

Inspection report for children's home

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| <b>Unique reference number</b> | SC063997      |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 27 May 2010   |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | Warren Clarke |
| <b>Type of Inspection</b>      | Key           |

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|--------------------------------|----------------|
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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 outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

## 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**

This children's home provides accommodation for three young people aged from 10 years to under 18. 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 where the staff sleeping-in accommodation is also located. On the ground floor there is: a lounge, kitchen; laundry and the general office. There is a large mature garden at the rear of the building.

At the time of inspection there were three young people, average age 14 years, resident. All of them were seen and they all contributed to the inspection.

### **Summary**

This unannounced inspection assessed the home's performance against the key national minimum standards (NMS) relevant to the Every Child Matters outcomes areas: staying safe, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution, economic wellbeing and organisation. Substantial improvements, built upon sustainable foundations, were found in all areas of the young people's care. Young people themselves say they are settled, making progress and reasonably optimistic about their future.

There are, however, some areas where improvement is required such as fire safety checks, repairs and maintenance, and staff retention and qualifications. These are reflected in the actions and recommendations.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the last inspection four requirements and five recommendations were made to address weaknesses. These were all in the staying safe and organisation outcome areas. With regard to the matters related to the staying safe, behaviour management is much more effective. There is, for example, less cause for staff to have to physically restrain the young people, hardly any incidents of bullying and no cause for safeguarding referrals to be made because of issues arising in the home.

In relation to organisational issues, a manager has been appointed and installed in the home, there is less reliance on temporary staff from outside agencies. Whilst the number of staff with relevant qualifications for the job still does not fulfil the required minimum ratio, a significant number of them are currently working towards these qualifications. This is therefore partly met while the others referred to above have been completely addressed. The overall impact of these improvements is that the home provides a calmer, settled environment in which care that young people are given is more thoughtful and effective.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

The home makes sound catering arrangements for the young people. In principle and practice, the arrangements successfully ensure the young people are provided with wholesome food and

an all round healthy diet. Mealtimes and the whole process of food preparation are used effectively and imaginatively to promote social inclusion of all the young people, healthy eating and preparation for future independent living. For instance, young people are actively involved in planning the weekly menus. The young people are engaged enthusiastically in food preparation and, where appropriate, are enabled to practise catering for themselves in the ways they may be expected to do when they move into their own accommodation. Young people express a high level of satisfaction with how they are looked after generally and, in particular, with always having enough to eat regularly and in a relaxed and homely environment. Similar views are expressed by some of their social workers.

A clear, comprehensive and coherent approach underpins the home's success in maintaining the young people's good health and responding to any health needs with which they present. The system of discrete individual health plans, which is in place, is effective in amassing sufficient information that enables staff to plan to meet needs arising from ongoing health problems such as asthma. It also facilitates staff in tailoring preventative strategies so that they are relevant to each young person's circumstances. Where young people have ongoing health problems staff work effectively with doctors and health care professionals to ensure any treatment needed is provided. The success of efforts to heighten young people's awareness of how they may maintain their own good health is apparent. They are able to discuss in an informed way, the benefit of healthy eating, physical exercise and the adverse effects on health of substances such as illegal drugs, tobacco and excess of alcohol. Importantly, some young people believe that despite difficulties that inevitably occur from living away from home, they are provided with the security and emotional anchorage which helps them to settle and confront positively social and emotional issues that impact on their overall well-being.

The home ensures that it has the necessary consent to arrange any medical or first aid treatment the young people might need. Clear procedures and staff training in safe handling of medication combine well to achieve a situation in which young people's medicines are securely stored, efficiently administered and errors avoided. Where appropriate and, as part of the drive to encourage young people to take some responsibility for their own health, they are permitted, subject to risk assessment, to manage their own medication.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

Staff ensure all the young people accommodated have an acceptable degree of privacy relevant to their age and circumstances. For example, each young person is allocated an exclusive lockable bedroom in which they are able to keep their personal possessions private and safe. Communal facilities such as bathrooms and toilets are also properly equipped to enable the young people to use them in private and without fear of embarrassment. There are well established staff codes of practice which ensure that young people's personal details are kept confidential and accessible to only those who are authorised. Where staff have cause to search a young person's bedroom to recover contraband or items which they may use to cause harm, this is done sensitively and within strict procedures.

