

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Russell Shackford
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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 service is a young people's home. It provides three long-term placements for young people aged between 10 and 17 years who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The accommodation consists of three single bedrooms and spacious communal areas for eating, studying and relaxing. The home is in a village approximately seven miles from the town centre. It is close to shops, leisure facilities and public transport.

Overall effectiveness

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

Young people living in this home benefit greatly from an experienced staff group who enthusiastically demonstrate their commitment to addressing their welfare issues. The staff team are persevering and supportive, creating opportunities for young people to reach their full potential.

Young people confirm that their views are genuinely sought and acted upon. The staff encourage them to make decisions about their lives and influence the way that the home is run.

Staff are particularly good at making sure that young people are looked after in a way that is particular to how they are and want to be. Education needs are very well met. The young people benefit greatly from the staff's efforts to promote the value of education, and encouragement of good attendance.

The staff work closely with other services to meet the range of young people's needs. Placement planning is good and it is well recorded and reviewed. The facilitating of contact is good. Good support is in place now to help young people learn skills that they will need for later in life.

Good risk assessing and fire safety practices help to keep young people safe. Staff are experienced, well trained and competent. Young people clearly benefit from the good leadership provided by the manager to a cohesive and adaptable team. There is very good monitoring to maintain and improve the quality of care in the home. The promotion of equality and diversity is good.

Outcomes for children and young people

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

The staff support young people well using talking and stimulating interactive activities to build relationships with them. As a result, young people gain good knowledge and understanding of their own background, they adapt well to new situations and their view of themselves is positive. Young people's progress at the home is good because great value is placed upon them fulfilling their potential.

Young people enjoy good health because their health needs are effectively identified and services are provided to meet them. They are encouraged and supported to attend routine appointments with dentists, doctors and opticians and are encouraged to take some responsibility for managing their own health needs. The young people's health is closely monitored and record keeping is good, enabling staff to change their ways of working or inform medical professionals of health progress. Specialist health workers are involved where appropriate to promote good health and discourage unhealthy behaviours such as smoking or substance abuse. Healthy activities take place such as walking and football. Young people are given choices about their food, and the food served is both healthy and nutritious. The staff are aware of individual children's likes and dislikes to ensure that they enjoy the food served. Matters arising from diversity are well managed. Staff encourage young people to eat healthy foods and snacks. Young people confirm that they are involved in planning, shopping for and cooking meals.

Young people are making good progress in attendance and achievement in their education. Whilst some are well settled into the school routine and attending every day, others are at the beginning of that process. The staff have worked in a determined manner to ensure that appropriate placements are sourced quickly and as a result, young people's education is disrupted as little as possible in order that they can continue to attend and achieve. Contact between the home and schools is frequent and effective, enabling staff to support young people successfully with homework or personal targets.

Young people confirm that they are helped to keep in touch with people that are important to them, and that they can have friends and family come to visit them. This is supported by staff who encourage contact and facilitate visits very well. This is done safely and sensitively.

The home has their own life skills plans for young people. This is implemented according to the level of maturity and understanding of the individual. Young people sometimes learn skills through taking part in the tasks of running the home, such as shopping, cooking, gardening and doing DIY tasks such as painting. Younger children are more informally helped and supported in preparation for adulthood. They are given help and support with social skills, laundry, cooking skills, budgeting, clothing care and shopping. Therefore young people receive care which prepares them well for adulthood.

Quality of care

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

Young people living in this home benefit greatly from an experienced staff group who enthusiastically demonstrate their commitment to addressing their welfare issues. The staff team are persevering and supportive, creating opportunities for young people to reach their full potential.

Young people enjoy warm relationships with staff in the home and there is good rapport between them. Staff discuss difficult issues with young people and challenge inappropriate behaviours consistently and sensitively. One young person reflected fondly upon the 'good morning' approaches that staff use which are individually applied to ensure that each young person is well prepared for the day ahead.

Staff encourage young people with their school attendance, assisting them by accompanying them there and settling them in. Young people confirm that staff are pro-active and challenging when seeking out appropriate education provision for them. Staff attempt to involve young people in education planning meetings or represent their views if they choose not to attend.

