six-monthly review which provides an analysis of all areas of care practice. This allows her to consider what interventions and approaches have been the most or least effective. The findings are then considered to inform future planning and development of the service. A similarly robust Regulation 33 process ensures an objective overview of the home is conducted monthly.

Young people are looked after by a suitable number of staff and the team is gender balanced; staff receive appropriate training and support. New staff undertake an induction programme which matches the required learning standards. Further training includes enrolment on the required diploma in a care qualification. A rolling programme ensures staff are kept up to date with relevant training. For example, recent training has looked at the needs of young people with epilepsy, autism and Asperger's syndrome and explored what type of care is deemed best practice. Staff have regular formal supervision and comment most positively on the support and guidance they receive. Comments included, 'when I started I was given great support and have developed my skills as a result', 'I have been encouraged to improve my confidence and use my experience to take on additional responsibilities, which has been great.' All staff spoken with noted that morale had steadily improved and was now very good in general.

Records are maintained to a good standard and accurately reflect the progress of young people living there. This includes care plans and risk assessments being reviewed monthly and amended when necessary. All documentation was up to date with all sensitive information being suitably stored in the office.

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.