

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Jacqueline Malcolm
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The children's home is owned and operated by a local authority. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for six young people who experience behavioural and emotional difficulties.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

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

Young people make inadequate progress in this home. A number of inappropriate placements have been made without due regard for young people's individual needs, safety and welfare. The needs of the existing group of young people have not been taken into account during this process. This does not support the home's Statement of Purpose or good child care practice, in particular ensuring there are good group dynamics. Staff are qualified and experienced and are committed to providing a good standard of care. However, positive staff engagement with young people has minimal or no effect and at times is inconsistent. Young people's highly risky behaviours at the home and in the community have a negative impact on all aspects of their lives. It has proved difficult for staff to effectively manage young people and fully keep them safe and some institutionalised practice has developed. A number of young people are engaged in anti-social behaviours and are disengaged from education and health services. This impacts on their life chances and hinders their ability to develop as responsible, socially included individuals.

Young people are not actively involved in developing their placement plans. A number of young people do not know what their plans are and therefore cannot take ownership of their responsibilities in relation to their care. Young people's views about life at the home present a mixed picture. Typical comments include: 'it's a doss house'; 'the staff are really welcoming and easy and are there when you need them'; 'nothing is good'; and 'I am helped to take part in meetings about me.' Young people's relationships with staff are variable and some young people spend time with their key workers and other staff with whom they feel comfortable. However, not all young people say they feel safe and highlight issues such as bullying and intimidation

as the main areas of concern.

Management oversight has not driven improvement that benefits the current group of young people. Factors in relation to the way placements are made have impacted on the Registered Manager's ability to operate the home in line with the home's Statement of Purpose. This is despite their level of responsibility and accountability. A recommendation made as a result of the previous inspection with respect to young people's engagement in education has not been met. A number of requirements and recommendations have been made at this inspection to raise standards in the home and improve outcomes for young people.

The home is taking positive action regarding some safeguarding concerns.

Areas for improvement

Statutory 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
9 (2001)	ensure the registered provider and the registered manager shall, having regard to the size of the children's home, its statement of purpose and the number and needs of the children accommodated there, carry on or manage the home with sufficient care, competence and skill (Regulation 9(1))	15/07/2012
4 (2001)	ensure that the children's home is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. In particular, ensuring appropriate placements are made (Regulation 4(6))	15/07/2012
5 (2001)	keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide (Regulation 5(a))	15/07/2012
11 (2001)	promote and make proper provision for the welfare of children accommodated there. In particular, ensure children are cared for in line with their placement plans and review all current placements to ensure that all young people are appropriately placed (Regulation 11(1)(a))	15/07/2012
12A (2001)	ensure that the registered person cooperates with the child's placing authority in agreeing and signing the plan for the child's placement prepared in accordance with the provisions in regulation 9 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (Regulation 12A(1))	15/07/2012
12A (2001)	ensure with particular reference to the regulation above, that children's plans make specific reference to meeting children's needs giving due consideration to children's wishes and feelings (Regulation 12A(1))	15/07/2012
16	ensure the written safeguarding policy is implemented in	15/07/2012

(2001)	practice so that children are safeguarded from abuse or neglect. In particular, ensure children are protected from bullying (Regulation 16)(1)(a) and (4)(a))	
16 (2001)	ensure effective liaison and co-operation with any local authority which is, or may be, making child protection enquiries in relation to any child accommodated in the children's home. In particular with reference to the regulation below and (Regulation 16 (2) (a))	15/07/2012
16 (2001)	ensure that children persistently missing from home and involved in risk-taking behaviours are protected: the registered manager must be involved in multi-agency risk management meetings; the risk management strategy must be recorded in detail and placement plans must include the actions that the home will take so as to contribute to the strategy and manage the risk (Regulation 16(2) (a))	15/07/2012
17 (2001)	ensure the imposition of a financial penalty is not used as a disciplinary measure, in particular the delay of pocket money that children receive (Regulation 17(2)(g))	15/07/2012
23 (2001)	ensure all parts of the home to which children have access are so far as reasonable practicable free from hazards to their health or safety and; any activities in which children participate are so far practicable free from avoidable risks. In particular, ensure up-to-date and robust risk assessments are implemented for individual children and the home environment (Regulation 23(a)(b))	15/07/2012
31 (2001)	ensure that all parts of the children's home used by children are reasonably decorated, maintained and suitably furnished (Regulation 31(2)(e) and)(4)(a))(b)) In particular with reference to the regulation below	15/07/2012
31 (2001)	ensure further that physical restrictions in the kitchen and lounge areas are not used unless necessary to safeguard children and promote their welfare and development, in agreement with the responsible authority and, if appropriate, parents (Regulation 31(2) (d and) (4) (a))(b))	15/07/2012
11 (2001)	ensure the children's home is conducted to promote and make proper provision for the welfare of children accommodated there. In particular, make proper provision for the care, education, supervision and, where appropriate, treatment, of children accommodated there (Regulation 11(1)(a)(b))	15/07/2012
11 (2001)	ensure the home is conducted with regard to the sex, religious persuasion, racial origin, and cultural and linguistic background of children accommodated there. In particular clearly identify and meet needs arising from children's race, culture and identity (Regulation 11(2)(b))	15/07/2012
20 (2001)	promote and protect the physical, emotional and mental health of the children accommodated in the home. In particular, ensure that each child is registered with a general medical practitioner and develop and implement clear policy and	15/07/2012

