

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Nicholas Murphy
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home accommodates up to eight young people who have emotional and behavioural difficulties or learning disabilities. It is provided by a private organisation.

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**.

The home provides a stimulating environment where young people can have a wide range of experiences which they clearly relish. One social worker said, 'My young person loves his life there.' Young people enjoy very good health and have exceptionally good attendance at school. Staff are caring and attuned to each young person's needs, abilities and preferences. This enables programmes of care to be tailored to individual circumstances and thus be as effective as possible.

Many of the young people living here are extremely vulnerable, pose significant risks to others, or both. The process of initial referral and admission is extremely thorough and robust. This ensures that the home only admits those young people whose assessed needs it can be expected to meet. It also reduces as far as possible any adverse impact upon young people already living in the home.

Staff invite the views of young people at every opportunity, both in day-to-day living and more formal ways such as community meetings. Staff increase the ability of young people to exercise more choice and take on greater responsibility as they develop and mature. This helps young people to be better prepared for independence.

Because of the remit of the home to look after particularly vulnerable young people, the home operates in a very structured and supportive way. Staff are aware of the whereabouts of young people at all times and are extremely vigilant with regard to how young people interact with each other. This ensures that the home is very safe and the young people feel confident that this is the case. One young person said 'I give the home 10 out of 10 for looking after me properly.'

There are some shortcomings in practice. Although restraint is rarely used, the records kept do not meet requirements. There are also shortfalls in the keeping of case records, fire safety and the recruitment process for new staff. However, these have minimal impact upon outcomes for young people.

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
32 (2001)	provide adequate means of escape in the case of fire, specifically that the recommendation made by the Fire Officer in relation to fire doors be implemented (Regulation 32(1)(b))	27/07/2012
17B (2001)	ensure that within 24 hours of the use of any measure of restraint in a children's home, a written record is made in a volume kept for the purpose, including all required information (Regulation 17B(3)(c))	28/06/2012
26 (2001)	ensure that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to persons working at the home, specifically that gaps in previous employment are identified and explored satisfactorily in writing. (Regulation 26(3)(d)(Schedule 2(6))	28/06/2012

Recommendations

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

- keep in the children's home a record of recruitment and vetting checks which have been carried out on those working in the home (NMS 16.3)
- ensure that telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references in respect to people working in the home (NMS 16.1)
- ensure that confidential information is managed appropriately, specifically that records relating to a child do not contain the names of other young people. (NMS 22.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people have a very positive view of themselves as a result of the lifestyles they are able to have in the home. There is a wealth of opportunities to take part in a wide range of high-quality activities that are taxing yet satisfying. This helps develop self-esteem and pride in achievement. There are lots of photographs on display of young people as they go about their lives inside and outside the home, for example on holidays. These serve as constant reminders for young people of their time growing up here. They are also an invaluable aid in helping young people recollect their time here and understand how they have progressed.

All young people are in very good health and developing normally. None of the young people smoke, or abuse alcohol or drugs. Any health needs are identified and met through prompt referral to the appropriate service.

Young people attend a range of educational provision which is geared to their particular needs and circumstances. All young people have exceptionally good attendance at school or college. All are doing outstandingly well in line with their abilities and potential. This ensures that they are able to make the most of their opportunities.

Young people have a strong sense of their responsibility for contributing to the upkeep of the home. This includes the communal space as well as their own rooms. They take obvious pride in their bedrooms and the way in which they have personalised them reflects the pronounced quality of attachment they have to the home.

Young people have levels of contact with their families which differ according to their circumstances. Staff plan and support arrangements for contact meticulously so that young people derive maximum benefit from the time they spend with their families. This keeps young people in touch with their culture and heritage.

