

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspection date	17 September 2009
Inspector	Russell Shackford
Type of Inspection	Key

Date of last inspection	30 December 2008
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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 service is a Children's Home. It provides three long term placements for young people aged between 10 and 17 years. 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.

Summary

This was an unannounced key inspection to check on key standards and related regulations under the Every Child Matters outcome groups for young people. This is a satisfactory service with some good features. Young people are encouraged to eat healthily and their good health is promoted. Good child protection procedures and practice safeguard the welfare of the young people and this is supported by good risk management practices. Education needs are very well met. A notable area of strength is the way that the home works closely with other services to meet the range of young people's individual needs including those that may arise out of diversity. Placement planning is good and placement plans are well recorded. Staff are sufficient in number and they are cohesive and adaptable. However, medication, fire, notification, leaving care and complaint records are unsatisfactory. Fire doors, designed to contain fire are frequently and routinely wedged open. Not all parts of the home are kept clean and reasonably decorated and maintained. There is only satisfactory monitoring of the quality of care at the home. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The registered person was asked to ensure that a minimum ratio of 80% of all care staff complete a National Vocational Qualification at level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People (NMS 29). The provider continues to provide time and opportunities for staff to do this but the target currently remains unmet.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are given choices about their food. The staff are aware of individual children's likes and dislikes to ensure that they enjoy the food served. Children confirm this. The staff use creative ways to introduce the children to new foods or incorporate vegetables into their meals. This helps to ensure that the food served is both healthy and nutritious. The staff have a good understanding of food hygiene and they are trained in this area. Staff encourage children to eat healthy snacks. There is always fruit available, and chopped vegetables are prepared to eat as snacks. Children learn about different foods through discussion with staff and being involved in creative educational topics such as themed food nights. Children are encouraged to help shop for food and they are supported to prepare and cook meals. Children confirm this. Therefore, children enjoy healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs. They also have opportunities to plan, shop for and prepare meals. However, mealtimes at the home are frequently disorderly, unsociable occasions with children eating different food at different times in different parts of the home. Children confirm this. The manager said that this was a matter for urgent attention and improvement.

Daily routines include encouragement of good personal hygiene and a healthy lifestyle. Reward based incentive schemes support this. Personal healthcare plans are on file for all children. The home has established links with a number of specialist health services and there is evidence of these being used to meet individual children's needs. Healthy activities take place, such as football, cycling and water sports. Children confirm this. The home's smoking policy does not allow the staff to smoke in front of children so that they present as good role models. Smoking cessation services are used regularly to support the children and promote their good health. Therefore, children's health needs are identified and services are provided to meet them, and their good health is promoted.

The staff are trained in medication matters to enable them to safely store, administer and record the medication that they are responsible for, and safeguard children's welfare. However, medication records are not always recorded accurately or signed in line with the organisations safeguarding policy. All staff have received training to enable them to provide first aid if necessary.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children have access to a private telephone which is free to use for reasonable periods. This ensures that children's privacy is respected and the payment method is convenient. All children have a key for their bedroom to help them feel that they control that private space. Details about children's care are recorded and stored appropriately to maintain good levels of confidentiality.

All staff have received training on complaints to ensure that they know what to do if a person complains about the service. The children know how to make a complaint because the staff have explained what to do and there is information in the children's guide about how to complain. Children confirm this. Independent advocacy services are commissioned by the provider and, where appropriate, children are supported in making complaints about the service. However, the complaints records do not always contain the required details because the outcomes are not always recorded. Therefore, complaints are not always satisfactorily handled.

The manager and staff have received child protection training. The provider has a good safeguarding procedure for staff to follow in the event of any allegation or suspicion of abuse. Staff demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the safeguarding procedures to promote and protect the children's safety. Therefore, the welfare of children is promoted, they are protected from abuse and bullying, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse.

All significant events at the home have been notified to the relevant authorities including Ofsted. However, the outcome of those events has not always been notified as required.

The sanctions policy is good, promoting the use of praise, encouragement and de-escalation of behaviours. Therefore, children are assisted to develop socially acceptable behaviour through encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff response to inappropriate behaviour. Physical restraint is occasionally used to manage behaviour where no other alternative exists. Staff demonstrate good knowledge of the subject and the associated law. Physical restraint records contain the required details. All staff have received training covering the use of restraint and they follow the home's practice policy.

Staff are knowledgeable about the risks to individual children. Good written risk assessments are recorded to enable staff to know what action to take to minimise the risk to each child during their known and likely activities. Therefore, children's safety and welfare are protected.

All staff working at the home have received up to date fire safety training to assist them in minimising the risks to children in the event of a fire at the home. All staff and children have been involved in a fire drill to ensure that they are aware of the procedure to be followed in case of fire in the home. However, the fire safety check records are not up to date and they are not checked at the frequency stated in the fire safety instructions. Fire doors, designed to contain fire are frequently and routinely wedged open. An action was raised to cease this practice immediately. Therefore, children's physical safety from fire in the home is not adequately protected.

All visitors to the home are recorded and the purpose for the visit is noted. There are good recruitment procedures and staff files are regularly audited to ensure that they contain the required information. All of the required information is present. Therefore, there is careful selection and vetting of all staff working with children in the home and there is monitoring of visitors to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The records contain details of individual support services involved in the health, care and education of children. The home has links with a wide range of helping agencies who are commissioned to provide services to fit the individual children's needs. The staff appreciate that the individual children may have needs arising from diversity. Therefore, the children receive good individualised support appropriate to their needs.