	procedural guidance to support children in relation to drugs and smoking cessation and alcohol misuse (Regulation 20(1))(a)(c) and (d))	
18 (2001)	ensure that children are encouraged to develop and pursue appropriate leisure interests. In particular, encourage and enable children to make and sustain friendships with children outside the home and have positive and appropriate relationships with peers (Regulation 18(2)(a))	15/07/2012
27 (2001)	demonstrate how all persons employed receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. In particular, training in sexual exploitation and loss and bereavement (Regulation 27(4)(a))	15/07/2012
28 (2001)	maintain in respect of each child who is accommodated a record in permanent form which includes the information, documents and records specified in Schedule 3 relating to that child and ensure the record is kept up to date (Regulation 28(1)(a)(b))	15/07/2012
33 (2001)	ensure the person carrying out the visit under this regulation, shall interview, with their consent and in private, such of the children accommodated there, their parents and relatives as appears necessary in order to form an opinion on the standard of care provided in the home. In particular ensure all concerns raised by children are promptly addressed (Regulation 33 (4)(a))	15/07/2012
34 (2001)	ensure the registered person establishes and maintains an effective system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals; and improving the quality of care provided in the children's home. Provide for consultation with children accommodated in the home, their parents and placing authorities.(Regulation 34 (1)(a)(b) and (3))	15/07/2012
30 (2001)	ensure that in relation to a children's home, any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 5 takes place, the registered person shall without delay notify the persons indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 30(1))	15/07/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure any child placed in the home is given the opportunity to participate in and shape the overall ethos, nature and routine of the home they live in (Volume 5, statutory guidance, paragraph 2.26)
- ensure children and young people are cared for in a way which helps them to reach their potential and achieve economic well-being (Volume 5, statutory guidance, paragraph 2.130)

- ensure each child's placement plan sets out any specific strategies that have been agreed to reduce the incidences of any negative behaviour exhibited by the child. Sanctions for poor behaviour should be clear, reasonable and not excessive. (Volume 5, statutory guidance, paragraph 2.88)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people have some understanding of their background, however not all young people have a positive self-image. For some young people there are concerns about their cultural identity and vulnerability to exploitative activities. Young people have made limited progress to form and sustain positive attachments to staff and peers. Some young people have low emotional resilience and are not confident about their skills and potential. This has resulted in young people's involvement in anti-social and risky behaviours in the home and community. This is detrimental to young people's development and progress.

Young people do not live in a healthy home environment that promotes their health, safety, well-being and development. Young people's explicit and chronic smoking of cannabis and cigarettes regularly takes place in their bedrooms, communal areas of the home, in the grounds and away from the home. This presents risks to young people's mental and physical well-being and impedes their routines and motivation to get involved in healthy activities and exercise. It also impacts on everyone's health and safety, as staff experience the secondary effects of cannabis. Staff are unsuccessful in their attempts to discourage young people from smoking cannabis and taking other drugs and alcohol despite young people also being provided with guidance and advice from health services and the local police. Action taken to minimise these activities is inconsistent and ineffective and agreed boundaries are ignored by young people. Additionally, younger people, who moved into the home without a drug problem, now have one.

Not all young people's health needs are fully promoted. While most young people are registered with various health professionals and some engage with these, it is not clear if all young people are registered with a general practitioner. The issues in the home with cannabis use and other dangerous substances have a significant adverse impact on young people's health. Additionally, young people do not always consume the healthy meals provided, which results in some missing meals; some young people have lost weight, which is not a good thing.

