

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Michael McCleave
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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

This is a local authority run children's home. It is a detached single storey building situated in a residential area. Staff provide care for young people who are vulnerable and for different reasons unable to live with their families. The home accommodates up to six young people aged from 10 to 17-years-old.

Young people have individual bedrooms with en-suite shower rooms. The home has a lounge, kitchen with dining area, quiet or computer room, bathroom and a laundry. The garden is enclosed and has a lawn and patio area. The home is situated within easy access to the local community, public transport and leisure facilities.

Overall effectiveness

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

The home is well managed with a team of motivated staff who have a clear understanding of their care responsibilities. Young people are confident in their relationships with staff and feel safe living at this home. Each young person is supported by staff to achieve their potential and this is underpinned by a positive culture of putting the young people first. The young people make progress in different degrees based on their starting points relating to all aspects of their welfare and development. The positive working practices at this home enable the young people to feel confident in raising any issues or concerns. Support for staff to enable them to carry out their duties is good and the management of the home is effective. A recommendation is made relating to the monitoring of records by the manager.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the home to ensure compliance with the home's policies and that young people and others sign the records as required. (NMS 21.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

The home provides the young people with a caring stable environment where they can develop their confidence and learn good social skills.

Young people have become more confident and secure in themselves since moving into the home. They initially had poor self-esteem and little trust in adults because of their previous experiences. Staff work actively with individual young people to build up a level of trust and to encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings. This ability to enable young people to open up and begin to trust an adult is a clear positive outcome based on the skills and commitment of staff at the home.

The health of young people is actively promoted by staff and there is access to appropriate resources as required. The looked after nurse is a regular visitor to the home and provides young people with advice and guidance on a range of health related issues. These include dieting, smoking, drugs misuse, personal health and hygiene. Healthy eating is encouraged and young people are actively involved in growing their own vegetables in raised garden beds. These are prepared by the young people and form part of the meals at the home. Some young people have accepted the need to change their diets in order to improve their health and are now eating better nutritionally balanced meals.

Young people are strongly encouraged by staff to value education and much effort is put into supporting them to achieve their potential at school or college. Most of the young people had poor attendance and a low self-esteem about their abilities to succeed prior to their admission to the home. There have been some successes with improved school attendance. A minority of young people are not engaging with their educational plan and the home is actively liaising with educational professionals to develop alternative provision. Those young people who are cooperating with their educational plan are currently pursuing GCSE exam qualifications. A member of staff known as the educational champion forms the pivotal link between the home and school.

Young people are encouraged to take a full role in the life of the home. House meetings chaired by young people, take place every two weeks where a range of topics are discussed. The decoration and colour scheme of the home was chosen by the young people. Weekly meal planning takes place between staff and young people and trips out to places of interest are a regular discussion topic. This communication dialogue between staff and young people promotes a positive culture at the home.

Contact between young people their families and friends is a crucial part of care planning. Relationships are often damaged when a young person enters the care system and staff are clearly aware of the importance of working with young people to improve and develop family links. There has been a marked improvement in the relationships between some young people and their families. For others, the work to repair strained relationships continues.

Young people are supported by staff throughout the planning for independence process. This is often a difficult and sensitive time as a young person prepares to move out of the security and care of the home. Staff recognise the importance of

keeping the young person fully involved and informed. Young people are given the opportunity to learn how to budget, shop for food and essentials, deal with officials and undertake domestic living tasks. These measures form an essential part of the transitions process. A social worker commented about one young person, 'the strong support given by the key worker in the transitions planning has been fantastic'.

Quality of care

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

Staff at the home work well with the young people and positive relationships have been established. The young people feel confident that their views are taken seriously at the home. This involvement of young people in the life of the home is demonstrated through the young people meetings held every two weeks. Areas for discussion include, the planning of trips out to places of interest, activities, menus, decoration, style of furniture, choices of meals.

There is a complaints procedure in place and the young people know how to use this if they have any concerns. The Young People's Guide contains information about other agencies who can be contacted, this includes Ofsted and the Children's Rights service. The young people are confident that any complaint made will be acted on. This is based on the trust that has been established between the young people and the staff.

The care plans clearly indicate the areas of work required to bring about an improvement for individual young people. These plans are reviewed every two weeks by the key worker and a re-assessment made of progress. These records are well maintained although some require the signatures of staff and young people. The young people are fully involved in these reviews. Where necessary, any religious or cultural needs are recorded. Staff are skilled in their engagement with young people and there is a positive rapport between them. Staff have an open, transparent way of communicating with the young people, which has enabled them to establish good relationships.

