

Inspection report for Children's Home

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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

The home is run by a private company and provides care and accommodation for up to five young people aged from 12 to 17 years. It is located in the suburbs of a large town and comprises three floors, an enclosed rear garden and a double garage. The ground floor comprises a kitchen, dining room, lounge, another room used for doing school work and a toilet. On the first floor, there are four bedrooms and a family sized bathroom. On the second floor, there are a further two bedrooms and a shower room. Each young person has their own single bedroom.

The home is close to local shops and bus routes are nearby if young people wish to visit the town centre with its larger shops, cinema and leisure facilities.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

At the time of the inspection, five young people were living at the home and three of them spoke to the inspector about the care they receive. Four young people also completed written surveys.

This was an unannounced, full inspection and so all the key national minimum standards (NMS) were assessed. The inspection also assessed whether the registered persons had met one requirement and three recommendations made at the previous inspection on 6 July 2010. These were about staff recruitment records and the recording of room searches, complaints, sanctions and restraints.

The Registered Manager and staff provide a good quality of care to young people and some aspects of the care are outstanding.

They are effective at helping young people to be healthy and a high level of external specialist support is also available as necessary.

The team are excellent at promoting safety. Privacy is promoted well and the team is good at promoting positive behaviour. There is no bullying and a comprehensive risk assessment system is maintained and reviewed regularly.

The team are also very effective at helping young people gain from educational and training opportunities. There is also a wide range of leisure activities and leisure trips on offer and young people receive high levels of individual support. An effective admissions policy helps to ensure a safe and appropriate mix of young people.

There is a strong ethos of consultation and the staff team receive good quality training and support. The team provides consistent care for young people which helps them feel secure.

There are some weaknesses in the monitoring of quality because the views of young people, parents and placing authorities are not being ascertained in a clear and systematic way.

Improvements since the last inspection

Recruitment procedures are now more robust because any gaps in employment are explained satisfactorily and all necessary information is sought and kept.

There is greater accountability for room searches because if a young person is present at the time of the search, they are given the opportunity to sign the record of what was found.

Any complaints are handled more effectively because the recording format now covers the details of the investigation along with a clear description of the outcome.

The monitoring of the use of any sanctions or restraints is also now more thorough because the Registered Manager now records any comments on the appropriateness of individual use of such measures along with any further action taken.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The Registered Manager and staff are effective at enabling young people to be healthy. The food is varied and nutritious, the young people help to choose the menus, the home employs a full time cook and the young people grow vegetables in the garden for use in the meals.

Young people receive plenty of exercise and are all registered with local health professionals soon after being admitted to the home. A psychologist visits the home every two weeks and the staff receive training from specialists in health-related matters such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and attachment disorders. A nurse for looked after children also conducts annual medical assessments and gives guidance to young people and staff. All staff are trained to administer first aid if necessary.

A well-established routine is in place for the administration of medication. However, the time of administration is somewhat vague because it is recorded as the meal (breakfast, lunch etc) rather than the time of day.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Arrangements for promotion of safety are excellent. All young people said 'we can talk to someone if we're sad or unhappy' and 'we feel safe in the home'. Young people receive the privacy they need when they need it. For example, young people can lock their bedroom door and can make and receive telephone calls without seeking permission from the staff. An alarm system is fitted to bedroom doors if necessary, to promote knowledge of any movement in the night. However, such arrangements are not currently described in the residential placement plans, and due to an administrative error, consent forms for the system are not in place from young people's placing authorities.

The staff fully enable young people to raise any concerns either informally or formally. Young people are also fully supported to raise concerns with external agencies such as Ofsted and Childline. They are also helped to gain support from an advocacy service where appropriate.

The local authority provides child protection training to all the staff and they are clear about how to respond to any allegations, suspicions or evidence of abuse. The provider also has their own person who provides training in child protection issues.

Young people said 'there's no bullying here' and this was confirmed by the staff. Good levels of supervision and appropriate admission procedures help to ensure a compatible mix of young people. Young people rarely go missing from the home and suitable arrangements are in place should this happen.