Young people and others who may have concerns about the quality of service, are provided access to a clear complaints procedure, which complies with all the NMS requirements and current good practice. This procedure is actively and appropriately promoted. In instances where young people make complaints they are taken seriously, fairly considered and provide outcomes

with which the complainants are satisfied. There is an ethos of openness in the home thus where young people's complaints suggest there may be safeguarding implications, these are referred to the appropriate authorities for consideration. A system of recording young people's expression of minor dissatisfaction has been recently introduced. This, further demonstrates the registered person's commitment to listening to the young people as a means of improving the quality of service.

Young people resident in the home are effectively protected from abuse by the well-established and comprehensive child protection policy. Staff have completed the basic training sufficient to enable them to recognise abuse, contribute to its prevention and respond appropriately to allegations. In addition, staff have available to them the child protection procedures of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and are familiar with protocols as relevant to young people placed by other local authorities. Staff work effectively with social workers and appropriate authorities to both safeguard young people's welfare and to provide the care and treatment needed for those who may have experienced abuse. Creditable performance in this area is reflected in some children's progress and successful application of a range of safeguarding strategies.

The home has made significant progress in establishing an anti-bullying culture. Staff and young people are familiar with the comprehensive anti-bullying policy, which is promoted on an ongoing basis. There is a common understanding of the nature and impact of bullying, the steps to prevent it and the appropriate response when it occurs. There is imaginative alignment of the anti-bullying initiative with the home's equality and diversity policy such that young people's and staff behaviour reflect the home's 'respect for and fairness to all' message. This is reinforced in posters displayed in the home. Young people who comment on this say that there are sometimes disagreements, but rarely bullying amongst them.

An effective procedure is in place which staff follow successfully on occasions when a young person absconds or is absent from the home without permission. The procedure is in line with the local joint police and local authority missing from care protocol, which takes account of the young person's vulnerability and the particular circumstances of their absence. Staff properly recognise the risk at which some young people place themselves when missing and proceed competently and successfully to recover them. Young people who comment say that the home is a good place to live, they feel settled and they absent themselves for reasons other than because they are dissatisfied or unhappy.

Staff have a good understanding of the factors that underlie aspects of undesirable behaviours sometimes exhibited by the young people. The comprehensive behaviour management policy provides a sound framework that guides staff in this aspect of care. It also contributes to the apparent success achieved in modifying the young people's conduct.

The behaviour management policy provides safeguards for young people from unfair treatment and unacceptable punishment. It ensures that staff focus on encouraging good behaviour and specifies clearly punishment or sanctions which are not permissible. The occasions when staff must respond to undesirable behaviour are managed within a structure whereby each young person's difficulties are specifically targeted via individual handling plans. For example, young people are set personal goals linked to reinforcing desirable conduct and personal development, achievement of which is rewarded. This approach encourages young people to understand their behaviour, take responsibility for it and have an awareness of their own progress. Some young

people say that although everything is not perfect, they believe they are making good progress in aspects of their behaviour that need to change. This is consistent with other good outcomes such as the sparing use of sanctions and there being little cause for staff to carry out physical restraint. However, records of sanctions are not kept on an exclusive basis, they form part of records that are kept for another purpose. This does not comply with the NMS and creates circumstances for error in the audit of such records. It is also observed that records of restraints do not, as matter of good practice, provide any information of the views of young people to which they relate.

Safety and security of the young people are given a high priority. For example, the home's environment and the various activities involved in the young people's care have been risk-assessed and, where necessary, control measures are embedded to remove or reduce hazards. Safety is also promoted and safeguarded by comprehensive fire precautions and robust security measures that provide effective protection from intruders. However, fire alarm tests were not conducted during one month. It is necessary for such tests to be carried out weekly to ensure that the alarm always remains in operationally sound order.

Young people value the staff and regard their input as being among that which is best about the home. This reflects the care that the registered provider takes to ensure that staff employed to look after the young people are suitable for their posts. For example, staff do not commence work in the home until there is a satisfactory outcome to the rigorous process of vetting in terms of references and criminal records disclosure. The coherent approach to safeguarding the young people also extends to control and supervision of official visitors.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

All resident young people have access to a wide range of support both within and outside the home, to address their personal difficulties. Each young person is assigned a staff member who acts as key worker. These workers are effective in giving the young people a sense of belonging and ensuring they have the time and space to unburden any worries they may have. Staff ensure necessary information is available to provide a clear understanding of each young person's needs and the personal support they require. In every case, there is a placement plan that takes full account of needs arising from the young people's sex, religion and culture. Importantly, young people are benefiting from the efficient system of communication among those involved in their care. Good co-ordination of efforts in this regard is, for instance, most productive in safeguarding the young people from abuse and exploitation. Staff continue to work successfully to accommodate the differences in young people's age and interests. Group outings, communal meals and house meetings are used to good effect, to ensure all the young people are included and there is reasonable cohesion.

