

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Stella Henderson
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Date of last inspection	13 January 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.

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

The home is a privately run children's home, which provides care and accommodation for two young people of either sex, aged from 10 years to 17 years of age.

The home is a detached four bedroom property, situated in a residential area. On the first floor of the house, there is a bathroom and four individual bedrooms, two of which are staff sleep-in rooms. One of these bedrooms is also used as an office. On the ground floor, there is a lounge, kitchen with dining area, toilet, utility room and conservatory.

The home has an enclosed rear garden and to the front of the property there is a driveway, providing car parking for a number of cars.

No young people were at the home at the time of this inspection but their views were ascertained through a telephone conversation.

Summary

The purpose of this visit is to follow up on actions and recommendations made at the last inspection and to undertake a full unannounced inspection. Six outcomes are inspected: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution, achieving economic well-being and organisation.

The home has some strengths but there are significant weaknesses and some elements of key national minimum standards (NMS) are not met. Management of the home is poor. Previously identified shortfalls have not been met and there are a number of safeguarding and management concerns which impact on the welfare of young people. Unsatisfactory management support means that young people are looked after by staff who not suitably experienced or trained to do so and who do not receive adequate supervision.

Monitoring systems have failed to identify these shortfalls. Some good outcomes are achieved for young people, however the overall quality of care they receive is below the standards that young people have a right to expect.

The acting manager began to make an immediate response to some of the deficits identified in this report.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection actions were raised in relation to notifications and behaviour management. Evidence from this inspection demonstrates that these have now been met.

The provider was also asked to improve practice in providing pathway plans, room searches, missing from home procedures and training across several areas of practice including safeguarding and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ). Practice has not improved in these areas and actions and recommendations are raised again, in order to secure safe practice and improved outcomes for young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The promotion of young people's health is good. Each young person has a comprehensive health plan based on thorough assessment. Plans clearly detail how to meet young people's needs and encourage good health. There is effective partnership working with health professionals and families to help meet any specialist needs of young people. Young people play an active role in this process.

Staff ensure that young people have an understanding about eating well and maintaining a proper diet. For example, young people are actively encouraged to participate in all aspects of healthy eating, from devising menus, shopping to purchase items and being helped by staff to prepare some of their own meals. This helps promote young people's health in the short term and equips them with information to help them make healthy choices in future.

The home keeps a detailed record of the food that young people eat which means that there is on-going assessment of whether a balanced diet is being maintained. Rather than get take-away food, young people enjoy going out for a meal which helps them to develop their social skills.

Young people have no need for medication as they generally enjoy good health and like to keep fit. There are, however suitable systems in place for the administration of any medication should this be required. Staff are trained in the use of first aid. Young people have written medical consent available so that staff have the authority they need to attend to young people's health needs.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

Young people's right to confidentiality is generally respected and all information about them is under secure lock and key. The recording of room searches is not specific enough to illustrate why rooms have been searched. Records do not show that staff have discussed with and explained to young people the reason why their room needs to be searched. This compromises young people's right to privacy. This is a recommendation from the previous inspection that has not been met.

Because young people are in stable and settled placements, they rarely go missing from the home. When they do there is no evidence that they are seen by somebody independent of the home to consider any reason for this absence without consent. This is a recommendation raised at the last inspection that has not been met.

There are suitable arrangements in place for responding to and managing any child protection concerns or formal complaints. New staff have not however received information on child protection at induction which places young people at risk.

Bullying is not an issue at the home and training in anti-bullying techniques equips staff to deal with problems should they arise. Staff treat young people like the young adults they are and implement effective behaviour management strategies, such as praise and positive reinforcement. This helps young people to develop a sense of responsibility and choice over their actions.

Physical restraint is an intervention of last resort and sanctions are fair and reasonable. One young person concurred with that view, stating that although sanctions are not liked, there is an understanding of why this has to happen.

Action is taken to reduce the risk to young people from their own known or likely behaviours and these assessments are regularly updated. Routine environmental checks and fire drills ensure that young people live in a home which is free from avoidable hazards.

Management have promptly responded where necessary to invoke staff disciplinary procedures to protect young people. The safety of young people is compromised however, as staff are employed who do not have the necessary background checks. Additionally, new staff have not received the training and supervision necessary to provide young people with a good, safe standard of care.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people are offered care that is entirely tailored to their individual needs. Young people respond positively to the very effective personal, social and emotional support and guidance provided for them and this is evident in, for example, the stability of the placement and good educational progress.

Young people are enabled to develop their self esteem and be equipped with the social skills they need to improve their life chances through effective key-working. This is an activity integrated into all aspects of young people's lives, although there may be times when a more formal approach is taken. In line with good parenting, there is close monitoring of the progress of young people. This enables young people to feel valued and helps them to develop a sense of belonging.

