

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC066796
Inspection date	03/10/2011
Inspector	Simon Morley
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	08/03/2011
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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

The home, run by a local authority, is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to seven young people between the ages of 12 and 17 with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Placements are on a medium- to long-term basis. If young people cannot be reunited with their families they are supported to move into more independent living accommodation.

Overall effectiveness

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

The care of young people and support they are given is well planned and takes into account their diverse needs. However, young people's development and progress in relation to their starting points when admitted to the home is variable. Outcomes for young people are satisfactory which reflects the varying success with which young people enjoy and achieve. Some young people make better use of the support on offer to them and do achieve well.

The needs, views and wishes of young people are considered important and clearly influence how they are looked after. However, the quality of information about a young person's needs provided by social workers needs to improve. The manager and registered provider are not challenging this practice sufficiently effectively to ensure placements are appropriate and to ensure the needs of young people will be met at the home.

Staff have a good understanding of, and implement, safe working practices to protect and safeguard young people. Though there is a strong focus on keeping young people safe there are a few times when young people have been bullied and do not feel safe at the home.

Overall, there is effective management of the home. The manager has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home and what needs to be done to improve outcomes for young people. Staff are experienced, motivated and want to see the young people do well and succeed. However, monitoring of the management of the home by the registered provider is weak with regard to outcomes, how young people enjoy and achieve. The manager and registered provider must also ensure that all required recruitment checks are in place before new staff work in the home.

Areas for improvementStatutory 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
11 (2001)	ensure the children's home is conducted so as to promote the welfare of children, in particular keep them free from bullying (Regulation 11 (1) (a))	31/12/2011
26 (2001)	ensure no one is employed to work at the home unless full and satisfactory information is available in relation to him in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 2. (Regulation 26 (3) (d) Schedule 2)	31/12/2011

Recommendations

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

- ensure the Registered Manager challenges the local authority with regards to any attempt to place a child in the home without there being an up-to-date and comprehensive care plan for that child (Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 5, paragraph 1.10)
- ensure Regulation 33 visits and reports focus and scrutinise on how children are supported to enjoy and achieve and make recommendations for improving outcomes for children. (Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 5, paragraphs 3.12 & 3.13)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people living at the home have experienced difficult home backgrounds, loss and rejection. Staff strive hard to provide a safe, nurturing environment and support young people, help them progress, understand their emotions and improve their self-esteem. This is not always effective at ensuring consistently good outcomes for young people.

Young people's attendance at school varies. Sometimes it is good; at other times some young people refuse to go. Taking into account the level of education when young people come to live at the home, they make suitable progress over time. School attendance and educational attainment of young people slowly improves. However, since the beginning of this term attendance rates have dropped and this is not helping young people in Year 11 to achieve well. Young people who have left

school succeeded in obtaining places at college and, to their credit, are working towards achieving vocational qualifications.

All young people regardless of their needs are encouraged to participate in a range of different activities to help achieve their potential. Young people benefit from the creative approach of the staff team. For example, young people are involved in a local art project. Their work is on display around the home and will be part of an exhibition in London. Raised beds have been added to the garden and young people grow their own fruit and vegetables which are harvested and eaten. There are opportunities to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and play sport for local clubs. This helps young people improve their social skills, develop their talents and increase their confidence.

As with education, healthy outcomes for young people also vary. Young people benefit as healthy lifestyles are promoted well, healthy diets and regular exercise are encouraged. Young people struggling with particular issues are supported with time out away from the home to focus on their health and well-being. Smoking and substance misuse impacts on the health of a number of young people as well as their ability to enjoy more positive outcomes in other areas of their lives. There is support for young people to reduce this behaviour and some progress is made in this respect.

Young people benefit from regular contact with their family and friends. There is good support and encouragement to maintain and develop relationships with relatives and friends and enjoy overnight stays.

Young people are able to develop their confidence and skills to help prepare for adult life. For example, young people can cook, wash their clothes and iron. Staff help young people fill in forms, apply for college, get a driving license and learn how to get a copy of their birth certificate. Young people also learn how to budget, shop and pay bills. Staff have developed links with the local 'leaving care' team so young people benefit from participating in a programme to promote their independence. Young people are now able to use a flat to try out what they have learned and test their skills at living independently.

Quality of care

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

Young people are well cared for by enthusiastic staff who have a positive approach to their work. Staff work hard to develop and maintain positive relationships with young people based on mutual respect and understanding. This is supported by regular meetings for young people to voice their views and opinions. These are mainly in relation to decisions about menus, food shopping and activities. Additionally, staff will spend one-to-one time with young people so they can talk about their concerns, share their achievements and plan their future.

