

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Sharon Treadwell
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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 children's home provides accommodation for three young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, currently aged between 14 and 17 years. The home is located on the outskirts of two local towns. There is reasonable access to local services and bus routes into the main shopping areas. The home is a detached house offering individual bedrooms and two bathrooms for young people on the first floor. On the ground floor there is: a lounge, a small 'chill out' room equipped with games and books, kitchen diner, laundry and the general office. There is dedicated staff sleeping-in accommodation. There is a large, enclosed garden at the rear of the building.

Overall effectiveness

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

A real strength of this home is a strong, well experienced and child-centred management team. The registered manager and deputy are dedicated and demonstrate commitment to driving up standards of care and recording practice.

The manager and deputy have undertaken some internal training with staff to enhance their skills in working with young people and maintaining sound placement records. Staff additionally have access to the provider organisation's comprehensive training programme, but this is not always flexible enough to ensure that staff receive training to equip them to meet the very individual care needs of the young people accommodated.

Young people generally have a very positive care experience within the home and are making significant progress. Detailed and comprehensive placement planning reflects that young people are treated as individuals, their individual needs are recognised and understood by the staff, and placement objectives are clearly stated and achievable. Young people, often with a history of poor school attendance are beginning to enjoy education and achieving positive results, their health needs are given good attention and, generally they feel safe and secure in placement even though they do not really want to be in a children's home.

Mainly young people feel that their views are listened to, through individual sessions and house meetings. Young people do not currently get formal feedback from house meetings to reassure them that the issues they raise are acted upon. Young people generally feel that their privacy is respected by staff but there has been a recent increase in the number of room searches conducted at the home and these are not always being undertaken or recorded in a fair and appropriate manner. Sanctions and physical interventions are used fairly and appropriately but records often do not

reflect the young people's views.

The Statement of Purpose contains wholly appropriate information but does not include details of the experience and qualifications of staff. The manager is very clear about her proposals for the continuing development of the home but there is no written business plan in place.

Currently parking at the home is extremely limited. The location of the home means that this is a point of contention with neighbours and the manager has been recommended to review the potential for minimising the aggravation to neighbours.

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
4 (2001)	ensure that the Statement of Purpose reflects the experience and qualifications of all staff working at the home (Regulation 4 (1); Schedule 1))	01/06/2011
27 (2001)	provide all staff with access to appropriate relevant training (Regulation 27(4)(a))	31/07/2011

Recommendations

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

- provide young people with formal feedback from young people's meetings in order that they receive a regular update with regard to the issues they have raised and clarification of why their wishes are not acted upon, when this happens (NMS 1.1)
- Review parking arrangements at the home to take full account of the potential conflict being promoted with neighbours by the current limited availability (NMS 21.9)
- Ensure that young people's privacy is always respected and that they are treated as individuals in determining the necessity for room searches. Records of room searches must always be retained and must fully detail the reasons for conducting them (NMS 3.3; 2.1)
- compile a written development plan, reviewed annually, clarifying the future

plans for the home (NMS 15.2)

- provide staff with training opportunities to specifically equip them with the skills required to meet the very individual needs of young people accommodated at the home (NMS 18.1)
- record the views of young people in records retained of sanctions and physical interventions used at the home (NMS 3.17).

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Relationships between staff and young people are observed to be good. Young people are relaxed and comfortable and conversation flows easily between them and the staff. Some young people say that their previous experiences of relationships with adults makes it difficult sometimes for them to trust staff, but all young people here feel they have some staff they can rely on. Regular key worker sessions and house meetings help young people to feel that they are able to influence decisions about their own futures and what happens within the home. Some young people feel that feedback, in relation to issues raised at house meetings can be convoluted, 'it's a bit like Chinese whispers, staff tell you different things', and would appreciate more formal feedback.

The home provides a homely, pleasant and welcoming environment. Young people say 'it's not home but the staff make it very homely'. There has been a good focus on redecoration and refurbishment, in recent months, to make communal areas more attractive. Young people appreciate this and they have been involved in choosing decoration schemes for their bedrooms and in choosing furniture and fittings for communal areas. Some young people, particularly in the early stages of placement, display very aggressive and destructive behaviours resulting in bedroom furniture in particular, being seriously damaged. Where this is the case replacement items have been purchased but installation has been delayed whilst staff work on helping young people to develop more appropriate ways of dealing with their internal anger, often at being in care for the first time. Staff show a good understanding of how young people feel about being in care and demonstrate a consistent approach in the implementation of consistent care practices. The clear boundaries and proportionate responses to presenting behaviours are designed to help the young people to develop strategies for managing their feelings more positively.

