

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Jennifer Reed
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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

The home is registered to provide care for up to four girls between 11 and under 17 years of age and have emotional or behavioural difficulties. A variation is in place for the home to accommodate five young people from 5 June to 31 August 2009. The home is a period two-storey detached house, located one mile from the nearest village. The home is set in seven acres of grounds which provide a garden, patio area and fields and paddocks. The local town provides access to schools, shops, health and leisure facilities.

The home operates a small-holding with vegetable and fruit gardens. A number of animals are kept including horses, chickens, pigs, sheep, and various small companion animals, including a house cat. Young people have the opportunity to work alongside staff in developing and maintaining the grounds and looking after the animals. The young people attend the company's school provision; this is approximately a 20 minutes drive from the home.

Summary

This was a short notice announced inspection of the home; all key standards were looked at during the inspection. The respective views of young people, staff members, the Registered Manager, a director of the company, the headteacher, the police and a placing authority social worker contributed to the inspection process.

Overall, the standard of care is satisfactory, with some good and outstanding features. The well qualified and experienced staff team provide young people with excellent individual support and promote their good health. Diversity and equality are suitably promoted in the service. Well embedded systems and regular monitoring and review processes underpin the sound standard of care provided to accommodated young people. The home provides young people with high quality accommodation and access to a range of activities and rural experiences which enrich their lives. Young people benefit from regular attendance and study at the company's school.

There is insufficient detail in some of the home's documentation and two safety matters within the building need attention. There are shortfalls in the home's recruitment and selection processes. The home operated outside of its conditions of registration for a period of two weeks prior to notifying Ofsted of this occurrence.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The home now provides detailed and robust risk assessments for the premises which identify major hazards to young people. The risk assessments in place contribute to keeping young people safe.

The 'safer recruitment' recommendations made for improvement in recruitment and selection processes have only been partially met. This inspection has identified further significant shortfalls in staff recruitment and an action and a recommendation have been made.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The home provides young people with excellent individual support and care to promote their good health and well-being. Clear health plans guide staff in meeting young people's health needs, with staff vigilantly monitoring young people's welfare. Staff look after young people well when they are ill. Young people said, 'staff keep us in bed and bring us drinks and medicine. They keep you eating food with lots of nutrients and if you are really bad, take you straight to a doctor.' Young people are registered with local medical practitioners to receive routine health care. Specialist health services are accessed as required, for example, young people's drug and alcohol services. The home can arrange clinical psychological services as appropriate. Staff work collaboratively with placing authorities to ensure young people receive regular medical checks and immunisations. Written records are kept of significant illnesses, accidents or injuries sustained and of all the medical appointments young people attend.

Staff complete training in basic first aid and in the safe handling of medication. Medical consent is obtained from appropriate persons to ensure young people promptly receive any emergency treatment that they may need. The home has established comprehensive systems and records for the administration of medication. Risk assessments are completed to check that it is safe for some young people to self-administer 'over the counter' medication; this is usually simple remedies, for example, creams and shampoos. Each young person has a safe within their room to securely keep their medication, if it is appropriate for them to do so. The home has suitable secure storage in place for all types of medication, including controlled drugs. Medication is appropriately stored to minimise the likelihood of error in administration. There are suitable arrangements to monitor medicines coming in and out of the home and for the disposal of any unused medication.

Young people benefit from eating well balanced and nutritious home-cooked meals. Meals routinely include fresh vegetables and fruit, and freshly laid eggs from the home's own chickens. One young person said, 'we have very nice dinners; there is salad and the chicken and eggs are very yummy and tasty'. Another young person said, 'staff encourage us to eat healthily by putting vegetables with every meal and they buy us loads of fruit'. Young people are able to help staff shop for food items and are encouraged to take part in food preparation and cooking, to develop their independent living skills. Staff show young people how to cook new foods; young people had recently made a batch of damson jam. Food hygiene standards are high; the kitchen and its appliances are kept clean. Staff do not hold current food hygiene certificates and training has been arranged; however, staff vigilantly follow safe food handling procedures.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Care practices within the home promote young people's welfare. The home gives young people sufficient levels of privacy. Each young person has their own bedroom. In accordance with the home's family-style environment, bedroom doors are not fitted with locks; young people are expected to respect each other's privacy. Bathroom doors have suitable locks fitted; however, the downstairs toilet door has a lock that cannot be opened from the outside by staff in an emergency. The home's telephone is well sited, enabling young people to make calls in private. Confidential matters are adequately managed and staff know how to share information for child protection purposes.

The Registered Manager has a good working knowledge of child protection matters and the staff team receive regular safeguarding training, helping them to safeguard young people. Senior management are reviewing the company's absent without authority policy to ensure staff have access to comprehensive procedural guidance. There have been a number of unauthorised absences from the home; however, missing episodes have decreased over recent months as the mix of young people has changed. The home appropriately reports any missing young person and works closely with relevant agencies and families to minimise such events. However, the reporting and notification procedures in place within the home to inform Ofsted about a range of significant events are insufficient. The home has failed to notify Ofsted in line with legislation requirements.