Strong emphasis is placed on education and achievement as reflected in the sound education support policy. Staff seek to fire the young people's interest in learning both formally and through hobbies and leisure interests, which are actively encouraged. Facilitating this are books, games and other resources available in the home to stimulate interest. Staff use their own skills such as in art and cooking to introduce young people to these pastimes. Some young people show pride in artwork they have been guided to complete and which are used to adorn the home.

Since the last inspection, the school which was operated from the home has been transferred to another location. This provides more scope for the young people to go out to school and associate with a wider group of children. All the young people of school age are currently in full-time education, they attend regularly and are making steady progress. Accomplishment in this area is reflected in a social worker's observation that care and teaching staff have successfully engaged in education, young people who have previously been most resistant.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Young people benefit from an overall high standard of care driven by the rigorous systems of assessment and care management. There is sufficient relevant information of young people's circumstances and needs, to plan their care. This is shown in the very good individual placement plans that bring together the young people's needs with the day-to-day care inputs to meet them. In terms of actual benefits, this yields measurable positive improvements in the young people's physical and emotional health, educational progress and overall well-being. Whilst in their comments, young people express some usual uncertainty about their future, they are nevertheless confident and optimistic. Of particular remark is that the assessment and planning system avoids drift and therefore both staff and young people have a clear focus about what they are aiming for.

Documentation kept of the input of care that the children and young people receive is used efficiently to inform regular formal review of their placement arrangements. Each child or young person, therefore benefits from a coherent monitoring and review system, which enables any lack of progress to be identified and addressed in a timely manner. This is consistently shown in instances where young people absent themselves from the home without permission or place themselves at risk of harm or abuse. In these and other instances there is clear evidence of alteration to their care arrangements to address their changing circumstances and needs.

Commitment that the home makes to enable young people to have contact with their families and others who are significant to them, is expressed in their placement plans and the efforts that staff make to facilitate such contact. Telephone facility and funds are provided that enable contact by this means to be done in private and visiting arrangements at the home are reasonably flexible. Where necessary transport and supervision contact is provided.

Among the sound care practices is a sensitive and clear process to support young people to join and leave the home without too much anxiety. Some young people currently resident joined the home on a planned basis, which permits time and space to consider properly whether it is an appropriate setting, and for them to become familiar with it before moving in. Those who have been admitted in an emergency, are particularly satisfied with the care and concern with which staff acted to ensure that they were welcomed and cared about. When a young person leaves the home, this is usually also on a planned and careful basis. Unless countered by the wishes of parents, or other factors, time is allowed for severing of attachments and gradual introduction to wherever the young person is transferring. As a tradition and with the individual's agreement, there is usually some form of farewell event to mark a young person's leaving.

Young people say that they feel a sense of belonging in the home and are able to influence their own care and how the home is run. Although their views are not always agreed with or acted upon, young people believe that staff listen to them. This is in keeping with the openness

with which the home is run and from which young people gain a confidence that enables them to express both critical and complimentary observations about the running of the home and how they are being looked after. Regular house meetings, individual keyworker sessions and other means of consultation ensure that all the young people have a comfortable way of expressing views and influencing how they are looked after.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

The young people profit from the home's care regime that teaches and guides them incrementally towards greater independence and thereby prepares them for adulthood. Currently all the young people are able to attend to their own personal care. In for example, keeping themselves clean, taking care of their appearance and establishing their own style. Skills such as budgeting are being acquired through management of pocket money and other allowances. Recognising that some young people will leave the home to live independently at a relatively early age, staff demonstrate that they make a substantial contribution to the planning and preparation of those young people. In these instances, staff skilfully combine the young people's prior learning and ability to look after themselves, with a more focused preparation programme that assesses and ensures that they are properly equipped. Among others, the programme includes: keeping well, preparing meals, budgeting, looking after your home, being a good neighbour.