In general young people present as more confident, competent and self-assured than records show them to have been at the time of their admission. The fact that they are respected as individuals by the staff, and that their opinions are listened to and valued has clearly supported this development. Whilst young people generally feel that their privacy is very well respected by the staff, there is a lack of clarity regarding room searches. A recent safeguarding concern has resulted in a significant increase in the number of room searches being conducted. Whilst room searches have not been conducted without young people being present, the young people are not always fully aware of the reason they are being conducted and records are not always retained if nothing of concern is removed. Discussions with staff make it very clear that room searches are prompted by safeguarding concerns, and young people realise this, but it is not appropriate when genuine concerns regarding the behaviour of one young person results in all young people being subjected to the same treatment.

Young people, some of whom have very chequered educational histories, are justifiably proud of the achievements they have made whilst placed at the home. Where young people have historically had poor attendance records they are being well supported to recognise that education can be enjoyable and that they can achieve success. Staff can support young people in school, when necessary, to help them to establish better attendance patterns and to support education staff in

promoting some very positive achievements.

There is a strong focus on promoting young people's physical and emotional well-being. Some young people are fearful of involvement with health professionals and staff encourage them to recognise the importance of, for example, visiting the dentist regularly and having annual health checks. Staff always secure timely and appropriate medical intervention when young people are unwell and keep sound records of treatment administered to promote swift recovery.

Young people are supported well to learn skills to support their progression to independent living through involvement in cooking and keeping the house clean and tidy and through robust encouragement to develop good personal hygiene practices.

There are extremely comprehensive placement plans in place, which reflect achievable aims and objectives. Young people are involved in their compilation, have good awareness of their content and it is commendable that placement plans are written from the point of view of the young person, for example: 'when I get upset I can't always manage my feelings very well' identifies a clear support need and the plan then outlines how the necessary support will be provided by the staff team.

Staff appreciate the importance, to young people, of retaining positive contact with their families and they support young people well with these arrangements. Transport and contact supervision can be provided, where this is needed. Staff support young people to cope with the feelings of loss and anger often brought about by separation from their families.

Quality of care

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

The Every Child Matters outcome areas form the basis of comprehensive, individual placement plans. Individual care and support needs are clearly identified and demonstrably well met. Consistent and comprehensive recording systems ensure that young people's progress, against achievable placement objectives, is well identified. Placement planning incorporates a contact plan, which ensures that staff provide physical and emotional support to young people in retaining positive contact with their families. There is a daily living plan to promote consistency for young people in maintaining routines, which encourages stability and security, and a positive handling plan to guide and support staff in managing young people's presenting behaviours in a consistent and effective way.

The provider organisation has a good range of sound policies and procedures to guide staff practice with young people. The organisation produces an annual training schedule, which is circulated to all its children's homes, and provides staff with access to a wide range of training opportunities designed to equip them with the skills to manage young people's behaviours appropriately and provide high standards of care. However, training determined centrally is not always reflective of the individual care and support needs of young people accommodated within this home. The staff have not, for example had access to specific training on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, drug and alcohol abuse or sexualised behaviour, to better equip them in meeting the needs of the young people currently accommodated. The manager and deputy are knowledgeable and experienced professionals and have countered the lack of formal training well by sharing their knowledge with the staff team and providing in-house training to staff, for example on record keeping and on self-harm. They have additionally negotiated access to some good, certificated on-line training and have accessed safeguarding training, for themselves and staff, through the local authority Safeguarding Children Board. The annual staff training programme does not always provide for refresher training to be undertaken in a timely way for all staff, because it is pre-ordained rather than responsive to the needs of individual staff members and young people.

Good opportunities are provided for young people to have their views heard. As well as regular opportunities to speak with key workers, on an individual basis, young people appreciate being offered weekly house meetings. There is a culture here of encouraging young people to speak their minds. Mealtimes are used to promote open discussion. Staff say that they consistently remind young people about language and behaviour, which could be deemed discriminatory or bullying, but equally young people are encouraged to highlight any issues they have with staff responses. Staff have good awareness that 'it's not always about intention but about interpretation. We and the young people need to recognise that'. Young people present as confident in expressing their opinions and clearly feel valued as individuals. There is sound staff awareness of young people's individual care and support needs and demonstrated pride in young people's individual achievements and progress.

