

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Barbara Davies
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Date of last inspection	13/09/2010
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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 is registered to provide care and accommodation for three children who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is a modern town house in an urban area. Shopping and recreational facilities are within close proximity of the home and there are public transport links to a city centre. National rail links are also easily accessible.

Overall effectiveness

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

Staff help young people enjoy improved outcomes by being helping them to settle into the home and experience a period of stability following multiple placement breakdowns. However the lack of placement meetings being held within 72 hours of emergency admissions has, in some instances, delayed permanency planning and the identification of suitable education provision. Although there are some inconsistencies in staff practice, young people generally view their relationships with staff as being positive and helpful saying that 'staff give us lots of good advice'. Young people feel safe, recognising that staff will attempt to diffuse situations by negotiation rather than resorting to the use of sanctions or physical restraint. Proactive action is taken in response to bullying as a result of which young people are protected. Young people are also protected when they are missing from the home by the action taken to locate them. The home does not however provide effective deterrents, such as helping young people to make constructive use of their leisure time, to prevent repetitions of this type of incident.

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
18 (2001)	promote the educational achievement of children (Regulation 18 (1))	31/10/2011
18 (2001)	ensure that children accommodated in the home are encouraged to develop and pursue appropriate leisure interests and are provided with appropriate leisure activities (Regulation 18 (2) (a)(b))	31/10/2011
27 (2001)	ensure that all persons employed receive appropriate supervision (Regulation 27(4)(a))	31/10/2011

28 (2001)	ensure that in respect of each child who is accommodated in the children's home, that a record is kept in a permanent form which is kept up to date (this refers to ensuring all information recorded about young people is included within their permanent record) (Regulation 28(1)(a))	31/10/2011
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Recommendations

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

- ensure there are procedures and guidance on police involvement in the home, which have been agreed with local police (3.22)
- ensure children who have been excluded from school have access to appropriate education and training, so that they are enabled to resume full time education (NMS 8.8)
- ensure a review is initiated no more than 72 hours after any emergency admission to consider whether the child should remain at the home, or whether it is in that child's interests to move to a different placement (NMS 11.7)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people have good understanding of their history and backgrounds as a result of the collaborative work undertaken by staff and social workers with young people. Staff work closely with young people and their families to help them resolve issues and move forward.

There is evidence that an inconsistent pattern of attendance at school by some young people before the summer school holidays has now been reversed. They now maintain regular attendance at the organisation's own school and are progressing academically. However education plans are not established for all young people and as a consequence their educational progress is hindered. This is largely attributed to reviews with the placing authority not having taken place within 72 hours of young people being admitted in an emergency. As a consequence of this, educational arrangements have not been clarified or implemented.

Young people are helped to maintain good health through the provision of a healthy diet and routine health checks. While staff encourage young people to participate in physical activity, they are not successful in engaging them in regular hobbies or exercise. Requests from young people to join sports and leisure clubs, such as the gym, take a long time to organise and result in young people losing interest and becoming dissatisfied. One comment received was that 'it's alright here and we do get to do a lot of nice things like going to the cinema. But sometimes it takes so long

to get things sorted'.

The house meeting forum is currently proving difficult through which staff formally consult young people about the operation of the home is formally consult with young people.

Quality of care

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

Overall relationships between staff and young people are positive and young people report that 'some staff have helped me so much since I have been here- when I get angry they talk to me, explain the consequences of my actions and then leave me to make my own choice about things'. Behaviour presented by young people is challenging of staff and is mostly managed well. The use of sanctions is minimal and physical restraint is rare. However some inconsistencies in staff practice with regard to reinforcing boundaries, particularly in relation to smoking and visitors, causes confusion and occasional conflict between young people. The external line manager of the home has demonstrated a commitment to exploring this issue.

The formal system of house meetings is currently proving an ineffective means for consulting with young people as they refuse to participate. Although not evident within written records, staff use more informal methods to regularly consult with young people over matters such as the planning of activities, meals and the décor for their bedroom room and communal areas of the home. Young people know about the complaints procedure and say they would complain if they felt the need to. Issues raised informally by young people with staff, such as the fear of bullying, are addressed to the complainants' satisfaction.

