

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Stephen Halliley
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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 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* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

This local authority home provides care and accommodation for up to five young people of both sexes, aged between 11 and 16 years, who may have emotional or behavioural difficulties. The home accepts both planned and emergency placements. The service is based on the pedagogic principles of care.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **outstanding**.

The home is highly effective in providing personalised, well planned care for each young person placed. All staff build successful, rewarding relationships with families and other professionals from the outset. Together they establish the individual needs of each young person and make clear and effective plans to support their progress. As a result there are excellent outcomes for all young people.

Young people know they are listened to and that their needs, thoughts and feelings are at the heart of the operation of the home. Their views are positive about the quality of care they receive and the way they are looked after. Staff show, consistently, that young people are central to their thinking and the ethos of the home. They show their value of the young people through their attention to detail, commitment to the role and the provision of high quality care to each young person as an individual. This value is also evident in the fact young people are involved in the interview process for new staff and their feedback is actively listened to. The well decorated and maintained home shows the young people are respected as does the nature of the positive relationships which are fostered between staff and young people. Young people are safe and feel safe and are happy to spend quality time with staff developing these relationships and their life skills as they plan for their futures. Transition planning is innovative and based in a 'real world' system of support, guidance and information for young people and this leads to effective transitions into adult life.

The manager is totally focused and energetic in ensuring continuous improvements which benefit the outcomes for young people as evidenced by the impact of the peer mentoring system. The home is actively and effectively monitored and all staff are supported to provide excellent quality care through training, advice and regular supervision. Key to this success is the managers attitude of giving staff responsibility for decision making and for highlighting individualised training needs. She utilises these different experiences and skills to provide individualised, focused child centred practice. The manager is highly visible and accessible within the home but her approach allows staff and young people to flourish in a safe environment.

There are minor weaknesses in relation to recording but these do not have a direct

impact on the outcomes for young people who make outstanding progress from their starting points during their time in the home.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure children and staff are given the opportunity to discuss incidents of restraint they have been involved in, witnessed or been affected by, with a relevant adult (NMS 3.17)
- ensure written records kept by the home when a child goes missing detailthe circumstances of the child's return and any reasons given by the child for running away from the home (NMS 5.10).

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **outstanding**.

Young people make significant progress in all aspects of their lives. This includes maintaining educational attendance, improving educational achievement and social skills. Three young people are in mainstream or alternative educational provision and are achieving well with high expectations for good examination results. One young person, new to the home, has a school placement identified to begin in the new year. Both their attendance and achievements represent outstanding progress from their starting points.

Young people make exceptional progress towards developing their emotional resilience and self confidence. This is due to staff showing them respect, having their needs fully and accurately assessed and their individuality celebrated. Young people take pride in their appearance, the decorative order of the home and are proud of their achievements and progress showing a vast improvement in their sense of self worth. Health needs are comprehensively met and the young people's physical health is very good. This is supported by them being encouraged to choose healthy diets and adopt active lifestyles through being offered a wide and interesting range of activities. Young people discuss personal hygiene, diet, smoking and general health with their key workers and appear to value and act upon this advice and support.

Young people are able to meet with family and friends with the home being proactive in facilitating and supporting appropriate contact. Young people are happy and relaxed around staff and this shows in the mature and adult manner in which they present. Young people make a positive contribution to the home through group meetings, feedback sheets and their involvement in part of each team meeting. They have raised money through charity events, contributed to telethons and give money towards a charity they support in Africa. This developing sense of responsibility and

increasing knowledge of wider social and community issues shows great progress for young people.

Young people are well prepared for moving towards independence. This centres around an innovative programme based around developing life skills as though they were living on their own including budgeting, cooking, form filling and ensuring they get themselves to appointments/school on time. Staff encourage this development and provide enthusiastic support to ensure young people are as fully prepared as possible for the transition to living independently. As a direct result young people move on from the home with greater self confidence, self awareness and improved opportunities than when they first arrived.

Quality of care

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

Young people benefit from very positive relationships with staff and managers who are warm, motivated and supportive towards them. The clear ethos of the home is child focused and they are central to decisions made about the running of the home. Staff are enabled to provide individualised responses to care plans through having a thorough awareness of young people's histories and future plans. This includes supporting educational placements, contact with friends and high quality input to work towards meeting future plans and targets. Young people contribute effectively to planning their future. Staff provide effective support leading to increased self confidence ensuring young people participate and engage fully and understand the decisions and agree the outcomes for their futures.

Young people are involved and listened to by staff throughout all aspects of daily living. They are regularly consulted on how the service is supporting them through group meetings, 'I want you to know' forms and reviews. They are also involved in team meetings and staff interviews which allows them considerable input into who they want to work with them. Young people know how to complain and they are confident to do so. They are very clear that the manager will respond quickly and, without fail, follow through the actions she says she will take. At the start of their placement young people are given a thorough written and verbal explanation about the complaints procedure and their rights and this is invaluable, especially for those young people who have no previous experience of being in care.

The home has a welcoming and well-decorated communal living area with the downstairs freshly decorated. The first floor communal areas and bedrooms are due to be redecorated next year.

Individual health needs are catered for through prompt and well-coordinated access to all health services as necessary, including children and adolescent mental health services. All outcomes relating to young people's emotional and physical health and well-being are comprehensively met as a result.