Staff promote healthy lifestyles with young people through activities such as swimming, horse riding, climbing as well as being encouraged to pursue their own individual interests and leisure pursuits. Young people are encouraged to eat healthy meals and home grown vegetables form a part of a good diet. Any religious or cultural needs are catered for. Where required, the young people are able to access appropriate support services such as drugs advice and personal counselling. Young people are encouraged to participate in a wide range of activities. In addition to those previously mentioned, also included are, meals out to restaurants and trips to places of interest. It is impressive how staff are willing to provide the young people with quality time to take part in activities that they may not have had the opportunity to fully pursue before. One young person who has particular skills in swimming, is being encouraged by staff to pursue a life guard certificate.

Education is positively promoted by staff who are proactive in encouraging and supporting young people to make the most from educational opportunities. This can be a difficult area for some young people who have become disengaged from main stream school. However, the staff are very active in developing an alternative provision until individual young people can be re-introduced to their school.

Respect for individual cultural backgrounds is a strong feature of the home. Young people are supported to value their cultural heritage. Care plans identify any issues and staff work individually with young people to help them have a greater awareness and understanding of their situation. At a practical level the home provides separate storage facilities for young people who require special food and utensils because of

religious or cultural needs.

The home is located in a residential area and is very pleasantly decorated and comfortably furnished throughout. The young people enjoy single bedrooms with en-suite facilities. A large lounge offers a comfortable place to meet and socialise. There is a quiet room with a computer for young people to use. A pay telephone is available in a private area that young people can access as they choose. The surrounding space around the building provides the young people with a patio with garden furniture where BBQ's are held. These are enjoyable occasions. The overall quality of life at the home is good and young people appreciate the role of staff in their care.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people are cared for by staff who have all been trained in safeguarding and who are very clear about their responsibilities to keep the young people safe from harm. Appropriate systems are in place to safeguard and protect the young people. They feel safe living at the home and they rarely go missing. There is a protocol in place with the local police who will provide support to staff when responding to situations if a young person is missing. Risk assessments for individual young people clearly indicate the strategies to follow if they do not return to the home at an agreed time.

Staff are always alert to the risk of bullying taking place and they have adopted various strategies to manage any such situation appropriate to individual young people. The restorative justice approach is used at the home. The aim being to try and engage with the bully so as to encourage them to understand the consequences of their actions.

The use of physical restraint is not a regular feature at the home and staff pride themselves on the good relationships established with young people. Positive behaviour is promoted through open dialogue with young people during periods when tensions or difficulties are evident. The use of restorative justice involves all the young people in discussions about particular behaviour situations and all work towards a solution.

The home operates to the local authority recruitment and selection processes. This ensures that only staff who have been interviewed and who have been fully cleared, are appointed to work with the young people. This prevents unsuitable people having access to the young people. All staff records are maintained in secure conditions at the human resources department of the local authority. These measures promote the safety of the young people.

The building provides the young people a safe place to live. All appropriate checks are carried out on domestic appliances, electrical systems and electrical equipment. There is a good health and safety culture operating at the home. Access points are secure with good quality locks and all windows have restricted openings.

Leadership and management

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

The deputy manager is currently responsible for the operations at the home due to the temporary absence of the registered manager. The staff are very well supported by the management team and supervision at a formal level takes place regularly. There is a positive team work approach that is clearly evident through the interactions of the staff during each shift pattern. Visitors to the home confirm that the home is being well managed.

The recommendation from the previous inspection relating to young people having access to their records, has been addressed. The young people confirm that they are aware that they can see their case records. Some have taken advantage of this, but have not always signed when they have read their records. The acting manager is aware of this and planned improvements are being initiated to address this. Another area the acting manager intends to improve on is the strengthening of partnership arrangements with education professionals. This demonstrates the capacity and positive attitude of the staff team to continually improve the home to benefit young people.

The Statement of Purpose outlines clearly the aims and objectives of the home and these continue to be met. The management team take responsibility for monitoring the quality of care and to ensure that key records relating to the care of young people are appropriately maintained. Case files for young people are well maintained with evaluation reports summarising the progress of each young person. However, some documents did not contain relevant signatures.

Staffing at the home is sufficient to maintain safe operations on a daily basis and to provide good quality support and care to the young people. Staff are appropriately supported by the management team and formal supervision is in place for all staff. Training opportunities to enable staff to improve their skills and professional development is readily available. This ensures that the young people are cared for by staff who are experienced and have the appropriate competences to carry out their roles.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.