Education is vigorously promoted. Staff make a lot of effort to encourage good attendance. There are space, resources and facilities at the home to enable the completion of homework or structured home study programmes. A laptop computer is available for each child to use for educational purposes. Therefore, the education of children is actively promoted as valuable in itself and as part of their preparation for adulthood.

The children are encouraged and supported to pursue leisure activities and particular interests. Examples highlighted include computer games, photography, football, water sports and museum visits. This enables children to socialise with children their own age to build their esteem and confidence. There is also a good range of books, DVDs and games available for education and entertainment. Therefore, children are able to pursue their particular interests and develop confidence in their skills and are supported and encouraged by staff to engage in leisure activities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The home's referral system enables the manager to fully assess the needs of the children concerned. Admissions to the home are not always planned but where possible the child and their family, where appropriate, are involved in that planning. Children can visit the home before they move in. Therefore, children are able to move into the home in a planned and sensitive manner.

The placement plans are recorded with good clarity to inform the staff what they need to do to meet the identified needs of individual children. Focused one to one work is also undertaken to provide children with guidance, advice and support on any matter. The daily observation records reflect the content of the care plan and show the action taken by the staff to meet the identified needs of the child. Therefore, children have their needs assessed well, and good written placement plans outline how these needs will be met.

There is a very good system for reviewing the placement plans of the children at the home. This system includes participation in the statutory reviews, intensive internal reviews of the placement plan and discussions with the child in key worker sessions. Key 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 children. This ensures that the children'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.

Children's contact is promoted and facilitated to ensure that they can keep in touch with people that are important to them. Children confirm that they can have friends and family come to visit them.

Children are encouraged to make decisions about their lives and influence the way that the home is run. This includes daily group discussion, key worker sessions and visits from children's rights advocate services. Children confirm this. Therefore, children's views are sought and acted upon.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The organisation has a good independence training package which each child is encouraged to complete. Children are taught day to day life skills according to their level of maturity and understanding. The children learn skills through taking part in the tasks of running the home, such as shopping, cooking, following budgets and doing simple DIY tasks. They are also given help and support with social skills, laundry, clothing care and cleaning. However, the Leaving Care team are not always accessed at an appropriate time and Pathway Plans are not always prepared and implemented in a timely manner. Therefore, children do not receive care which helps to fully prepare them for adulthood.

The interior and exterior of the home are not maintained in a good state of structural and decorative repair. Some parts of the home are not clean and there are very few homely touches throughout. The garden is safe but not well maintained. There is a maintenance and repair programme for the building but staff say that it is a slow process to instigate it.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

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. Children 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 have been a number of temporary managers providing leadership of the home's staff and operation during the last two months. A permanent manager is now in post. There is a consistent staff team with a range of skills and experience among its members. The team present as cohesive and adaptable. Staff refer to written guidance frequently during discussion and give examples of how it is implemented in practice. Staff supervision is good.

The staff are trained in a wide variety of safety and childcare subjects and an ongoing programme of refresher training is provided in a range of subjects to enhance the staff's competency to meet the needs of the children. However, the target of 80% of staff having achieved National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People is not yet met.

A quality assurance system is maintained to monitor the welfare of the children in the home. Monthly audits are undertaken by the manager and unannounced monthly monitoring visits are carried out by the provider. A report of the findings is produced. This ensures that the care of children can be adapted in the light of information about how the home is operating. However, not all of the safety matters raised in this report have been identified and addressed. Therefore, there are only satisfactory measures in place to improve the quality of care provided and safeguard the welfare of the children.

Young people's individual case files are well recorded and organised in a manner that makes information easily retrievable. They are confidentially stored. Children are aware that they can access their files and they confirm that they have done so.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Examples of less than good practice are in areas such as safeguarding individuals, individual children's health care needs, and the monitoring of individual needs being met.

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
13	make suitable arrangements for the recording and safe administration of any medicines received into the children's home (Regulation 21)	17 September 2009
16	ensure that a written record is made of any complaint including the outcome of the investigation (Regulation 24)	1 October 2009
20	notify without delay the relevant persons or agencies of the matters set out in Schedule 5 in particular the outcome of any child protection enquiry (Regulation 30)	1 October 2009
26	cease the practice of wedging open fire doors and take adequate precautions against the risk of fire, including the	17 September 2009

	making of adequate arrangements for containing fires and the maintenance of all fire equipment (Regulation 32)	
6	consult with the child's placing authority and prepare and implement a Pathway Plan where appropriate (Regulation 12)	1 October 2009
24	ensure that all parts of the children's home used by children are kept clean and reasonably decorated and maintained; and kept in good structural repair externally and internally (Regulation 31)	1 December 2009
32	ensure that monitoring is effective enough to improve the safeguarding of the welfare of children and the quality of care in the home (Regulation 33)	1 November 2009
33	maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals which is effective enough to improve the safeguarding and promotion of the welfare of children (Regulation 34)	1 November 2009

Recommendations

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

- endeavour to set up mealtimes to be well-managed, orderly, social occasions (NMS 10)