The whole ethos of the home is geared towards equipping young people with the right skills and emotional resilience to cope with life as an adult. Staff achieve this through formal programmes which involve assessment of ability in various areas followed by work undertaken to improve skills and knowledge. Such programmes are tailored to each young person's particular needs and level of ability. Units of work completed are rewarded with formal certification, which further enhances young people's feelings of self-worth. Additionally, daily routines within the home place realistic expectations on young people, for example by giving them responsibility for their own laundering.

All young people have made very significant progress since being placed here. A social worker commented, 'In hindsight, I wish I'd placed my young person here much earlier than I did.' Such progress can be measured not only by young people's health, or attendance and attainments at school, but also by their general presentation. Young people's behaviour is exceptionally good, and even those who are less confident have developed greater self-assurance in social situations. Additionally, young people are able to trust in staff and talk to them about difficult personal matters. One young person said, 'A couple of months back I didn't speak to

anyone about my behaviour, but now I can speak to staff if I am having trouble controlling myself.'

Quality of care

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

Staff relate warmly to young people and are attentive to their needs. Staff constantly emphasise the importance for young people to have consideration for others. This results in a home which has a harmonious and positive atmosphere where young people get on well with each other.

Staff hold frequent meetings with young people where they can discuss choices such as menus and activities. Staff and the manager respond to the preferences of young people wherever possible. For example, some young people wanted to try fishing in their leisure time, so this has been organised. Another expressed a wish to have a double bed rather than a single, and the manager bought one. Young people can also have a voice in regular individual sessions with their keyworker. For example, one young person felt that the level of supervision he was subject to at school was excessive. This was discussed with the manager and the school and it was agreed to give the young person more freedom. As a result, the young person is happier and now has greater confidence that his views on how he is cared for matter.

Each young person has a placement plan which is tailored to their individual needs and describes the outcomes to be achieved in each area of the young person's life. Staff update plans at regular intervals, which enables changes to be incorporated as young people develop. Young people know the content of their plans and contribute to them through the keyworker sessions.

Daily routines and practice within the home support and promote healthy lifestyles. Food is nutritious, varied and plentiful. The emphasis on activities (many of which are outdoors) gives opportunities for exercise and fresh air. Staff ensure that young people can access all the services they need to maintain and improve their health. These include specialist services which address learning disability or complex psychological issues such as sexualised behaviour. Staff liaise closely with these professionals to ensure that young people derive the maximum benefit from their intervention.

The manager and staff have a detailed knowledge of each young person's aptitudes and attainment at school. The routines of the house ensure the exceptional attendance levels of young people. Communication between schools and the home is very good. This ensures that any relevant information can be passed between home and school on a daily basis and prevent any minor problems becoming major.

A particular strength of the home is the range and variety of activities it provides for young people. In tandem with the provider's school provision, it is able to offer horse riding, mountain biking, hill walking and camping. The farm associated with the school provides opportunities for young people to work with animals. This promotes

empathy and gives young people skills which can form the basis of a subsequent career. In addition, staff encourage young people to engage in activities within the community, such as army cadets, going to the gym, cinema, and climbing wall. Less physical pursuits are also encouraged. For example, in response to a request by some young people, a piano tutor visits the home to give lessons. There are regular weekends away to the provider's cottage and caravan, as well as holidays further afield such as to France. Staff take every opportunity to make these outings constructive as well as enjoyable. For example, young people who go fell walking learn how to navigate and this adds to their skill sets. Young people have just spent a weekend in London touring the Olympic sites, and will round off the experience by attending Olympic matches being staged in the region. Photo albums provide happy memories of these times for young people, and professional-quality photos of young people on activities adorn their bedrooms. All this enhances young people's positive self-image and gives them tangible evidence of their time spent in the home.

The home is extremely spacious, and very well decorated with high quality furniture and fittings. This conveys to young people that they are valued and it promotes their sense of ownership of the home. The layout of the home has enabled part of it to be set up as a separate 'flat' for those young people preparing for independence. This space can be used flexibly, so that young people in the main part of the house can use it if necessary. Having this facility gives young people something to aspire to, which motivates them to improve their skills and develop more self-sufficiency.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Staff exercise high levels of supervision within the home. This is because of the particular vulnerability of many of the young people who live here. Young people do not find this unduly oppressive and take comfort in the security and safety this provides them.

