

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Barbara Davies
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is privately owned and one of a number of children's services operated by the provider. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and learning disabilities.

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**.

The recent appointment of a competent manager and a renewed focus on the training of staff have significantly improved the quality of care provided. Effective quality assurance systems and a development plan aim to raise standards further.

Given the short time they have been in placement, young people have made good progress in relation to their starting points on admission to the home and in comparison to previous placements. They benefit from being cared for by a competent team of staff whose experience, skills and competence has improved considerably over time and through the training provided.

Care plans are individualised and tailored to reflect the specific needs of young people and staff work consistently to make sure that young people's assessed needs are met. Young people themselves report that they are well looked after.

Young people enjoy good health and mostly lead a healthy lifestyle. Educational arrangements are not yet fully implemented but this is mostly due to placements coinciding with the end of the summer school term. Young people demonstrate a good or improving attitude to education or vocational qualifications and want to achieve.

A range of stimulating and challenging recreational activities broaden the experiences of young people and contribute to their sense of well-being and achievement. Young people are active participants in the running of the home and the planning of activities. As a result they invest in the home; their confidence increases and they

develop skills, such as negotiation skills, that will be beneficial in independent living.

Young people are cared for safely and they report that they feel safe in the home. Arrangements for managing and responding to unauthorised absences are robust and protect young people should they go missing. There have been no incidents of young people going missing since the interim inspection in March 2013. Behaviour is well managed. Young people respond positively to the way staff work with them and the use of physical restraints or sanctions is rarely necessary.

Recommendations for improvement have been made with regard to following up shortfalls noted during the routine checking of fire equipment; the introduction of a protocol that has been agreed with the police concerning police involvement in the home and the training of agency staff in the home's approved methods of restraint.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure where children's homes use restraint, staff are trained in the use of physical restraint techniques and only use the home's agreed techniques (NMS 3.15)
- ensure there is written guidance and a procedure for staff to follow on police involvement in the home, which have been agreed with the local police (NMS 3.22)
- ensure information about a child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to a child when they access their files now or in the future. In particular ensure copies of any e-mail correspondence relating to young people are placed on children's files (NMS 22.5)
- ensure that, within reason, hazards are removed. In particular that records of fire checks are updated to show the action taken in response to deficiencies noted in fire equipment during checks made. (Volume 5, statutory guidance 2.64)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

The home is imaginative and flexible in meeting the needs of young people. Despite the presenting issues, young people have been supported to make a positive move to their new placements. However, in one instance this was without a formal meeting taking place with the placing authority. The home is, however, able to demonstrate through e-mail correspondence, that it was acting in accordance with local authority plans. Also that the distance and time involved was a primary factor in the placing authority not being able to attend a meeting.

High staffing levels, good interaction between staff and a comprehensive induction process has helped other young people to settle quickly into the home. Young people enjoy positive relationships with staff and problems presented in previous placements, such as high levels of going missing, offending and challenging behaviour, have not been displayed here. Comments from young people include, 'staff are really very good here because they don't judge you on what you do. They stop and ask you the reason why.'

Young people benefit from a range of positive activities that promote their individual interests and social development. They develop social skills as a result of their participation; for example, they follow their interests and hobbies, such as learning to play the guitar.

Although formal education or vocational arrangements are not currently in place for some of the young people, this is primarily due to the limited time that they have been in placement. Securing appropriate educational provision in readiness for the start of the autumn term is high on the agenda. In the meantime, the home intends to provide home tuition throughout the summer holidays for those young people who have requested it. Through the perseverance and good advice given by staff, young people who have previously been reluctant to engage in education now have a more positive attitude toward doing so, however, this has yet to be fully tested.

The health needs of young people are well met. Although complete documentation has not yet been received from all placing authorities, the health needs of young people are outlined within the home's own documentation and provision is made accordingly. Young people are conscious of health issues and mostly lead a healthy lifestyle. They like to eat healthy and nutritious meals, that include fruit and vegetables. They also keep fit by going to the gym and participating in activities with staff such as, walking and cycling. In instances where there are suspicions of substance abuse, staff provide advice and guidance about risks to their health which enables young people to make informed choices.