Staff have sound relationships with young people's schools and demonstrate good awareness of the need for regular exchanges of information, for example through home/school diaries or daily telephone contact, to promote positive educational

experiences and outcomes. The provider organisation operates its own educational facility and can provide educational input for young people where mainstream school is not an appropriate option. The home's commitment to improving educational attendance and achievement has seen young people, with lengthy histories of non-attendance, begin to enjoy school and achieve positive results.

Young people have comprehensive health care plans. Their specific health care needs are clearly expressed and they are encouraged and supported to access the support of health care professionals in an appropriate way. Staff are very aware of their responsibility to seek involvement from specialist health care professionals, where this is appropriate, though young people are not always good at working co-operatively with such professionals, to address presenting issues. Some young people have, for example been reluctant to engage with mental health services or with work relating to drugs misuse. Staff promote a healthy, active lifestyle. Young people have good access to fruit and vegetables, are actively involved in preparing the menu and in shopping for and preparing meals, and have opportunities to sample foods from different cultures. Young people are reluctant, currently, to get involved in local community group activities. Staff encourage engagement within the local community but their primary focus is responding to young people's expressed leisure preferences. Young people attend the local gym, go swimming, play pool and visit the cinema in accordance with weekly planners, which they prepare with staff. Young people say that they had a very enjoyable annual holiday, with staff, in the summer.

Staff are very aware of the need to support young people in preparing for adulthood and independence, through the provision of essential information and by equipping them with the skills they will need to live independently. The home operates an independence programme, giving young people increasing control of their finances and increasing responsibility for budgeting and self care, and works closely with placing authorities in determining how this will be implemented with individual young people. The staff are actively involved, with young people and their placing social workers, in compiling pathway plans for young people. Sometimes young people's behaviours have made it difficult to achieve a balance between encouraging increasing freedom and prioritising safety. In such instances the home prompts regular professional discussion of how this can best be achieved and of young people's future support needs.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people all say that they feel very safe at the home and they demonstrate a good awareness of the fact that the staff focus strongly on promoting their safety. Key worker sessions are used well to promote young people's understanding of how to keep themselves safe and the staff involve other professionals appropriately, such as the looked after children's nurse and New Futures in tackling issues such as prostitution, sexual health and drugs awareness, to support this approach. Some young people present behaviours, which have the potential to place them at serious risk, for example self-harming, involvement in misuse of drugs or inappropriate sexual behaviours. Sound placement planning and comprehensive risk assessments and behaviour management strategies guide staff in promoting young people's safety in these circumstances. Staff receive training in safeguarding and in managing behaviour, including the use of de-escalation techniques and the appropriate use of physical restraint. Organisational policies provide clear guidance on reporting and recording requirements, in relation to safeguarding issues, and staff demonstrate a good understanding of their responsibilities in this area. Management appropriately respond to allegations or suspicions of harm, and ensure that information is appropriately shared with all professionals, to promote young people's safety.

Staff actively encourage, promote and reward positive behaviours. Young people's positive handling plans highlight any presenting behaviours and detail the likely triggers as well as strategies for managing these behaviours in a consistent and effective way. The staff feel that they are skilled at de-escalating situations to reduce the requirement for using sanctions and physical intervention. Sanctions and physical interventions are appropriately recorded but do not routinely incorporate the views of the young people. Some young people, particularly in the early stages of their placement, display very challenging and aggressive behaviours necessitating a high level of physical intervention to keep them, the staff and other young people safe. Where this is the case, there is a demonstrated reduction in this requirement as young people establish relationships with the staff and are helped to develop better ways of managing their anger. Sanctions used are generally fair and are often restorative. Young people do not feel that sanctions are punitive or unjust. Some young people, who are preparing for independence, feel that they should be getting more freedom but, where this is the case, it is clear that decisions are influenced by justifiable safeguarding concerns.

There is an appropriate protocol in place, with the local police, with regard to young people who go missing from the home. Individual placement plans and risk assessments individualise how absences without authority will be responded to according to the safety implications. Staff have been successful in helping some young people to reduce the incidence of absences without authority and there have been no such incidents since the previous inspection. Young people say that there is no bullying at the home currently. There are clear policies and procedures to guide staff in challenging bullying and they are very aware of the need to monitor relationships between young people carefully for any changes.

