

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Mandy Williams
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This home is owned and operated by a private organisation. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to three children and young people. The organisation specialises in working with children who have emotional and behavioural difficulties; specifically attachment problems.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

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

This is a good home where young people say they enjoy living and where they receive predictable and nurturing care. Young people have made good progress since moving here both socially and educationally, despite their complex needs. Young people benefit from a committed team of staff that is eager to improve the life chances of those living here. Some relationships between staff and young people have endured over a number of years. This assists young people to develop an emotional resilience that will help them cope with their problems, as they become confident in the responses that they will receive from those that care for them.

The home works well with professionals, external organisations and young people's families. Staff offer good, clear communication and ensure that everybody involved with the young person is focussed on meeting the goals identified in their individualised placement plans. Many young people are preparing to move on to independence and staff work hard to identify appropriate support systems for them to access in the community, and to prepare them for this difficult period of transition.

There has been a recent change of management in the home, following a period of long-term stability. This has required some adjustment by staff and young people. However, the new manager is enthusiastic and keen to ensure positive outcomes for young people living in the home.

As a result of this inspection there were three areas identified for improvement. These relate to the home's procedures for the administration of non-prescribed

medication; the involvement of young people's views in the monitoring of staff; and inaccuracies included in the external monitoring of the home.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring staff (NMS 1.7)
- ensure children's health is promoted in accordance with their plans and staff are clear about what responsibilities are delegated to them; this relates to the administration of non-prescribed medication and the monitoring of those who self-medicate (NMS 6.5)
- ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the home; in particular that reports undertaken under Regulation 33 accurately reflect the management situation in the home and the conditions of registration. (NMS 21.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people living in the home achieve good outcomes in terms of their education, health and emotional well-being. Those resident in the home have often had difficult life experiences and many changes of primary carer. This can result in young people displaying a range of complex needs, including attachment difficulties. Staff are committed to working with young people to help them develop an understanding of their past and help them develop coping strategies to assist them in the future. Young people have regular access to the organisation's therapeutic team. Staff also receive a monthly consultation, so that they are able to respond to young people in the most appropriate way.

Young people are registered with appropriate health care practitioners and staff offer appropriate support to young people to attend appointments. Young people are also supported to develop their own skills in terms of personal hygiene, fitness and following a healthy lifestyle. Staff provide information on a range of issues, such as smoking or the use of drugs and alcohol. However, ultimately, young people are encouraged to make informed choices regarding their own health. This helps to prepare young people for when they are living independently and do not have easy access to the advice and support of informed adults.

Young people benefit from detailed health care plans and appropriate health-related risk assessments. However, the home does not administer homely remedies despite having a medication policy and parental consent. Young people consequently do not

have access to appropriate non-prescribed medication should they need it. Many minor ailments do not require medication to be prescribed and do not necessitate a visit to the general practitioner. This would assist those young people preparing for independence to learn about self-administration and when to call for medical assistance in the future. In some circumstances young people have been assessed as competent to self-administer their medication, but it is not always clear that appropriate safeguards put in place have been adhered to.

Some young people have made excellent progress in terms of their attendance and achievement educationally. Some young people attend the organisation's own school, while others attend educational establishments in the community. All young people have made progress since moving to the home, although some have unfortunately been unable to maintain their focus in order to complete their national examinations.

Young people are supported to maintain contact with those important to them, such as family and friends. Contact is clearly outlined in young people's placement plans. Some young people have developed, and maintained for some time, positive friendships in the community. Staff are supportive of these relationships and have developed good communication with the parents of such friends, ensuring that young people's whereabouts are known and that they are safe. Young people are able to have access to the home telephone should they need to contact their friends, although many have their own mobile telephones. This ensures that young people are able to sustain these relationships over time. This is of particular significance for those preparing for independent living, as these relationships will be a source of support in the future.

Some young people in the home are preparing for the transition to independence. This is an anxious time for many, and they have become rather unsettled over recent months. There have been struggles over rules and boundaries in the home and the attempts of staff to promote independence skills. Some young people have consequently displayed some aggressive behaviour while they struggle with the uncertainties of the future.

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy positive relationships with staff, despite the challenges that they may have presented recently. Young people have well-developed keyworker relationships with staff that they have known for a long time and have learnt to trust. This is important for young people who have been let down by adults in the past, and have not experienced a positive primary attachment.

Staff act as positive role models for young people and give consistent messages about appropriate behaviour. They are particularly skilled at diffusing situations and maintain a calm approach. Staff demonstrate a real empathy for the young people

that they care for and an understanding of their individuality. Their responses are tailored appropriately. Young people are encouraged to consider the consequences of their decisions and the effects of their behaviour on others. This encourages young people to develop socially acceptable behaviour that they will require to live independently in the future. One social worker commented, 'I feel the staff deal very well with the complex needs of this young person, who has significant attachment problems' and, 'there have been significant improvements in behaviour since being placed at here.'

Staff seek the views of young people in everyday discussions; in keyworker sessions; by the use of a suggestion box; and by holding regular young people's meetings. Their views influence the running of the home. Young people also have the opportunity to complete occasional surveys. One young person recently commented, 'I really enjoy living here, I like the staff and the food' and they were unable to identify anything that could be improved in the home. There has been recent involvement of young people in choosing the new colour scheme for the home, and in formulating interview questions for potential new employees. The organisation also embraces the involvement of young people in their development by holding a children's forum. A representative from the home attends this group where young people are able to bring issues to the attention of senior managers. This helps young people develop the skills of negotiation and compromise that will assist them in coping with social situations, and dealing with problems that present in adult life.