Placement plans help staff to identify the needs of young people but only broadly rather than specifically advise staff on how identified needs are to be met. They do not sufficiently focus on cultural heritage. As it is not evident from placement plans, whether young people have been consulted about the contents, there may be things they would like to do in recognition of their heritage that are not included as strategies within their placement plan. Staff are in most circumstances proactive in arranging educational provision for young people. However some young people have experienced a delay in suitable full-time educational provision being identified. No temporary provision has been made available in the short term, despite the organisation having its own school. This is disadvantaging young people at an important point in their education. Staff are however extremely supportive of those young people who do attend school. Daily contact is maintained with the school to determine what assistance can be provided to help young people progress.

The home's location provides young people with excellent access to recreation, shopping and public transport facilities. As in regards to education, while young people do have access to recreational activities such as the cinema or videos, there is often a delay in arranging particular hobbies and interests. This can hinder the development of social skills and is an issue for some but not all young people.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The health, safety and welfare of young people is safeguarded by the provision and maintenance of a safe environment together with the safe working practices of staff. Young people say they usually feel safe in the home 'as result of staff talking to us and telling us about how to keep ourselves safe'. Staff are aware of and are taking action in respect of recognised incidents of bullying that cause distress to some young people. The incidents have reduced as a result of close monitoring by staff and unacceptable behaviour being challenged.

Relationships between staff and young people are generally good and overall behaviour in the home is managed well. Staff receive training in how to manage behaviour by the use of de-escalation techniques. This is used effectively as is demonstrated by the very low incidence of physical intervention. Sanctions are sparingly used.

There are numerous incidents when young people go missing from the home and become engaged in offending behaviour while absent. Staff take appropriate action to locate young people and secure a safe return including searching the local area and instigating missing person procedures with the local police should their whereabouts remain unknown. It is not however clear what strategies staff use to work alongside young people and deter them from becoming involved in such incidents.

Young people are protected by the robust recruitment procedures in place. Although original documentation is held centrally at an office in Belfast, the home has a written record of checks completed. Staff are carefully selected and vetted, Placing authorities and the service work effectively to safeguard the young people with prompt notifications being made to all relevant parties.

Leadership and management

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

In the period since the last inspection there has been a change in ownership of the organisation. Information, such as the statement of purpose and young person's guide, has been updated to reflect the organisational changes. They provide information about the services provided in an accessible format. Although taking place several months ago, new policies, procedures and records have yet to be fully implemented and consolidated.

Training is planned to familiarise them with the new practices and record keeping systems. As their previous training is up to date in most key areas of practice, staff already possess the knowledge and skills to safeguard the welfare of young people

with respect to matters such as child protection, bullying, restraint and fire precautions. There is however a lack of clarity around the new systems of record keeping, particularly in relation to the recording of physical restraints, sanctions and information held on young people. Information is difficult to access as it is held in different places. Some records concerning young people are held on unsecured computers and do not form part of their individual record of progress. As well as information being difficult to locate it is not readily available for young people to read should they request access to their files.

Although there have been some changes to the staff team, during the transition, disruption to young people has been minimised as the majority of the staff team are known figures. Staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of young people. Most staff benefit from receiving regular supervision through which they receive support and guidance to help them fulfil their roles and responsibilities. However in some instances, the frequency of supervision has lapsed, resulting in some practice issues not being addressed. As a consequence there are inconsistencies in practice which causes confusion for young people. These are being addressed by the external line manager of the home.

The home works well with other agencies should safeguarding concerns arise. Contact with placing authorities and the local safeguarding team is initiated to inform them about events and to agree action. However, as reported previously, there has been a failure to co-ordinate meetings with placing social workers following emergency admissions of young people to the home. This has resulted in a delay in the suitability of placement being considered and firm plans being formulated. This creates uncertainties for young people about their future. Although staff work well with the police, this tends to be a reactive measure in response to incidents that occur, such as young people going missing. The home has not been proactive in agreeing a protocol with police about the circumstances in which their involvement in the home may be requested. This could potentially lead to disagreement over their role.

The living and working environment is safe. Routine checks are completed on mechanical, electrical and fire equipment to ensure it remains in good working order. Fire drills are conducted at least once every three months so that young people and staff know what to do in the event of a fire. Some of the communal facilities and bedrooms have recently been re-decorated and have improved the overall appearance of the home. Young people like their bedrooms saying 'it is great that we can choose the way we decorate our rooms, it makes it feel more like our own home'.

Actions and recommendations made following the last inspection have either been addressed or are no longer applicable due to the change in ownership of the organisation.

Equality and diversity practice is **satisfactory**.