Staff consistently and purposefully support young people to prioritise their education

including going to schools to actively pursue reintegration of young people and support with homework. One social worker reports that the staff have very robust communication and practice around planning education. As a result most young people are in full time education with a clear plan in place for the other, and attendance levels are high. This clear prioritisation of education by the staff team ensures young people are fully supported, engaged and achieving in education.

Staff provide a stimulating programme of activities to young people based around activities they are known to enjoy but which also offer the opportunity to maximise young people's involvement in community based activities. This provides an improved understanding of social situations and community participation. Young people are encouraged to enjoy birthdays and other cultural celebrations and at the time of the visit the home was very nicely decorated in preparation for Christmas. The cultural awareness of staff and young people has been improved through working with young people of different nationalities and learning directly from them about language, culture and life in general. Young people are given highly personalised memory books when they leave with comments from staff and this allows them to reflect upon their time in the home in a positive light. Young people's sense of personal identity is well fostered overall as is their sense of citizenship and social responsibility.

There is good diversity within the staff team in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and experience and this provides a variety of suitable role models and support. It is clear that the young people and their well-being is the priority of the staff team ensuring young people benefit from fairness and equality of opportunity in both daily living and daily care planning irrespective of their differences.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Safeguarding of young people is a priority of this home and is at the core of the service it provides. Young people say that they feel safe, that the home is a safe place to be and that there are always enough staff on duty to look after them. Bullying has occurred in the home but this has been promptly and decisively acted upon by staff following guidelines from their clear and efficient policies on bullying, safeguarding and behaviour management. Clear, child-focused information is available to help young people understand what constitutes bullying and how they can get help if necessary. The development of socially acceptable behaviour is supported by staff consistently and openly challenging anti-social behaviours observed in the home. There are effective channels of communication between the home, parents, schools and health professionals to ensure they actively and consistently share the care of young people and protect them from harm. Staff receive comprehensive safeguarding training which is regularly updated resulting in young people feeling safe and being confident about their life in the home.

Staff support young people to take responsibility for their own safety through discussion in key worker sessions and group meetings. This covers areas of personal safety including risks from smoking, bullying and substance misuse. Young people are also allowed to read and comment on their individual risk assessments further heightening their understanding of the issues which can put them at risk.

Practice is informed by assessing and minimising risk without compromising a young person's independence. The home has close links with other agencies to ensure young people's safety including a very impressive and collaborative working protocol with the local police officer and local constabulary overall. Young people who go missing are actively encouraged to return and they are responded to very positively on their return in order to reduce further occurrences and ensure their continued well-being. Instances of young people absent without authority have reduced since the summer. All instances are accurately recorded but there is some weakness in the recording post return to the home.

Behaviour management is a strength of this home. Young people's behaviour management plans are individually focused and give staff clear and extensive guidance on how to manage anti-social behaviours appropriately. Frequent reviewing and updating ensures practice remains informed and young people receive a service which is flexible to their changing needs and behaviours. Young people are supported to reduce negative behaviours through positive strategies based around a restorative justice model. This approach and the closeness of the link with the Police Liaison Officer have seen a 98% reduction in the conviction rate of young people being looked after in this home. Physical intervention is very rarely used. This is thoroughly recorded but young people are not offered the opportunity to discuss the reasons for this after it has taken place. Young people are extremely well protected by this effective behaviour management practice.

An effective and robust recruitment process involving comprehensive checks on staff applying to work with children ensures young people are well protected. The manager is thorough in her additional checks, especially with overseas applicants, further ensuring only adults who are properly cleared to work with young people are employed.

The environment is physically safe and appropriately secure taking account of young people's individual needs. Thorough and regular checks of fire equipment and fire drills ensure young people are actively protected from fire and know how to safely exit the home in case of fire. A range of additional health and safety checks further protects young people and ensures a safe environment. As a result young people are kept safe and have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

Leadership and management

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

The manager of the home is highly effective and leads her team through motivation, effective support and guidance and role modelling. She is insightful about how the

home needs to progress to both continue to improve the service it provides and to fit with its strategic remit. There is a clear development plan in place showing local authority intention and developments specific to the home itself. The manager leads by example but also empowers her team to take responsibility for decision making and to identify their own professional development needs. This has led to the development of a confident, competent and highly motivated team who are fully aware of each others areas of strength and weakness. The major improvement since the last inspection has been the introduction of peer mentoring which has had a very noticeable impact on reducing dangerous behaviour such as fire setting, greater awareness of contraception and family planning and a heightened awareness of the importance of education.

The Statement of Purpose is thorough and details well the focused aims and objectives of the home. Practice is fully in keeping with the statement and what the service offers is clearly understood by all the young people, staff and other professionals.

The home is adequately staffed in terms of numbers and all staff receive a comprehensive training package as part of the induction process. The same core training courses and qualifications are also undertaken by relief staff. This promotes a sense of unity, consistency of care practice and shows relief staff they are valued as members of the team. Two staff are currently undertaking the Social Pedagogy degree course and it is planned to roll this out to all staff as this is the foundation for the principles of care used in the home. All staff receive robust and regular supervision which includes reflecting on their own practice to identify learning points and personal improvement.

The manager undertakes regular, detailed and robust monitoring of records and procedures throughout the home. This ensures best practice is maintained in the key areas of health and safety, child protection and behaviour management. All records seen were of a good standard and were legible, current, detailed, sufficient for purpose and relating to the correct young person. Confidentiality of recording was observed to be scrupulously maintained and systems in place support this. The service is effectively and efficiently managed and supports, motivates and values staff to ensure young people continue to receive a high quality service.

Equality and diversity practice is **outstanding**.