Bullying is not tolerated in the home. Young people say that staff effectively deal with any bullying issue that arises and they know how to raise any concern that they may have. For example, the home provides young people with a copy of their placing authority complaints procedure and clear information is contained in the Young Person's Handbook about how to make a complaint about the home. There have been no complaints made since the last inspection.

The home helps young people to develop socially acceptable behaviour. Young people's Individual Behaviour Plans identify triggers and strategies to manage behavioural issues. Staff are trained in de-escalation, control and restraint techniques. The home's records show that few restraints have been undertaken. However, the record is not suitably formatted; it does not require staff to include the details of the child's behaviour that led to the use of the measure. Consequently, there may be insufficient information held in this record for the purposes of effective monitoring and inspection. Sanctions given to young people are recorded within the dedicated sanctions book; the pages of this book are not numbered as required by the standard. The home employs a reparations approach in responding to some behavioural matters, helping young people to develop a sense of right and wrong and to learn to be accountable for their actions. The amount of the financial reparation given is not always entered within the sanctions record to enable disciplinary measures to be monitored and evaluated. A financial reparation given to a young person to repay £55 was not entered in any of the home's records; this is an excessive sum for a young person to repay.

Comprehensive risk assessments are in place for the premises and grounds, hazardous substances, fire, activities and young people's behaviour. This detailed guidance helps to keep young people and staff safe. Regular utility and safety checks are completed; however, electrical installations have not been checked every three years in accordance with the requirements of the National Minimum Standards. Portable appliance testing is scheduled to be undertaken in the home in the next few weeks.

The company's practice of commencing staff in post prior to receipt of their Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure does not meet the requirements of relevant legislation, including the Children's Homes National Minimum Standards. Furthermore, CRB disclosures provided by an agency for a tutor employed in the home, have not been completed within the previous 12 months. Visitors coming into the home are monitored to ensure young people are safeguarded.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

As found at previous inspections of the home, an outstanding level of individual support is provided to each young person that reflects their particular needs. Staff demonstrate a good

understanding of each young person and the home is set up to provide tailored care to meet the unique needs of the individual. Placement plans are rigorously implemented to meet agreed objectives. Responses from a placing authority social worker and the local police highlight the home's capacity to respond to individual young people's needs and note the efforts made by staff to improve outcomes for young people. Young people enjoy living in this home. One young person wrote, 'this is the best care home ever and is the place for change'.

Young people are treated fairly and are guided in good citizenship. Difference is accepted and valued. One young person wrote, 'this home is a caring house and we all see each other as a family; there is hardly ever any trouble'. The home provides young people with a wide range of activities and leisure pursuits, including an annual holiday. Young people are encouraged to join local clubs and maintain their hobbies and interests.

Each young person has a Personal Education Plan in place. The home works collaboratively with placing authorities to use looked after children funding to help young people achieve. Regular school attendance is encouraged and staff transport young people to the company's school, located on the head office site. The school is registered with the Department for Children, Schools and Families and is inspected separately by Ofsted. The school provides every young person with an Individual Education Plan which is regularly reviewed. Young people are well supported in making the transition from school to the world of work or further education. Staff support young people in seeking employment and work experience opportunities. They also liaise with colleges to access suitable courses and programmes that young people may wish to pursue. The school and home work closely together; there are daily handovers between the two at the beginning and end of each school day to provide a holistic approach to young people's care and well-being.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The Registered Manager seeks sufficient referral information and history from placing authorities, to evaluate the suitability and appropriateness of each potential placement. Young people are invited to visit the home prior to admission, to make up their own minds about whether they wish to live in the home. Alternatively, the Registered Manager will also visit young people to tell them about the home. Young people are given a copy of the Young Person's Handbook, which provides relevant information about the operation of the home, to enable them to make an informed decision about their future placement.

Placement plans provide staff with clear guidance on how best to look after young people. Plans are regularly updated to reflect arising issues and include recent decisions about the day-to-day care of young people. Staff adhere to and implement the plans in place; the weekly one-to-one sessions provide young people with an opportunity to talk about their plans and their progress. The home keeps an 'access file'; this includes written information completed by staff about the young person. Young people are able to see this file and are encouraged to sign documents and make comments about that which has been written about them. Young people are consulted and can participate in decision making about the home in a variety of ways. For example, regular house meetings are held and young people talk freely to staff about arising issues on a daily basis. Most young people say they have a good relationship with staff. One young person wrote, 'this is a great place and always will be'.