Young people confirm that their views are genuinely sought and acted upon. The staff encourage them to make decisions about their lives and influence the way that the home is run. Staff provide opportunities for daily group and one-to-one discussion, link worker sessions and visits from children's rights advocate services. Quality assurance monitoring by the manager includes opportunities for young people to comment upon the quality of care at the home. Examples of young people's choices acted upon include activities, coming-in times, food and personalising bedrooms. Any cases where it is not possible to act upon young people's wishes are carefully explained to them. Young people confirm this by giving examples such as not being allowed to smoke on the premises.

The staff handle complaints well. They ensure that the young people know how to complain if they wish by explaining what to do. There is also good, clear information in the children's guide about how to complain. The staff assist young people in making complaints if necessary and they understand their role as advocates. Young people confirm that staff make it clear to them that they can tell people outside of the home if they are unhappy and provide information and contact details of independent advocate services. Complaints are clearly recorded to reflect the action taken by the staff and the outcomes.

Young people are able to move into the home in a planned and sensitive manner. The home's referral system enables the manager to fully assess the needs of the young people concerned. Admissions to the home are not always planned but where possible the young person and their family, where appropriate, are involved in that planning. Young people can visit the home before they move in. Young people have their needs assessed well, and good written placement plans outline how these needs will be met. Their placement plans are very well recorded with good clarity to inform the staff what they need to do to meet the identified needs of individuals. Focused one-to-one work is also undertaken to provide young people with guidance, advice and support on any matter. The daily records reflect the content of the care plan and show the action taken by the staff to meet the identified needs of the

young person.

Young people's needs and development are reviewed regularly in the light of their care and progress at the home. Following reviews, placement plans are updated in a timely fashion. The reviewing system includes participation in the statutory reviews, intensive internal reviews of the placement plan and discussions with the young person in link-worker sessions. Link workers monitor the placement plans and produce monthly summary reports. Statutory case reviews take place within the required timescales to inform those working at the home and others of progress made by young people.

The staff appreciate that the individual young people may have needs arising from diversity. The young people receive very good individualised support appropriate to their needs. The staff commission individual support services involved in the health, care and education of the young people. The home has links with a wide range of helping agencies, and very good practice has helped to quickly provide services to fit the individual young person's needs. Young people confirm that staff respect and support them with their cultural and religious differences. Staff are aided in providing good quality health care by external professionals in physical and emotional health. They provide advice directly to young people and indirectly by advice supplied to the staff team, to aid positive outcomes for the young people. Examples include smoking cessation classes and discussion with the Looked After Children nurse.

Young people's education is a very high priority and it is and vigorously promoted. Staff see it as valuable in itself and as part of the young people's preparation for adulthood. The staff work closely with education welfare and integration officers to secure good quality school placements. Staff make a lot of effort to encourage good attendance and young people are well prepared for the school day. There are space, resources and facilities at the home to enable the completion of homework or structured home study programmes. A computer is available for the young people to use for educational purposes and well monitored internet access is available.

Young people are able to pursue their particular interests and are supported and encouraged by staff to engage in leisure activities. In an attempt to enable young people to socialise and to build their esteem and confidence, young people's involvement is well supported by staff who explore their individual choices, likes and dislikes. The staff have established very good links and relationships with community based activity providers. Despite this however, the young people are largely disinterested in engaging in activities, preferring to socialise in their home area or stay in the home. Examples of organised activities highlighted include cinema, climbing wall day trips, go-karting and electronic gaming. There is also a good range of books, DVDs and games available for education and entertainment.

The young people live in a home that is appropriately located near to shops, leisure, education and employment opportunities. It is on main bus route to the nearby city and surrounding townships. The interior and exterior of the home are maintained in a very good state of structural and decorative repair. There is a satisfactory maintenance and repair programme for the building, furniture and equipment, and

any damage is repaired promptly. The garden is well maintained and safe. The home is kept clean and there are homely touches throughout.

Good policies and practice around the storage, handling, administration and disposal of medication safeguards young people's welfare.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Staff describe safeguarding young people as, 'an absolute priority'. Young people's welfare is very important and central to practice. Young people confirm that they are supported to learn how to keep themselves safe and learn about risks. Where particular risks are identified, consistently well-written risk assessments are recorded to help the staff understand what action to take to minimise the identified risks. In addition, the manager has established good links with the local safeguarding service from whom she can seek advice if necessary. The manager considers what local resources may further support young people, for example community police and substance abuse services. A notable area of strength is staff ability to engage the young people in talking through any identified concerns to develop their own understanding of these and the reasons adults are concerned. As a result young people's risk-taking behaviours reduce and they feel cared for and protected. Young people confirm this with examples such as, 'I like to keep my home life on the low, separate from my socialising life because I feel safe here and I can relax'.

