

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Kenneth Smith
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Provision subtype	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 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 is a children's home for up to six young people. It is operated by a private company that has a range of children's homes in the area and some linked educational provision. Currently it is accommodating children between the ages of eight and 12 years including some for whom future fostering placements are being worked towards.

Overall effectiveness

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

The home provides personalised care within a group living situation in which children learn to think about themselves and others. Care is well planned including good levels of activity and support with education. This has been maintained despite a turbulent year. The management of the company and the determination of the new manager are supporting the home through a period of significant change since the Registered Manager left in July. The new arrangements are not yet fully embedded.

Children enjoy an active lifestyle with constant support from an energetic staff team. Children are kept safe and make good progress across all aspects of their lives. Young people value their relationships with staff members. The home is developing a good track record in helping younger children and ensuring all moves on are positive developments for them. The promotion of family contact is a strength of the home.

The areas for development are to strengthen the management arrangements through the registration of the manager and the use of reviewing systems to improve the quality of care, particularly focusing on sanctions and physical interventions. Staff supervision is not regular enough and there are minor issues to rectify in the children's guide and in improving one of the communal rooms.

Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
7 (2001)	make an application to Ofsted for registration of the manager (Regulation 7(1)(a))	31/01/2012
34	improve the quality of care in the children's home through	31/01/2012

(2001)	review of the effectiveness of issues outlined in Schedule 6, and supply Ofsted with a copy of these reports. (Regulation 34(1)(b))	
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Recommendations

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

- review incidents of challenging behaviour (NMS 3.21)
- improve the facilities within the rear lounge, specifically provide comfortable furniture (NMS 10.3)
- ensure that the sanctions information in the children's guide is an accurate reflection of practice (NMS 13.1)
- recruit enough staff to ensure a stable staff group can fulfil the homes Statement of Purpose and meet the individual needs of all children resident in the home (NMS 17.1)
- provide staff with regular supervision. (NMS 19.4)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

While staying at the home children develop a more positive self view. Their knowledge and understanding of their background increases which helps them to mature and adapt to their situation.

Children enjoy good health including physical, emotional, and psychological health. Staff know them well and seek any specialist support relevant and for which they are ready. Although children display some very challenging behaviour there is a minimal use of medication related to this and staff seek positive intervention through their relationships with individual children. Children are making behavioural progress.

Children attend school with good attendance records. All are making progress in school, for some this includes achieving major strides in core subjects.

Children have a say in the operation of the home. Children here are young and the consultation includes formal and informal methods to ensure it is run in the interests of children and with their voice heard. Children all enjoy some community based activities and the ethos is not risk adverse when children are old enough to begin to have free time.

The promotion of family contact is a real strength of the home. Managers understand the complex family situations from which some children come, they are non-

judgemental in their promotion of contact and help children to sustain any level of relationship which proves beneficial.

The home is developing a track record of successfully moving some children with history of placement breakdown from the children's home into fostering placements. Current work is with children too young to prepare for independence but in the last 12 months four children have moved into foster care through careful preparation for life beyond the stay in this home.

Quality of care

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

Central to practice in the home are the warm and constructive relationships between staff and young people. Although the turnover of staff in the home has put some strain on this the dedication and skill of the staff have sustained a good level of care through this difficult period. The turnover of staff has required many shifts to be covered by staff from the company not routinely attached to this home; there is no use of agency staff. This has been managed carefully but does place greater stress on the regular staff who children know well and rely on. Children trust staff and enjoy their company. Staff use their good relationships to influence children and help them make wiser choices in their day-to-day functioning.

All children have placement plans which give good information about their backgrounds, and include plans for their care in all relevant areas. The plans are regularly updated and staff in the home liaise well with placing social workers to ensure that all significant actions are mutually agreed. Social workers confirm that there is very good communication to them from staff in the home.

Staff support the educational attainment of children through very good links with the school. The company has a junior school within the grounds of a state school, allowing some shared experience for children requiring its additional levels of support. Staff assist children in educational tasks within everyday life, including using relevant computer programmes.