All areas of the home, including gardens, are maintained in good order. Decoration, furniture and fittings combine to create a comfortable and pleasing environment. Indoor and outdoor space is sufficient to meet the needs of the young people who say that they feel at ease in the home's environment. Young people who comment also say that they are satisfied with their bedrooms, which they have personalised. Communal facilities such the large sitting room with ample comfortable seating, kitchen and dining areas and bathrooms are well equipped and though domestic in scale, cater more than adequately for the number of children and staff. Overall, it is an agreeable living environment for young people in which those currently resident are relaxed and thriving. However, there are some deficits. Floor coverings in some areas of the home are stained and detract from the otherwise pleasing appearance. There is no floor covering in one of the bathrooms although there are arrangements in place for this to be replaced imminently. One of the external lights is not working thus compromising safety during hours of darkness. It is also observed that the seal on the oven door is defective and is likely to cause it not to work as efficiently as intended.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

Young people are thriving in the home's settled environment, which has seen a greater focus from the registered provider during the last 12 months. This is shown in the revised written Statement of Purpose which now sets a more realistic rationale for the home and variation of resources, accordingly. For example, education which was previously provided on the premises has now been transferred to another location and the document clarifies that the home is able to arrange therapy for young people rather than it being 'a therapeutic residential care service'. Summarised in a clear, helpful and thoughtful way in the children's guide, together these documents are likely to provide young people, parents and others a clear understanding of how the home is run and the care experience a child or young person can expect.

More than adequate numbers of staff are employed and led by a management team with a clear focus. This has a significant impact on the quality of care. Deployed efficiently, there are sufficient staff on duty at any one time to meet the young people's individual needs and complete the administrative and other tasks involved in so doing. However, although there is less reliance on agency staff, the turnover of permanent staff during the last twelve months is atypically high for a small children's home and contrary to the young people's need for a high degree of stability. The registered person recognises this and is redoubling efforts to reverse this trend. Among the action taken to address the problem is greater staff support and development through regular supervision, training and on the job mentoring by managers. This has been most beneficial for the young people, because there is a more confident approach to their care, greater consistency and a more peaceful environment in which to live. Despite this, only one third of staff members hold the necessary qualifications for their post. The registered provider also recognises this shortfall and demonstrates a commitment to remedy it. That is, five members of staff are currently undertaking training towards becoming so qualified.

Young people's best interests are served by the sound arrangements made for the deputy manager to take charge of the home in the manager's absence. This ensures there is someone with the experience, and with the support of the operations manager, to maintain continuity and consistency of approach to the young people's care. The manager has also acted to ensure groups of staff are rostered for duty for long enough periods to conclude any listening and guidance that young people seek from them. This is in response to reasonable views expressed by young people and further demonstration of how seriously their views are taken in the home's attempts to meet their needs.

Staff consider that they are well supported to provide high standards of care for the young people, and this comes in the form of one-to-one supervision by the manager, the company's in-service staff training and development programmes and the support of their colleagues. The home continues to be successful in recruiting staff that provide a reasonable number of females and males who are diverse in race and culture. This benefits young people in that they have a wide range of staff to turn to for support and who are able to introduce a broad spectrum of talents and interests.

An established system of continuous and rigorous monitoring of the home on behalf of the registered provider, and separately by the manager, remains in place. This system is thorough in assessing the home's performance and ensuring the young people's welfare is promoted and safeguarded. However, on some occasions the deficits identified, particularly in regard to repairs and maintenance, feature on more than one occasion. This system is, in part, intended to identify difficulties for the registered person to address in a timely fashion.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. A sound equality and diversity policy is successfully implemented such that all aspects of the running of the home and the care of the young people is influenced by it. The diversity of the staff team, clear reflection of equality and diversity in the assessment and care management process and the values imparted to young people serve as some examples.

Children's records are well organised in files that provide information about their individual circumstances, needs and progress. The records kept conform to that required by the relevant regulations. There is an access to records policy and, should the young people opt to access their individual records, the way they are structured should enable this to happen easily.

## 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 meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

| Standard | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Due date     |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| 26       | carry out fire alarm tests consistently at the frequency recommended by the fire authority and ensure the outcome of drills informs the fire risk assessment where young people do not respond as required (Regulation 32 (1)) | 30 July 2010 |
| 24       | ensure that there is a satisfactory maintenance and repair programme for the building, furniture and equipment, and any damage is repaired quickly. (Regulation 31 (2) (c) (e))                                                | 30 July 2010 |

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that sanctions are recorded in an exclusive bound book in which the pages are numbered as specified in the national minimum standards (NMS 22.10)
- ensure that when physical intervention is used, the young person involved is encouraged to write or have his or her views recorded in the record kept of the event (NMS 22.14)
- ensure that a minimum of 80 per cent of care staff hold the National Vocational Qualification Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People or other validated equivalent qualifications (NMS 29.5)
- ensure that cause for high staff turnover in the home is reviewed and, as necessary, effective action taken to address it(NMS 33.3)
- ensure that timely action is taken on recommendations or issues of concern raised in reports of visits to monitor the home. (NMS 32)