The majority of young people refuse to attend their school, employment or training. Those who do attend school regularly are making good progress. However, most young people's attainment is unsatisfactory and limited progress has been made as a result of their poor attendance.

Contact with family members and other significant people is actively promoted and encouraged. This enables young people to maintain relationships and promotes

young people's sense of belonging to people who are significant to them.

Most young people are not making a positive contribution to their community and some are at risk of harm. A number of young people do not have meaningful friendships, are associating with inappropriate people and some do not know if their friends can visit them. This does not promote social inclusion and positive community involvement so that young people begin to understand their rights, responsibilities and build their confidence and self-esteem.

Young people preparing for supported or independent living are not all fully motivated or enabled to engage in developing skills that will help them in the future. Some young people say that they are not helped to learn how to look after themselves or prepare for independence. Staff do not always support young people in developing independence skills as they prepare snacks, drinks and wash clothes for young people when they could be encouraged to carry out these tasks for themselves.

Quality of care

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

Young people's diverse and complex needs are not fully met because some young people are placed without proper regard for their individual needs, safety and welfare. Placements are made with no clear planning arrangements before and during placements. Young people are not involved in the development of their placement plans. Not all young people know what their plans are or the timescales for future care moves. This practice does not promote young people's ownership of their care and some are drifting. Young people's cultural and identity needs and other significant presenting behaviours are not fully recognised. These issues have significantly impeded the staff team's ability to engage with all young people and fully meet their needs. Placement plans are not regularly reviewed so it is not clear how outcomes for young people are monitored and improved.

Staff work positively with parents and carers to promote positive outcomes. Staff proactively make contact with them, as appropriate; this is to obtain further information about the young people they care for.

Some young people say they enjoy sound relationships and interact positively with staff. However, not all of the young people respect the adults who care for them, despite the positive role models represented. Staff regularly talk to young people about their behaviour and set boundaries and routines, but this has minimal or no impact. Some young people's behaviour is conditional and based on material gain. Challenging behaviours such as verbal abuse, violence and aggression towards staff and other young people is not effectively managed by consistent positive behaviour management strategies. It is not clear how young people's presenting behaviours are effectively monitored to promote an environment where socially acceptable behaviour is the preferred option.

Some young people are suffering from serious bullying, such as name calling, physical assaults, threats and intimidation. Staff are aware of bullying issues but young people who are being bullied say that staff do not deal with it well. The sustained severity of bullying behaviour has impacted on some young people's safety, emotional well-being and behaviour.

Young people say that the time they spend with their key worker is good or 'OK'. Young people are encouraged to attend and contribute to their statutory reviews. However, young people's views, wishes and feelings are not taken into account in the running of the home. Young people's meetings are not used to their full potential as a means of positively engaging with young people thus giving them a sense of ownership of their home.

Young people have access to an online counselling service available to them through an independent provider. This enables young people to have an alternative external means to discuss any issues or concerns. Young people know how to complain; procedures have been followed when they have complained. However, not all young people are happy that issues they raise are really considered. For example, young people's access to food continues to be limited.

Staff encourage young people to take responsibility for their health and support them to attend their health appointments with varying levels of success. The arrangements for medication are under review with support from the looked after children's nurse. This is to ensure improved safety of medication management. Most young people say they are supported when they feel unwell.

Staff actively promote young people's education and attend relevant education meetings and have good relationships with education providers; however most young people's attendance is poor.

Good opportunities are available to young people to be involved in hobbies and activities. However, not all young people are motivated to participate in these and this limits their opportunities to develop confidence in their skills and abilities.

The home is showing signs of wear and tear. Not all young people like the home and do not take ownership of or pride in their environment. Monitoring young people around the home presents a daily challenge for staff due to its layout and young people's behaviours. Externally, the garden is not well maintained. The vegetable patch is overgrown with weeds and the damage to the external fences and broken glass on the ground present a risk to health and safety. The kitchen and lounge areas are locked during the day time. This restricts young people's access to food, for example, making their own snacks and drinks to promote their independence. This practice is in response to some young people's concerning behaviours, but has not been formally agreed with the placing authority or other stakeholders. This is institutional practice and does not support the home's Statement of Purpose or address the fundamental issues that are impacting on the lives of the young people at the home.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Not all young people are consistently safe. Some young people say that they do not feel safe in the home and that staff do not keep them safe all of the time. However, they are confident that they can speak to an adult if they feel unsafe, including staff. Not all risk assessments are up to date to address young people's individual needs and behaviours, such as self-harm and bullying behaviours. Some risk management strategies impact on all young people.