The manager has established strong links with the Local Safeguarding Children Team. An information display around the telephone area has details of local agencies that young people can access for advice and information. Staff use team meetings to ensure that everyone is up (MCLEANH: Removed hyphens as the expression is not used as a compound adjective – see Style Guide re hyphens.) to date about how to promote and protect the young people's safety. Good written risk assessments support this. The provider has very good safeguarding systems and procedures for staff to follow in the event of any allegation or suspicion of abuse. The manager and staff have received child protection training which includes elements of child exploitation and on-line protection. Staff demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the safeguarding procedures to promote and protect young people's safety. Anti-bullying messages are displayed and the subject is regularly discussed at young people's meetings. There is good written guidance for staff to follow in the event of unauthorised absence. This is supported by individualised risk assessment records. The manager secures good multi-agency working and protocols to ensure a holistic approach to safeguarding. This ensures all agencies are vigilant and work to current plans to offer protection for young people.

Behaviour management plans are used. They contain good, individualised details for staff to follow when managing young people's behaviour. Sanctions are relevant and reflect the age and understanding of the young people. They are reviewed regularly for effectiveness. Physical restraint is very rarely used to manage behaviour. Staff are trained in the provider's policy and authorised techniques. Record keeping is good and there is evidence that it is monitored well to identify patterns or trends that can be used to support young people further. Physical interventions quickly cease to be a strategy with young people once they settle in the home.

All staff working at the home have received up-to-date fire safety training to enable them to minimise the risks to young people in the event of a fire at the home. This is supported by regular fire safety checks to help ensure that young people's physical safety from fire in the home is well protected. Good checks and maintenance arrangements ensure the home is physically safe and is kept safe.

All staff have been appropriately recruited and undergone suitable Criminal Records Bureau checks to ensure that they are suitable to work with young people. Staff confirm this.

Leadership and management

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

A Statement of Purpose is available to inform professionals and members of the public about how care is provided at the home. There is a good children's guide to the statement which is appropriate to the age and understanding of the children accommodated. Young people receive a copy of it before they come to live at the home so that they know what to expect if they choose to live there.

There is a consistent staff team which has been added to recently to broaden the range of skills and experience among its members. New members of staff describe how they have received good quality induction training before commencing work with the young people. Staff refer to written guidance and on call help frequently during discussion and give examples of how it is implemented in practice. Management support and supervision are described as, 'excellent' and, 'one of the best things about the home' by a staff team who clearly value the beneficial contributions of the manager.

The young people are receiving care from competent staff that are experienced and appropriately trained to meet their needs. All staff are trained in a wide variety of safety and childcare subjects. An ongoing programme of regular refresher training is provided in a range of subjects to enhance the staff team's competency to meet the needs of the young people.

The manager has a very effective system to monitor, report and evaluate the administration systems of the home, ensuring what staff record they record well. Robust quality assurance processes are regularly carried out by people independent of the home, and any areas of weakness identified are promptly acted upon. These highly effective evaluations ensure the standards within the home, remain high. Therefore, there is effective monitoring of the quality of care for the young people in the home.

Young people's case file records and other written documentation are of a good standard. This facilitates good communication with other professionals as well as ensuring young people have a permanent and secure record of their history. Good cross referencing of all documentation enables the management team and staff to evaluate and monitor young people's progress. Young people's individual case files are confidentially stored and are arranged in a manner that makes them useable by staff and yet accessible to young people. The young people know that they can have access to their records. The young people's individual case records reflect their development and progress.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff are particularly good at making sure that young people are looked after in a way that is particular to how they are and want to be. This is particularly evident around health, diet and education. All staff have received equality and diversity training and they demonstrate a good understanding of the subject and how they promote it in practice. Young people's cultural and religious needs are taken into account during the care planning and review process. Staff have a good understanding of individual young people's needs and ensure that these are met on a practical level. Staff also demonstrate good practice around equality and diversity through their attitude towards it and by giving

examples of this in practice, such as the value of education and achieving potential. Young people have access to a team that is balanced in terms of race, age, background and gender, and have access to a variety of services in the local and wider community.

Appropriate action has been taken to address the previous recommendation. All staff have completed an appropriate course at level 3 in caring for children and young people. This helps to ensure that young people are receiving care from competent staff that are appropriately trained to meet their needs.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.