Young people show high levels of investment in the home. This is largely because young people's opinions are sought and valued by staff and they are involved in making decisions regarding the home and in planning for their own future.

Where appropriate, and taking into account young people's views, staff support young people to maintain contact with their family and friends. Staff support young people and their families with any difficulties they encounter. This helps young people maintain positive relationships with the people who are important to them and helps them to retain a sense of their own identity and background and develop emotional resilience.

Quality of care

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

The home provides a nurturing and homely environment in which young people feel secure, comfortable and settled. Communal areas have been greatly improved by redecoration and the environment is bright, welcoming and homely. Young people have been consulted about, and involved in, choosing the decor and, as a result, demonstrate high levels of satisfaction with their environment. Although the home is situated within a rural community there are lots of opportunities for young people to integrate into the wider community. Their engagement and use of community resources helps them develop confidence in social situations.

Young people's needs are well met through a thorough assessment of their needs. Placement plans contain clearly defined targets that staff remain mindful of in their practice. Young people have aspirations, such as learning to play musical instruments, and are fully supported to work to achieve these through the recreational arrangements that are made by staff.

Relationships between staff and young people are positive and they hold each other in warm regard. This is of particular note given the short duration that some young people have been in placement and their history of not engaging in previous placements. Staff use a calm, consistent and negotiating approach with young people. Through this young people develop positive and trusting relationships with staff, develop appropriate ways in which to manage their behaviour and learn skills that will benefit them in adulthood.

Young people have confidence that staff are genuinely concerned and committed to promoting their welfare. One young person commented, 'I have lived in other children's homes but staff are more caring here than in previous placements and try to see the person who you really are.'

Young people know how to complain, using both the home's own procedures and the external procedures available to them. Young people say that most concerns are resolved amicably together but when complaining to the manager they have been happy with the action taken and the outcome achieved.

Young people's views are central to the running of the home and they are consulted both informally and through more formal forums, such as key work sessions and house meetings. Positive regard is shown to the views expressed by young people and their views significantly influence the practice of the home, proposed changes and the decisions that are made concerning their future.

Staff fully promote educational and vocational opportunities. However, because of the timing of their placements, most young people do not currently have education identified. In the meantime, staff are creating a stimulating environment and programme of activities in which young people can participate in, develop and learn.

Young people are healthy due to the provision of appropriate health-care, good nutrition and opportunities for exercise. Young people have access to activities that support good physical health as well as providing opportunities for socialisation, leisure and enjoyment.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

There has, since the interim inspection when the home was judged as making inadequate progress, been a clear focus and commitment to improving safeguarding practice. Young people are better protected as a result of the appointment of a new manager who provides clear direction in this area. The manager has established positive relationships with the local safeguarding team and the local police.

The home does not, however, have a policy that has been agreed with the police concerning police involvement in the home. Although not an issue presently, it potentially could leave staff confused about whether it is appropriate or not to request police involvement, particularly with regard to enlisting their support to manage behaviour.

As a result of the repeated training that staff have received in safeguarding and behaviour management they are more aware of their responsibilities and effectively implement the home's policies, procedures, behaviour management plans and risk assessments. Any concerns about young people's safety are discussed with the local authority designated officer and recommendations are acted upon.

Behaviour is better managed; the staff team work more cooperatively and strategies outlined within behaviour management plans are consistently implemented in practice. As a result, young people live in a positive, nurturing environment. Any inappropriate behaviour displayed by young people is constructively challenged to positive effect. An improved focus on the use of de-escalation techniques means that the use of physical restraint has declined substantially and is now extremely rare.

Permanent staff have received training in the organisation's approved methods of restraint, however, agency staff on long-term contracts have not received this training although they are trained in other methods. Because the use of physical restraint is now rare this has not been detrimental to the welfare of young people. However, potentially this could lead to inconsistencies in practice and a hold being used that is not approved by this organisation. This leaves both the organisation and young people vulnerable.

Although not yet trained in restorative justice, staff now use aspects of this approach rather than, as was previously the case, repeatedly impose sanctions that have little effect. Staff said 'This is like a completely different home. The transformation is incredible. The morale of staff and young people is really good and most things are resolved through discussion. It is now highly unusual for us to give a sanction and the way that young people have responded is incredible. They are much happier and we are much happier.'