Not all young people feel protected from harm, including neglect, abuse, and sexual exploitation and bullying. Young people who present with highly risky behaviours are not fully protected by placement planning decisions. This means that action taken to keep young people safe is mostly ineffective and some continue to be at high risk. Ofsted has made contact with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in relation to an issue of concern. This has resulted in remedial action to safeguard young people.

Staff take proactive measures to locate young people when they go missing from home, particularly those young people at risk of sexual exploitation. Good links with the police ensure that young people are reported missing within the agreed missing from home protocol, including additional checks, such as contacting young people on their mobile phones. Young people who are persistently missing from home are included in the missing behaviour strategy. However, the manager was not aware that he was in receipt of the strategy for a young person at risk until recently. This does not promote effective safeguards for young people.

Staff are trained to help them to manage young people's behaviour. However, in a number of instances the boundaries set are unclear, some practices are inconsistent and most young people are unresponsive. A high number of financial sanctions, such as delayed pocket money, are imposed and the rationale for these sanctions are not always clear. Restraint is rarely used. Not all behaviour management strategies are up to date. They do not include all information, such as the impact on young people's drug use on their behaviour or clear behaviour management strategies that promote positive behaviours.

There are sufficient staff to care for children, many of who are part of a longstanding and experienced staff team.

The current health and safety risk assessment does not fully take into account the needs and risks presented by the current group of young people.

Leadership and management

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

The manager returned to the home six months ago, following a secondment in another home. Effective and efficient management of the home is compromised by a number of inappropriate placements that undermine the home's Statement of Purpose. Matching does not take into account all young people's needs, including those relating to their safety and welfare, the existing young people living at the home or the views of their social workers. Impact assessments required prior to making a placement are not sufficiently informative. Some practices are verging on institutional. This is due to a number of ineffective measures to manage young people's behaviours. This impacts on young people's progress and development and presents challenges to staff. The manager has been instructed, by senior managers, to place some young people at the home due to a lack of alternative placement availability; this practice, and the resulting impact it has on the outcomes for young people, calls into question the registered provider's fitness.

The home cannot demonstrate capacity for continuing improvement. At the last inspection the home was judged to be making satisfactory progress. One recommendation was made relating to young people being supported to attend school, college or alternative provision regularly. This has not been met.

The manager regularly monitors the quality of care. The manager has good oversight of the young people and most of their needs. He is acutely aware of the home's limitations in meeting some young people's needs. However, there is no evidence of direct consultation with young people and stakeholders. Monitoring is not robust and shortfalls are not routinely followed up. For example, sanctions imposed are not monitored to identify trends to enable the review of behaviour management plans. Gaps in young people's placement plans are not identified and addressed. Significantly, issues relating to children's cultural needs, sexual exploitation issues, the review and implementation of clear bullying and drugs strategies and a review of staff practices to ensure consistency are not evident.

Visits undertaken on behalf of the provider report on the home's strengths and areas for development. However, the level of scrutiny is not robust enough to enable challenge to be made about the impact inappropriate placements have on outcomes for young people. Young people and staff are consulted, but parents and relatives are not. Not all issues raised by young people are made subject to an action plan. It is unclear how leaders and managers respond to concerns about the home's current operation. The absence of a development plan makes it unclear what the future plans are for the home. Not all significant events have been notified to Ofsted, so it is not possible to track how and if issues have been addressed.

Young people say they have a copy of the young people's guide. Staff spend time with young people explaining the guide to them; this informs them about the care they can expect to receive. However, there is no information in the guide to provide young people with an up-to-date contact number for Ofsted. Nor are there details about how young people can contact the Children's Rights Director and their independent reviewing officer.

Young people are cared for by experienced and supportive staff. Young people benefit from a staff team, a number of whom have worked at the home for a long time and share similar values; and this motivates them to promote young people's needs. Staff are supervised and say the manager supports and listens to them; this enables them to carry out their roles and responsibilities. However, they recognise their limitations in caring for some young people and voice their concerns about this. The staff team are all trained in an appropriate child care qualification and undertake training that informs their practice, such as advanced behaviour management, safeguarding, self-harm, bullying and attachment theory. Staff are not trained in areas such as sexual exploitation and loss and bereavement and this means they are not equipped to deal with these important issues. The team is well regarded by volunteers and partner agencies. Staff work effectively with partner agencies and share information about young people to try to support and protect them.

Young people's records vary in quality. Some care planning information is missing, records are not kept up to date and some information does not include young people's contributions. However, good daily records provide a clear account of young people's activities in the home.

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.