Young people are aware of the process of making a complaint, and there is a clear procedure for dealing with this. Information is available in the children's guide and young people have easy access to an independent advocate that visits the home on a monthly basis. Complaints are handled sensitively, and young people are kept informed about the progress of these. Issues raised are responded to promptly and changes to practice implemented if appropriate. For example, one young person now travels home from school independently following a complaint about travelling home with other younger children in the car. A compromise situation was reached with another young person who challenged the home's rules on reasonable times of day to use the house telephone. This ensures that young people can have confidence in the home addressing any issue with which they are dissatisfied.

Young people benefit from highly individualised placement plans, to which they contribute. These clearly outline the needs of the young person and how the staff team should work to meet these on a daily basis. These receive regular review to ensure that they are meeting the young person's presenting needs. The home ensures that all staff are familiar with any changes made. This ensures that staff adopt a consistent approach, which is of particular significance when caring for young people with attachment difficulties. Social workers receive a monthly summary of the young person's progress and report that the standard of this information is extremely high. This ensures that social workers are kept updated about progress, as well as emerging issues, appropriately.

Staff support young people to attend education and maintain regular contact with teaching staff. This enables them to provide consistent messages and ensures that

young people are able to take full advantage of their learning opportunities. Outside of school young people are encouraged to engage in any hobbies or interests that they already have and in the development of new ones. Staff are particularly good at identifying activities that are taking pace in the local community that they hope will ignite an interest by a young person. Such activities are discussed in young people's meetings and information displayed on the notice board in the home. Some young people choose to spend their leisure time with friends, whilst others prefer to spend time with staff. There are numerous photographs of young people engaging in activities and memorabilia from holidays displayed around the home.

Young people live in a warm and comfortable home in a residential area. The home is decorated to a good standard and is well maintained. Young people have been involved themselves in some recent redecoration and their bedrooms are individually personalised. This helps young people feel that they belong to the home, as well as promoting their independence skills.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people live in a safe environment. Staff undertake safeguarding training as part of their induction to the home and refresher training is offered appropriately. This ensures that staff are aware of the correct procedures to follow should they have to deal with any safeguarding issues. The organisation has a bullying policy, although young people living in the home generally have positive relationships. Staffing levels are also good, so young people are closely monitored and any potential conflicts quickly resolved.

The home has had an isolated missing from home incident since the last inspection. Appropriate actions were taken to ensure the young person's safe return. The home has developed positive relationships with the police, and good communication with them has been established.

Staff are trained in behaviour management, including the use of physical restraint. The organisation has recently introduced a new comprehensive format of recording such incidents. However, any incidents of restraint are rare as many of the young people are preparing to live independently in the community, and are learning to manage their own behaviours. Staff are also skilled in managing the issues specific for each young person, being successful at de-escalating many situations. However, there has been some physical damage to the home over recent months. The home does employ the use of sanctions, as a means of assisting young people to understand that there are implications for their actions. These are largely restorative in nature. For example, these include going shopping to purchase a broken item, or helping repair damage made to the home. This helps young people appreciate the longer term consequences of their actions. The home also employs the use of rewards to promote positive behaviour and these outweigh sanctions imposed in the home. Young people may receive a reward for being polite and helpful, or for

receiving a good school report. Rewards given include going out to a café for a drink and a cake or choosing a magazine.

The organisation ensures that staff recruitment processes are thorough. Staff are suitably checked prior to commencing work with young people and records kept in the home include all the required information. Staff ensure that visitors to the home sign in by the use of a visitors book, and are appropriately supervised when on the premises. These measures ensure that young people are protected from those who may pose them harm.

Young people live in an environment that is physically safe, as regular safety checks are undertaken on equipment within the home, and environmental risk assessments undertaken. Regular fire drills take place and visitors to the home are informed about the process of evacuating the building in the case of emergency. These actions serve to ensure the safety of all those in the home.

Leadership and management

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

There was a new manager in post at the time of the inspection, who is in the process of applying to Ofsted for formal registration. He has previous management experience within this organisation, albeit on a temporary basis. A temporary manager managed the home for some six months prior to this. The new manager is in the process of identifying their own targets for the development of the home.

The home meets the aims and objectives of its Statement of Purpose, and young people and social workers are clear about the aims and objectives of the home. This has been recently reviewed, although the manager's qualifications were omitted. This was rectified during the inspection. Similarly, the children's guide, which is an attractive and user-friendly document, still contained reference to the former manager. This was also altered during the inspection.

The organisation has addressed the one recommendation from the last inspection that related to the implementation of a full induction process for new or temporary managers. The organisation has reviewed its induction workbook for managers, and all new managers or assistant managers are expected to have completed this within six months. This covers topics, such as the role of the manager in the organisation; the importance of effective communication; safeguarding responsibilities; and managing individual's performance. Both the external and internal monitoring of the home is undertaken regularly and in some detail. Both are forwarded to Ofsted routinely. These serve to highlight any tasks that need completing in the home and an action plan is developed as a result. This ensures that tasks are not overlooked. However, the reports have not been updated in relation to the change of manager or the conditions of registration for the home.

Staff report that they enjoy working in the home and that they feel supported, despite the recent change of management. The staff group has remained largely

stable and some staff members have worked in the home for many years. Staff say that they work well together as a team and this helps provide consistent messages for young people. Supervision and annual appraisals take place regularly, although do not currently take into the account the views of young people. Staff meetings take place regularly and are clearly structured. This helps to ensure team cohesion. Staff sign to indicate that they are aware of the content of discussions and any changes to placement plans for young people. This ensures that everyone is kept updated.

The organisation is committed to providing a wide variety of training opportunities for staff. This is targeted to ensure that staff have the necessary skills to meet the needs of the young people that they are caring for. Staff are also confident in training being identified for them in a particular topic if they feel they require further information in this area. The manager is also keen to invite guest speakers into the home so that relationships are forged with other specialists in the community and the knowledge base of staff is developed.

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.