Young people know how to complain if there is anything they are not happy with. Their complaints are taken seriously. Young people have support from advocacy

services and opportunities to meet with senior managers to discuss their complaints. Young people are also given reasonable explanations when their wishes cannot be met.

The quality of care and placement plans provided by the placing authority, in this case the local authority which is also the registered provider of the home, is poor. This can impact on the ability of staff to effectively support a young person by not providing essential information. To minimise this shortfall the manager and staff develop in-house placement plans. These are comprehensive documents to which young people can contribute and which detail the needs and support an individual young person requires. These plans take account of young people's diverse needs including age, gender, sexuality, culture and religion. Staff effectively implement these plans to ensure young people receive a good quality of care.

Care planning includes a clear focus on young people's health needs and how they are supported. This includes emotional and psychological health with input from local mental health and substance misuse services. Staff ensure services are available to meet the holistic health needs of young people. The arrangements for ensuring young people receive any required medication are adequate and monitored for their effectiveness.

Staff promote the education of young people, encourage them to get up and go to school each day. There are close links with the placing authority and local schools so staff know the educational targets and needs of young people. Staff attend meetings with schools to discuss any concerns and help promote young people's education.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people's individual placement plans clearly identify risks to young people as a result of their individual needs and behaviour. Strategies to minimise risks are known by staff, implemented in practice and are effective at keeping young people safe.

Bullying is not tolerated. There are good responses from staff to minimise the incidence of bullying. There have been a few recent incidents of bullying and not all young people feel safe at the home. The manager is taking action to improve this situation. In the meantime the safety of young people is being promoted with overnight stays, agreed with the placing authority, at relatives' homes.

Positive behaviour is suitably promoted. Staff do not need to use any form of physical intervention to keep young people safe. Staff use effective de-escalation skills to defuse challenging behaviour and help keep young people safe. Physical intervention is seen as a last resort. Similarly, there is minimal use of sanctions to try and modify behaviour. These are appropriately monitored to make sure such measures are fair. Young people think the rules and any use of discipline is fair.

There are effective procedures and agreed protocols with the police to help protect young people when they are missing from the home. Young people return safely and care practice helps minimise the frequency of when they are missing. Staff are trained in child protection and are alert to any signs that a young person is at risk. Procedures for reporting concerns are well known and followed in practice. There are good working relationships with other agencies such as the placing authority and police to help promote young people's safety and welfare.

Recruitment procedures do not ensure all staff are checked and vetted in accordance with regulatory requirements. The reason given was that staff employed since the last inspection already worked for the registered provider. Although this was in another capacity, there had been appropriate vetting for their previous job. On this occasion the breach of regulation is judged to have minimal impact on the safety of young people.

Leadership and management

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

Overall, the home is managed well ensuring a good quality of care and focussing on improving outcomes for young people. The manager is very clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the home and enthusiastic about improving the quality of life for young people. There were no required improvements from the last inspection, but the manager has ensured other improvements. The numbers of staff who have achieved the recommended care qualification have increased. Other improvements relate to the creative ways in which staff try and engage young people in meaningful activities, such as art, gardening and preparation for adulthood.

Quality assurance processes include regular consultation with young people and some consultation with parents or carers and placing authorities about the quality of care. The registered provider's arrangements to monitor the management of the home are adequate. However, these do not consistently evidence how well young people enjoy and achieve, for example, how outcomes in health and education can be improved.

The staff team as a whole and on individual shifts are experienced and able to meet the needs of young people. There are clear lines of accountability and effective deputising arrangements in the manager's absence. This helps ensure the continuity of the management of the home. Staff feel well supported and receive good supervision to fulfil their roles and keep standards of care high. Staffing levels are suitable and provide young people with good support with their care needs.

Staff receive a wide range of training and, if this is not available from the registered provider, there is scope to buy in additional necessary training. Training covers a wide range of topics with regards to health and safety and young people's individual needs. All staff have either already achieved the minimum recommended care qualification or are working towards the new Children and Young People's Workforce Diploma. As a result, staff are competent, able and skilled to support young people

with their diverse needs.

The manager ensures that significant events relating to the welfare of young people are communicated well to the appropriate authorities to ensure their safety. The manager also ensures appropriate action is taken following any such event to help keep young people safe.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.