This is a busy home where staff constantly engage children in constructive play. There are good resources for this, the home having four communally available rooms for children to play in. One of these, the rear lounge, is sparsely furnished and is not an attractive play area: it is not used a great deal. The other three rooms are child friendly and well used. All children enjoy some activities in the local community, for example, skate parks and bowling. The staff have enabled all children to make the most of play including those with disabilities. Children are supported both individually and as a group of equals; they enjoy comparable activities regardless of skills and background. There is a range of parks close by which staff take children to. They benefit from stimulating and energetic activity made available by both the resources and the boundless energy of the staff team. The significant amount of active play also keeps children healthy. If mature enough children may enjoy unsupervised time, although most are not yet ready for this.

The home is centrally located in a small sea-side community. The house has the appearance of a family home and provides a comfortable environment for up to six children. Bedrooms are personalised and children have a lot of choice over this. The management of the environment is thoughtful, for example ensuring children who may be disruptive at bed-time have minimal impact on other children through the room allocation.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children are kept safe in the home and beyond through good oversight, training of staff and dedication of the team. The home follows procedures carefully including reporting matters externally and liaising closely with other agencies. All staff are familiar with procedures and receive extensive induction training and periodic updating on safeguarding.

Children's behaviour is managed thoughtfully and staff are always warm in their responses to children even when there are challenges. The home uses rewards and sanctions systematically; physical restraint is used only as a last resort and this is well documented, including the views of children. Children have made progress in their behaviour; however the effectiveness of sanctions is difficult to gauge. There is no regular analysis of this. Similarly the antecedents to physical interventions have not been analysed to consider all possible ways of avoiding the need for this. Children understand the staff need to intervene and they feel fairly treated.

Children have gone missing from the home on a few occasions, but this has reduced through strategic planning. The home has clear guidelines which they follow if children are missing; these are in line with local police protocol. Children are welcomed on return and they understand that staff are seeking to keep them safe.

Children are protected by safe recruitment practices. All staff files examined contained clear vetting information to a high standard including Criminal Records Bureau checks and references with telephone verification.

Children are kept safe in the environment; there is regular inspection and servicing of appliances, staff are trained for the event of fire and practices are held. Individually children are kept safe through risk assessments of all activities and behaviours. From these staff know how to keep children safe and plans are followed.

Leadership and management

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

This year has been a time of change for the management of the home, the previous manager left in the summer and acting management arrangements have been put in place. The manager is knowledgeable and provides leadership to the home; he is

currently being supported by a manager from another home in the group. This reflects the complexity of this home and, with the assistance of the deputy manager, ensures experienced leadership for staff to draw on in most all shifts. These arrangements are not permanent and this is a little confusing to staff. The arrangements are very recent and the benefits have yet to emerge.

The emphasis has been on supporting the practical day-to-day work of the staff. This is the correct priority but some aspects of the strategic management are not fully in place. The manager's quality audits have not been thoroughly completed and the opportunity to review the effectiveness of practice, rather than just the compliance with recording guidelines, has not been taken. Staff feel well supported by management but formal supervision is not taking place at the expected frequency.

The manager understands the strengths and weaknesses of the home well but he is too new in the post to have implemented significant change. The manager is well supported by both the current arrangement and the area manager of the company.

The home has successfully ensured good levels of staffing whilst the core staff team remains under-strength. The relatively high turnover of staff this year is unexceptional in a home with this level of challenges and a manager leaving. However, the age of children means that stability is critical to them and this remains a challenge. Staff training is good through both the induction period and with ongoing training. Staff are all trained in first aid, safeguarding and managing behaviour (including physical intervention). All staff have attained National Vocational Qualification level 3 or commence this after the successful completion of their induction period.

The use of monthly monitoring reports by the company is good. Reports written are robust and actions set out are fulfilled. Reports are regularly sent to Ofsted, as are notifications of significant events when needed.

The home has a Statement of Purpose which complies with guidance, although its stated aims are generic and do not especially reflect the work with younger children currently undertaken. The children's guide is available in the home in a format that children can understand. Some minor details were imprecisely written, for example implying a use of sanctions beyond any routinely used in the home.

The administration of the home is systematic, the records are maintained to a good standard and stored securely. There were no requirements or recommendations arising from the previous inspection by Ofsted.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.