The Registered Manager and staff are effective at promoting positive behaviour. There is a strong ethos of reward rather than punishment. The use of sanctions and restraint is rare and any such use of these measures is recorded fully. All the staff receive annual training in dealing with challenging behaviour but the main strength is the quality of relationships between the young people and the staff. There is a negligible turnover of staff and no use of agency staff and so the young people and the staff know each other well.

A clear and comprehensive risk assessment system is in place. This covers all the hazards that may affect young people as individuals. Risk assessments are also conducted once a year for any other hazards that may arise in the house. The premises are maintained in a safe condition. Professional technicians regularly service the electrical equipment, gas appliances and equipment for preventing, detecting and extinguishing fires. The Environmental Health Department has awarded the maximum award of five stars for the food preparation and cooking facilities.

Robust recruitment policies and procedures are in place to ensure that staff recruited to work with young people are suitable and safe. The registered persons follow the

guidance of the national minimum standards and procedures meet the requirements of legislation.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are supported well to enjoy and achieve in life. The use of the key worker system and co key worker system helps to ensure young people receive significant amounts of one-to-one time with the staff. External support from agencies with expertise in helping young people with their emotional health and preparation for leaving care is also readily available.

Very effective arrangements are in place regarding education. Young people said 'the staff help us to go to school and help us with our homework'. The staff provide high levels of support to enable young people to continue to attend schools they have attended before being admitted to the home. This helps them maintain friendships and continuity of academic progress. The Registered Manager and staff are effective at promoting attendance and achievement at school and they use incentives to achieve this.

For those who have left school, suitable arrangements are in place to take up further training and employment. The children's home is also registered as a school and employs a full time teacher and two part time learning assistants. Young people have access to two computers and these can also be used outside of school hours. The home receives a daily paper and young people receive their own magazines.

The staff team offer a very wide range of activities and young people can pursue hobbies and interests of their own choice such as learning a musical instrument, supporting a football team or electronics. The staff team ensure young people are able to take part in holidays and trips to major cities such as London. They make sure such trips are very memorable and take lots of photographs to help each young person remember any special aspects of the trip. Such occasions are also useful in helping young people gain invaluable experience of everyday independence skills such as travel on public transport and meeting a wide variety of people and speaking in front of strangers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There is a strong ethos of consultation with young people. House meetings are held every week and young people are given the option to complete satisfaction questionnaires every three months. Young people also have regular one to one time with their key worker or with any other member of staff. Young people have consequently been able to choose the décor of their bedroom, of the living room and to have a say in the re-design of the incentive charts.

One young person said 'I was able to choose my key worker' and another said 'I am currently deciding who I want my key worker to be'. The Registered Manager also regularly contacts parents to seek their views about the quality of care. However, although these surveys cover a range of issues, they do not cover all of the issues recommended by the national minimum standard.

Suitable residential placement plans are in place for each young person and these cover relevant issues. These are kept up-to-date by each key worker and are amended at statutory reviews or if other developments arise. Young people are fully involved in the content and review of these plans.

Young people can maintain regular contact with their family and friends even though they may live a long distance from the home.

In addition, the home has robust admission arrangements which means the Registered Manager will not admit any young person unless he is assured that the assessed needs of the incoming young person are compatible with the rest of the group of young people living in the home. This leads to an effective mix of young people who get on well with each other and this allows them all to make good progress and to feel settled in the home.

The staff team are settled and consistent. They clearly have positive relationships with the young people which enables them to make good progress in a home where they feel secure.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Effective arrangements are in place to help young people of all ages to develop skills which will be useful for them when they are older. Pathway plans are in place for those who are older and the staff help young people learn useful skills such as shopping, cooking, budgeting, laundry skills and self care. They also learn useful skills relevant to life in the community such as use of public transport and being able to shop independently.

