

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.

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. 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 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. However, where children adopt unhealthy eating patterns and choices, there is no formal support and guidance for staff to follow. Although children have their needs assessed well, and good written placement plans outline how these needs will be met, the evidencing of the work undertaken to meet children's needs is poor. All parts of the home are kept clean and reasonably decorated and maintained. Staff are sufficient in number and they are cohesive and adaptable. There is 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 make improvements in regard to fire safety, the home environment and the monitoring of the quality of care provided at the home.

Fire doors have been fitted with automatic closing devices to ensure that a fire in the home would be adequately contained.

There have been many improvements to the home environment, most notably around repairs and decoration. The home is now decorated and maintained to a good standard.

There is good evidence of the monitoring of the quality of care provided. Matters identified for improvement are raised as an action plan to be implemented within given timescales. Therefore, there are satisfactory measures in place to improve the quality of care provided and safeguard the welfare of the children.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The staff have a good understanding of food hygiene and they are trained in this area. Children are encouraged to help shop for food and they are supported to prepare and cook meals. Children confirm this. 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. Staff encourage children to eat healthy snacks. There is always fruit available, and chopped vegetables are

prepared to eat as snacks. Children confirm this. However, where children adopt unhealthy eating patterns and choices, there is no formal support and guidance for staff to follow. The staff offer weekly takeaway meals as an incentive for the children to eat healthily but this is largely unsuccessful. The impact of this is that children's health is compromised because they are regularly not eating sufficient food or they are limiting their range of food intake to exclude healthy options.

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. Therefore, children's health needs are identified and services are provided to meet them, and their good health is promoted.

Healthy activities are planned and encouraged but they do not always happen. The manager described how not all children are willing to participate in the activities they have planned and chosen. This is a matter for monitoring and improving.

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. Medication records are recorded accurately and signed in line with the organisation's 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 good.

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. The complaints records contain the required details. Therefore, complaints are 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.

There is written guidance for staff to follow in the event of children being missing and individualised risk assessments are on file to help staff minimise the risk to children during unauthorised absence.

All significant events at the home have been notified to the relevant authorities including Ofsted.

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. 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.

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. The fire safety check records are up to date and they are checked at the frequency stated in the fire safety instructions. Fire doors are fitted with automatic closers to ensure that a fire in the home would be adequately contained. Therefore, children's physical safety from fire in the home is well 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.

Leisure activities are planned and encouraged but they do not always happen. The staff described how not all children are willing to participate in the activities they have planned and chosen. The manager has highlighted this in her monitoring of the quality of care at the home and is exploring ways of improving it.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

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. However, the plans are not always fully up to date. The daily recordings and one-to-one records do not fully reflect the content of the care plan and do not show fully the action taken by the staff to meet the identified needs of the child. Therefore, although children have their needs assessed well, and good written placement plans outline how these needs will be met, the evidencing of the work undertaken to meet children's needs is poor.

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, 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. However, following reviews, placement plans are not 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 advocacy 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. The leaving care team are accessed at an appropriate time and pathway plans are prepared and implemented in a timely manner. Therefore, children receive care which helps to prepare them for adulthood.

The interior and exterior of the home are maintained in a good state of structural and decorative repair. All parts of the home are clean and there are homely touches throughout. Children confirm that they have been consulted about the way the home should look and they have

chosen colour schemes for their bedroom. The garden is safe and well maintained. There is a satisfactory maintenance and repair programme for the building.

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 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 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. Matters identified for improvement are raised as an action plan to be implemented within given timescales. Therefore, there are 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. All staff have received equality and diversity training and they demonstrate a satisfactory 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 satisfactory understanding of individual needs and ensure that these are met on a practical level. Staff also demonstrate satisfactory practice around equality and diversity through their attitude towards it and by giving examples of this in practice such as discussing gender-specific task stereotyping. Young people have access to a team that is balanced in terms of race, age, background and gender, and have access to services in the local and wider community. The manager is involved in a collaborative exercise with other managers in the organisation to produce a children's guide and other information in a variety of forms to make it more inclusive. Individualised approaches to the promotion of children's leisure activities and their diet need to improve.

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

Standard	Action	Due date
10	ensure that children are provided with food which is served in adequate quantities, sufficiently varied, wholesome and nutritious and suitable for their needs (Regulation 13)	14 June 2010
2	ensure that placement plans are implemented, kept under review and revised as necessary. (Regulation 12)	14 June 2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure that 80% of staff have achieved a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. (NMS 29.5)