Staff are highly alert to any banter between young people which is disrespectful and could lead to more serious humiliation or intimidation. When this happens staff quickly check the young person's behaviour and redirect the conversation. As a result, there is little or no bullying, and staff in general foster respect and tolerance which is demonstrated in the quality of interactions between young people.

The level of supervision within the home ensures that young people go missing very infrequently. In these cases, staff act promptly to locate young people and ensure their safe return to the home.

Staff set clear expectations of behaviour which are consistent and frequently repeated. This establishes an ethos within the home which the young people accept and follow. Staff use praise and incentives to reward young people as they make progress. Sanctions are occasionally used but these are proportionate and young people generally understand the reason for them. Additionally, staff use some flexibility and discretion in the application of sanctions. For example, a sanction may

be ended early if the young person has made a particularly noteworthy attempt to make amends for his misbehaviour. As a result of this emphasis on positive behaviour management, staff need to use physical restraint very rarely. However, the recording of restraint does not contain enough detail nor is it written in plain language. It also does not confirm in every case that the young person and staff involved have been spoken to about the restraint. This means that there is insufficient accountability for the use of this measure of control.

The process for recruiting staff is generally robust and comprehensive. However, the manager does not retain a summary of the recruitment checks within the home. This means that he cannot be assured that all appropriate checks have been carried out. There is no record of whether telephone verification of staff references is carried out, which reduces the confidence the provider can have in these checks. And, the provider does not always ensure that gaps in employment of prospective staff are identified and explored. This introduces the possibility that unsuitable people may be appointed to work in the home.

The home is generally a safe and secure environment. There is a member of staff who is delegated to carry out appropriate health and safety checks at regular intervals. However, there is a shortfall in arrangements for fire safety. Some fire doors on evacuation routes within the home are wedged open during the day. This is contrary to the fire officer's advice and means that in the event of fire it may not be possible to use all the available exits.

Leadership and management

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

The particular remit of the home and how it operates are made clear to placing authorities, parents and young people as part of the referral and admission process. This helps to ensure that everyone involved with each young person fully understands and cooperates with the plan for them. This in turn makes the collaboration between home, social worker and parent more effective in producing desired outcomes.

The home is extremely well appointed, the air of quality giving young people a sense of pride in their surroundings. There are ample resources to ensure that young people's physical needs are met and the activities provided are properly funded.

The manager and staff have very comprehensive knowledge of each young person and understand the impact the home is having on their progress. External monitoring has been improved to include consultation with parents and the manager's internal monitoring is satisfactory. In addition, the manager is developing more sophisticated tools to measure and track outcomes for young people. The home has a development plan which includes strategic objectives for the provider as well as more detailed targets for the home to achieve over the next year. The track record of the home and the provider shows that it is an organisation which is able to learn and make improvements to practice where necessary.

There are always sufficient staff on duty to ensure the safety and welfare of young people. In addition, there is an effective duty manager system which ensures that there is always a senior person available for staff to consult. The manager provides effective formal supervision and appraisal for all staff. This augments structured daily handover sessions and staff meetings, and ensures that staff work consistently to meet the home's objectives. As one member of staff said, 'We all sing from the same hymn sheet.'

The home is pro-active in helping young people to contribute to their looked after reviews. The manager prepares a comprehensive report for each review which includes photos of the young person doing activities and the like. Each young person keeps his own copy. This enables young people to take satisfaction from the progress they have made and understand the targets for their future development.

Both generic records and individual case records are kept securely and organised well. Generally, records on young people are reviewed and updated at regular intervals. However, some young people's records contain the names of other young people in the home, which compromises confidentiality.

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.