Records kept in relation to physical restraints and sanctions now contain all the detail required by regulations which enables the measures used to be properly monitored

for appropriateness, relevance and fairness.

The group dynamics cause some challenges for staff as the group of young people adjust to living with each other but these are well managed. High staffing levels enable high levels of engagement and for young people to pursue activities and interests of their own choosing. This approach has multiple benefits: it keeps young people constructively occupied; increases their feelings of self-esteem and self-worth and minimises the potential for bullying. Any suspicion of bullying is closely monitored and addressed; any young people involved receive emotional support.

There is a jointly agreed protocol for staff to follow in the event of an unauthorised absence and children going missing. This is supported by individualised risk assessment records. There have been no incidents of young people going missing since the interim inspection of the home in March 2013. However, staff are aware what to do should this happen and files contain up-to-date photographs of young people in case of an emergency.

Young people are extremely well protected by the organisation's robust recruitment procedures and the monitoring of visitors to the home. Rigorous checks completed on people applying to work in the home prior to their commencing work reduces the risk of unsuitable people being employed to work with the young people. The zealous following up of references has, in several instances, resulted in provisional offers of employment being withdrawn as the applicant's integrity and conduct has been questionable.

Young people are protected from fire and other hazards as a result of thorough checks and procedures. However, it is not always clear within the records whether action has been taken in response to issues noted. General risk assessments are robust and regularly monitored. The home and grounds are physically safe and appropriately secure. Robust safety and servicing checks are undertaken and regular fire drills take place to ensure staff and young people know how to safely evacuate the building in the event of a fire.

Leadership and management

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

The home has been without a Registered Manager for well over a year during which time the quality of care fell dramatically. However, the home is now effectively and efficiently managed by a competent manager who is well supported by a much respected and able deputy manager. The manager has submitted an application to Ofsted to be considered as the Registered Manager. Outcomes for young people are improving as a result of the determined and committed approach of the new manager and the staff team.

A lot of progress has been made in a short period of time with all the identified areas for improvement, particularly in relation to safeguarding and behaviour management, having been successfully targeted and met. The home's development plan identifies

further areas of planned improvement, including the installation of a new kitchen by the end of September.

Young people receive highly individualised care as a result of high staffing levels. Staffing levels provide flexibility and this allows group activities to take place and also allows staff to work individually alongside young people. This contributes to the progress young people make developmentally and in achieving their targets as outlined within placement plans.

Staff are well supported and regularly supervised which enables them to reflect on their practice and develop new skills. Staff now receive an annual appraisal through which individual training and developmental needs are identified. Collectively the staff team has a range of skills and competencies that benefit young people and the organisation is looking to develop these further by, for instance, training someone to be an assessor for the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Staff maintain good communication levels with each other through daily handovers and team meetings which ensures consistent practice and stability for young people.

Staff receive mandatory training. Recent refresher training in all the core competencies alongside a change in behaviour management strategies, has improved the skill base of the staff team. Staff now demonstrate more understanding and competence in their role which has resulted in improved outcomes for young people. Some staff have achieved a recognised professional child-care qualification and others are studying to complete a relevant qualification. In the meantime, the home's training programme equips them to fulfil their role and meet the needs of the young people accommodated.

Staff work hard to achieve the best outcomes possible for young people. There is proper and effective oversight of the home's performance by both the manager and someone acting on behalf of the responsible individual. The performance of the home is monitored rigorously. This enables any issues of concern to be identified and addressed.

Clear and accurate records that are stored securely and contribute towards staff and young people achieving a positive understanding of young people's life, experiences and plans for the future. However, these are not complete in that they do not contain copies of e-mail correspondence relating to young people. While this can be retrieved, young people do not have access to it and it is not possible to track how some decisions have been made without requesting additional information.

There is evidence of good multi-agency working with positive links having been established with the local police; missing from care coordinator; the local authority designated officer (LADO) and social workers. Significant events or matters of concern relating to the protection of young people are reported to the appropriate authorities promptly enabling consideration to be given to any protective or emergency action that may be required.

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.