Staff support young people to attend their statutory reviews and to take part in decision-making about their future. The home helps young people to keep in contact with their families and friends; for example, staff will escort young people to and from their home areas. There is sufficient space available in the home for young people to meet privately with their family and visitors.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people receive excellent support to help them develop independent living skills. The home expects young people to take part in household chores on a rota basis; for example, young people are asked to keep their bedrooms clean and tidy and help with the washing up. Staff encourage young people to become involved in the home's award scheme and independent living programme from age 11 upwards. For example, young people can learn how to plan menus and prepare basic meals, fill out forms, open a bank account and pay utility bills. Young people say that the programme provides them with good information and they benefit from this task centred work and the support and advice given by staff. There is a semi-independent accommodation option available within the company for some young people to move into as they make the transition into adulthood

Getting involved in caring for the animals is optional. Young people can choose to help with the work on the small-holding and individual young people spend differing amounts of their time involved in these activities. One young person has opted to be responsible for looking after three horses and is involved in all aspects of their care. Staff work alongside young people to share their expertise and help young people develop their abilities. The home has its own horses, pigs, chicken and rabbits; there is also a house cat.

This spacious home provides young people with a high standard of accommodation which promotes a family environment in a very rural setting. Only the staff rooms within the home are kept locked. The home is well maintained and decorated throughout; there is a rolling programme of refurbishment to ensure the good quality of the accommodation is maintained. Cleaning standards are high. Every young person has their own bedroom which they can choose to personalise. The communal rooms provide sufficient space for everyone and enough room for young people to meet in private with their families and visitors. The home is set in seven acres of grounds which include the garden and patio area and out-buildings, animal shelters, fields and paddocks. There are no near neighbours and the home's ample grounds provide young people with opportunities for solitude in safe and quiet surroundings. Staff transport young people into the local towns to access shops and community facilities.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The culture and ethos of the home underpins care practices that demonstrate the home's capacity to promote diverse individual needs. Young people are treated fairly and they are supported to develop an awareness of their rights and responsibilities.

The home has a Statement of Purpose which is available to young people, their families and placing authorities. However, it provides some inaccurate information about the operation and staffing of the home. The young people's guide to the home is in the form of a personal

handbook; this format works well. It provides clear information to young people about how the home runs and clarifies expectations of behaviour.

Young people benefit from the good standard of care provided by the well qualified and experienced staff team. The registered manager is suitably qualified to manage the home and provides strong leadership. All team members have gained their National Vocational Qualification Level 3 award in 'Caring for Children and Young People'. Staff are supported in the delivery of well-embedded care practices by regular team meetings, regular supervision and appraisal processes and the established on-call management arrangements. However, staff do not have Personal Development Plans in place which show their agreed training needs and performance targets. All staff complete the company's induction training and further core training is provided thereafter.

The sharing of information and collaborative working with external agencies and placing authorities, contribute to the effective implementation of placement plans, helping young people to achieve successful outcomes. Monthly monitoring processes are regularly undertaken to check that young people's welfare is promoted and safeguarded by care practices within the home. Records are generally well kept and confidential information is securely stored. However, some records do not provide the level of detail required by the National Minimum Standards. For example, the register kept by the home in accordance with Schedule 3 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001, has gaps in the recorded information. The Registered Person has not given sufficient attention to recruitment and selection processes and the conditions of registration of the home. Since the previous inspection, the home has exceeded the agreed numbers of accommodated young people. A short term variation is currently in place to address this matter.

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 Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
20	notify without delay the relevant persons or agencies of the matters set out in Schedule 5; in particular, notify Ofsted within 24 hours of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with Regulation 30 [Regulation 30 (1)]	17 August 2009
22	ensure details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of any measure of control, restraint or discipline, is included in the written record made in a volume kept for the purpose [Regulation 17 (4) (b)]	18 September 2009
27	ensure that no person starts work in the children's home until such time as full and satisfactory information is available in respect of the matters specified in paragraphs 1 to 6 of Schedule 2; in particular, the Criminal Records Bureau check must have	17 August 2009

	been completed before the person starts work [Regulation 26 (5)(b); Regulation 26 (3)(d)(ii) and Schedule 2]	
34	manage the home with sufficient care; in particular, ensure that the home operates within its conditions of registration [Regulation 9 (1)]	31 August 2009
35	obtain the information specified in Schedule 3 in respect of each child; in particular ensure the child's address immediately prior to entering the home is included in the record [Regulation 28 (1)]	25 September 2009

Recommendations

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

- review the financial sanctions imposed by way of reparation, to ensure that each amount is reasonable and is not excessive [National Minimum Standard 22.6]
- clarify the sanction given within the dedicated sanction record; in particular, ensure that the amount of the financial reparation is entered in the record [National Minimum Standard 22.10]
- ensure the dedicated bound book kept by the home to record any sanction given to a young person has numbered pages [National Minimum Standard 22.10]
- ensure the staff (not children) are able to open the door to the ground floor toilet from the outside in case of emergency [National Minimum Standard 25.6]
- ensure electrical installations and equipment are checked at least every three years [National Minimum Standard 26.4]
- ensure that any staff provided through an agency who work with children in the home have successfully passed the checks that are required in the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 within the previous 12 months [National Minimum Standard 27.3]
- review the Statement of Purpose to ensure that it provides an accurate description of the home [National Minimum Standard 1.1]
- ensure each member of staff has a Personal Development Plan in place [National Minimum Standard 28.7]