The provider organisation is a member of Ofsted's National Provider Scheme. An audit of the head office, in March 2011, determined that 'there are very good systems in place to make suitability decisions about staff and staff records are

maintained to a high standard'. The manager retains good evidence, within the home, that all appropriate checks have been undertaken on permanent staff, agency staff and any staff deployed from the providers other children's homes. Any visitors to the home are closely supervised to ensure they do not have unsupervised contact with the young people. This ensures that young people are protected from contact with unsuitable adults within the home.

Sound systems promote the safety of young people, staff and visitors within the home. There is appropriate servicing of gas, electrical and fire safety equipment and young people are involved in regular fire drills to ensure that they understand the importance of evacuating the building quickly in case of fire.

Leadership and management

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

The registered manager and deputy manager provide strong, knowledgeable and effective leadership within the home. They demonstrate a dedication to consistently improving care and recording practices within the home and to promoting positive outcomes for all young people placed. Previous inspection reports highlight that there have been periods of instability and inconsistent practice in the home, in the past, but there has been a demonstrated steady and consistent improvement with a focus on improving staff retention and developing staff skills and their capacity to provide consistent quality care to the young people accommodated. There is now a stable staff team who value the positive leadership and say that both formal and informal support and supervision is good: 'we are now on a very even keel'. Team meetings are held regularly and provide a forum for discussion of consistent approaches to promoting positive progress for young people in all outcome areas. The manager and deputy reflect not only the high expectations they have of the staff team but also their dedication to ensuring that the staff fully recognise the real benefits of improved practices in enhancing relationships with, and outcomes for, young people.

There are extremely thorough and robust systems for monitoring the operation of the home and the quality of care. The manager and deputy have extremely good oversight of daily care practice and regularly audit all records. They are clear that this has been the most effective tool in improving recording practice. At present, although this is a joint exercise, the deputy completes the monthly reports to demonstrate this monitoring and, in line with regulatory requirements, these reports must be countersigned by the manager to demonstrate her oversight, the registered person, and her identification of any concerns. Monthly visits to the home, on behalf of the provider organisation, incorporate regular discussions with staff and young people and identify any issues of concern. The reports of these visits are comprehensive and thorough and are regularly submitted to Ofsted for consideration.

The manager has a very clear awareness of the strengths and weaknesses within the staff team and capitalises on individual strengths to provide the required individual support for the young people placed. For example, members of staff have used their skills to nurture young people's artistic talents and to support young people to become so skilled in cooking that they have won awards for their cakes. The manager also has a very clear awareness of how the home will continue to develop, although there are no proposals for major changes to services provided. There is however no written business plan in place to detail this. There is an organisational crisis management plan to highlight how a range of potential emergency situations, such as the requirement to close the home and evacuate young people, will be effectively managed.

The Statement of Purpose provides good information, for parents and placing authorities, about the home's aims and objectives but does not provide detail of individual staff experience and qualifications.

The home is appropriately staffed to meet the needs of the young people accommodated. The staff team comprises a good mix of male and female staff, of

varying ages and from a range of cultural backgrounds, giving young people a good range of appropriate role models and ensuring that there is good capacity to meet their identified, individual cultural needs. Although some issues have been identified in relation to staff training, there is a demonstrated organisational commitment to sound induction training to meet the required standards of the Children's Workforce Development Council and to National Vocational Qualification(NVQ) training. Although the home does not currently fully meet the requirement of 80% of staff with NVQ, only one member of staff, out of 16, is still to commence this training. All other staff have either already gained the qualification or are in the process of completing the course.

Young people benefit from the sound management arrangements and are able to speak with the manager or deputy should they have any concerns about their care at the home. The young people's guide is presented in a child friendly and accessible format and young people are provided with clear information about their rights and given full details of how they can contact independent advocates should they wish to do so.

Only one complaint has been received, by the home, since the previous inspection. This relates to damage inflicted on an adjacent property and is being responded to by the provider organisation. The neighbour raises concerns regarding the parking of vehicles at the home. The manager and staff detail that, although no other formal complaints have been received, neighbours regularly request that vehicles belonging to staff and visitors are removed. Although there is a fairly large area to the front of the property, parking is restricted to three vehicles because of a very large tree. There are two pool cars at the home and generally at least three staff cars in addition to vehicles belonging to visitors. This is an area of potential ongoing conflict with neighbours. The manager is aware of it as an issue and is seeking resolution through discussion with the provider organisation.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.