Young people are actively supported in their education by the home and have the opportunity to attend the school provided by the company. Young people have a range of plans in place to support them with their education, such as personal education plans, statements of educational special need and individual education plans. There are helpful records on file of their progress at school and there is good liaison with teaching staff to the benefit of young people.

One young person commented that staff are very supportive where education is concerned, and encourage involvement in a range of activities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The care planning process is a strength of the home. Young people's needs are assessed prior to arriving at the home, and from these assessments an individual comprehensive placement plan is formulated covering all aspects of young people's lives.

This placement plan is regularly reviewed in response to young people's achieved outcomes or changing needs. This provides a dynamic and helpful record of young people's development and progress. One young person commented that he understands the plans made for him and that staff discuss these with him 'every week pretty much'.

The well-being and development of young people is reviewed on a regular basis, by formal measures, such as statutory reviews, and by daily general observations and communication with staff. This means that any changes in behaviour or development is quickly noticed and intervention taken accordingly.

The size of the home and the nature of the placements means that there is frequent dialogue with young people, which is confirmed by young people who say 'staff discuss things all the time'. Their views and opinions are therefore well-known to staff without the need for formal meetings. In addition, young people's views and feedback are systematically recorded throughout their case files. One young person commented that 'they take my point of view very seriously'.

Young people benefit from staff working well with their families and providing practical help to facilitate their contact arrangements. This ensures young people's contact is maintained with the people who are important to them. One young person said that they are 'really grateful' that staff help with transport.

Families are also very much included in the admission process. They can see where their young people will live and meet the staff who will be looking after them. Discharges from the home are managed and recorded appropriately.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

There are no young people living at the home who are of an age where they need formal pathway planning. Young people are encouraged, from an early age, to engage in tasks such as cooking and tidying their rooms, which will equip them with the skills they need as they move into adolescence and beyond.

The home is fit for purpose, spacious and well furnished, but shows the usual signs of wear and tear evident in any domestic dwelling. Repairs are generally completed within reasonable timescales, however the kitchen ceiling needs attention where there has been a leak and a loft hatch is not secure.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

The Statement of Purpose gives parents and social workers good information about the service. A useful young people's guide outlines how young people will be cared for.

There is some good practice at the home which secures positive outcomes for young people. For example, the majority of staff are skilled and experienced. The stability of placements clearly indicates that young people's individual needs are well met at the home. Young people say that staff are 'understanding'. Files and other records are in good order, evidencing good levels of consultation with young people. Records provide a fair reflection of young people's time and experience in the home.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Several members of staff have attended equality and diversity training, and young people have access to services in a diverse community. Individual planning is good and reflects young people's diverse needs. The staff team is balanced

in terms of age and gender. Effective working with young people's families enables young people to retain an important sense of identity and belonging.

There have been difficulties in the management of the home however. During this time staff have received poor support from senior management which impacts on the quality of care that young people receive. A recommendation raised at the last inspection with regard to training has not been met. Staff, including new staff, do not receive supervision at appropriate intervals.

Staffing levels are sometimes inadequate which means that young people are on occasion left in the care of new staff who do not have the experience, training or management support to meet their needs. One young person expressed approval and confidence in the staff team but does not like it that staff keep getting moved to other homes. This creates inconsistency and uncertainty for young people and impacts on their sense of stability.

Scrutiny under Regulation 33 and 34 is unsatisfactory and lacks the rigor to either drive forward self improvement or identify the kind of shortfalls found at this inspection. Young people and staff are not interviewed as part of Regulation 33 processes, so this opportunity to form an independent opinion of the standard of care in the home is missed. Additionally, the Regulation 33 visitor also supervises the acting manager of the home, which compromises any independent overview of the home's performance.

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
27	ensure full and satisfactory information is obtained in respect of each of the matters listed in Schedule 2 (Regulation 26 (6)(b))	16 April 2010
27	ensure that all persons employed receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal (Regulation 27 (4)(a))	16 April 2010
32	ensure visits to the home are conducted by an employee of the organisation or partnership who is not directly concerned with the conduct of the home (Regulation 33 (2)(c))	16 April 2010
32	interview, with their consent and in private, such of the children accommodated there, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as appears necessary in order to form an opinion of the standard of care provided in the home (Regulation 33 (4)(a))	16 April 2010
33	monitor the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals. Ensure that the system provides for consultation with children accommodated in the home, their parents and placing authorities (Regulation 34) (1)(a) and (3)	16 April 2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure that records of room searches show the full details of the search and demonstrate that the search has been carried out in accordance with the home's guidance and on clear grounds (NMS 9.8)
- ensure there is a satisfactory maintenance and repair programme for the building, furniture and equipment and that any damage is repaired promptly (NMS 24.3).