The children's home is clean, well-maintained and homely. It is suitably equipped has appropriate furnishings and fittings. The bedrooms are also suitably furnished. Young people said 'we like our bedroom' and 'we have plenty of storage space'. The outside of the home is also in good decorative order and young people enjoy growing vegetables in the garden at the rear of the house.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

A written Statement of Purpose and children's guide are in place. These set out the aims of the home and contain detail of how the home operates on a day-to-day

basis. The children's guide contains useful information for young people living in the home. The Statement of Purpose describes most of the necessary issues but it does not contain a description of the staffing policy, as recommended by the national minimum standards. This means people external to the home are not fully supported to be aware of the staffing arrangements at the home.

The staff team are experienced and know the young people well. They receive good levels of training and at least 80% of the staff are qualified to level 3 in the National Vocational Qualification in Care. Specialist training is also provided as necessary. Each member of staff has their own personal development plan which is discussed in regular formal supervision with a senior member of staff. The staffing levels are good, for example, there are always three and often four members of staff on duty and two staff work an waking night shift each night. The team of staff is of mixed gender and the Registered Manager always tries to ensure there is at least one male and one female on each shift.

An external person visits the home once a month to assess the quality of care. As recommended by the national minimum standards, these visits are unannounced and the Registered Manager receives a copy of the monitoring report soon afterwards. However, the visitor does not seek views from all the necessary people. For example, the reports do not provide evidence of regular one-to-one consultation with staff on duty and the reports are not adequately evaluative of the issues such as sanctions and physical interventions. Additionally, recommendations are sometimes hard to identify and it is unclear if previous recommendations have been met. In addition, the visitor does not seek the views of parents when conducting the visits. Overall, this means there is less likelihood that shortfalls will be identified and put right.

The staff confirmed that they have ready access to the monitoring reports and to the inspection reports. Moreover, they pointed out that the Registered Manager requires them to read these in order to be aware of how the home is performing.

The Registered Manager also monitors the quality of care and this assessment covers all the necessary issues. However, these checks do not incorporate the views of social workers, young people or parents. So there is also a risk here that shortfalls may be less likely to be identified.

Most of the necessary records required to be kept in the children's home are present. However, some records such as medication and staff records are archived off site. Legislation requires that such records must be stored at the children's home in case any external agency or regulator may need immediate access in the future.

Relevant records pertaining to the young people are kept in their case files. Young people can read and add their own comments to these files, subject to appropriate restrictions covering confidentiality.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The staff are able to support young people to follow their own interests and choices thereby enabling them to fulfil their potential and to establish their own identity. Management factors support this. For

example, each young person not only has a key worker who takes special responsibility for their needs, but also a co-key worker, who covers in the absence of the key worker. There are also good levels of staffing, for example, there are always three and usually four members of staff on duty and this enables young people to receive good one-to-one support. There is also a strong ethos of consulting and listening to young people and helping them to do the things they would like to do. Children's rights are promoted alongside the promotion of awareness of responsibility. The Registered Manager and staff are effective at ensuring there is no bullying and the staff are effective at promoting equal opportunities for all. Each young person is given the opportunity to follow their religion if they want to and staff will support them to do this.

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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
9	ensure in relation to the use of bedroom door alarms, each child's placing authority consents to the use of the measure and it is provided for in the child's placement plan (Regulation 22(a) and (b))	03/01/2011
34	maintain in the children's home those records required by legislation. In particular this relates to a staff register (Schedule 4, item 2) and a record of any prescription medication administered to a child (Schedule 4, item 5) (Regulation 29 (1))	03/01/2011
32	ensure the external visitor seeks the views of the staff and, as appropriate, the parents of young people when undertaking monthly visits to the children's home (Regulation 33(4)(a))	03/01/2011
33	take into account the views of parents, placing authorities and young people when undertaking monthly monitoring of the care provided in the home. (Regulation 34(3))	03/01/2011

Recommendations

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

- record the time of administration when any medication is given to a young person (NMS 13.2)
- record the staffing policy in the Statement of Purpose (NMS 30.2)

- ascertain on a regular and frequent basis, the views of parents regarding those issues described in the standard, unless inappropriate to do so, (NMS 8.6)