

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Julian Parker
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is one of a group of homes operated by an independent organisation as part of a tendering contract with the local council. This home provides care and accommodation for up to four young people with emotional and/or behavioural 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 **good**.

This is a good service that provides positive outcomes for young people. The effectiveness of the provision is a result of personalised, well-planned care; considered placement planning and tenacious staff commitment when addressing young people's individual needs.

Young people's health needs benefit and improve by having access to focused health and psychological services that promote well-being. Plans for schooling and education are often in flux when young people are admitted however concerted efforts and multi-agency working effectively enable children's reintegration into the classroom or specialist schools.

The changing needs of some older young people admitted to the home generate particular uncertainty about the range of services they will require to progress. The home is positive in their attitude and proactive in re-establishing routines into their lives. On-going support provided by care staff enable most young people to develop practical abilities and the emotional resilience required to aid progression and transition to family or independent living placements.

Young people are encouraged to develop positive and trusting relationships with their care staff that enhances the stability and quality of their placement. Regular communication using placement planning sessions obtains their views which influence improvements in the quality of care provided.

With staff support young people maintain meaningful contact with family and people important to them. They live in a comfortable environment that facilitates easy access to all community resources. Some parts of the home require further improvement. Young people say they feel safe and learn how to keep themselves from harm. The practice of physical restraint and use of sanctions is rare as acceptable behaviour is constantly encouraged, through the use of praise and individualised reward schemes.

The management and operation of the home is generally good but some monitoring systems are not as robust as they could be in tracking the performance of practice or ensuring case recording is up to date. Some aspects of the physical environment need attention and revised arrangements for dealing with the possibility of fire require sharing with the fire regulator.

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
31 (2001)	ensure that all parts of the children's home used by children are: suitably furnished and equipped by replacing worn / damaged bedroom furnishings (Regulation 31(2)(e))	23/09/2013
31 (2001)	ensure that all parts of the children's home used by children are of sound construction and kept in good structural repair externally and internally by ensuring that doors that provide fire protection are replaced if damaged (Regulation 31(2)(d))	16/09/2013
32 (2001)	ensure the registered person after consultation with the fire authority: take adequate precautions against the risk of fire: by ensuring that an amended copy of the building plan locating fire prevention appliances and the amended copy of the Fire Risk Assessment is made available to the local fire and rescue service (Regulation 32(1)(a))	01/09/2013
28 (2001)	ensure that a record in permanent form is maintained for each child, which is kept up to date. (Regulation 28 (1)(b))	01/09/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that management monitoring is completed within the frequency prescribed by the providers policies. NMS 21.2

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Following admission to the home most young people demonstrate some meaningful improvements in their confidence and self-esteem. This is demonstrated by the physical care they take of themselves and their re-engagement with education and training schemes. By helping young people recognise their own worth and abilities, they can socialise and cultivate friendships with peers, enabling them to settle and feel more emotionally secure in their home. Forming trusting relationships with staff by knowing what the expected standards of behaviour are, help young people become more confident and aware of how they can modify their behaviour to achieve legitimate goals.

When compared to their starting point on admission to the home most young people make significant improvement. On-going placement support promotes meaningful achievement and attainment for example reintegration into full time or mainstream schooling. Staff work alongside educational support teams and show they are interested in children's attainment in class by promoting regular school attendance, helping with homework and attending parents evenings. Very good progress has been made ensuring that all young people have a school or training placement.

Having completed their formal schooling some young people demonstrate commitment to accessing training placements rather than being unoccupied and unemployed. Practical support from staff and Connexions ensure such motivation is practically supported by ensuring attendance at meetings and offering transport support to get to work venues. In this way young people are assisted to improve their opportunities through volunteering or developing practical and learning skills that can enhance employability.

Young people learn to understand the importance of healthy living and most respond positively to the help available. With help and encouragement they attend all health related appointments. In the home young people eat a well-balanced diet, regularly reflecting different cultural backgrounds. Care staff in the home and specialist workers from external agencies help promote good diet, emotional health, safeguard sexual health and address specific issues such as the use of substances. Young people understand that this type of support helps keep them keep safe and healthy.

Young people generally value having good levels of staff help to sustain safe contact with family and friends who are significant in their lives; where this is a component of their care plan. Staff demonstrate positive commitment towards working with family networks. This enables young people to recognise that concerns about their welfare and safety are the principal focus of the placement. Some young people benefit from unsupervised contact that helps maintain meaningful experiences with family or significant adults in their life. In practice this helps young people develop those social skills beneficial to re-establishing positive relationships and working towards rehabilitation or alternative family placements. A social worker confirmed,

'Staff, from the home, work well with all professionals involved and are pro-active in supervising contact with family members.'

Young people generally express positive opinions about their home. With encouragement they contribute to the daily running of the home by helping with general house chores and usually keeping their rooms tidy. They make suggestions about the décor of the communal areas and their own personal space. Some young people have pets. Young people contribute ideas in their regular Sunday evening meetings letting staff know what the home could improve upon alongside choosing activities and meal planning. Young people receive a weekly allowance to spend as they choose plus opportunity to increase this by demonstrating socially acceptable and helpful behaviour. Should they deliberately damage the home young people contribute towards the cost of repair as part of their reparation.

Quality of care

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

Young people benefit from an established, gender balanced, competent and trained staff team who choose to work at this home, providing consistent nurturing care and practical support. Relationships between staff and young people are friendly, structured and effective. By establishing positive relationships and using respect and humour to diffuse difficult situations behaviour is generally good as evidenced by the minimal use of restraint and few sanctions.

Young people know how to raise any concerns or make a complaint. They are usually happy with the comprehensive manner in which staff members and the homes manager respond to any issues they raise. Young people are confident that any real concerns, complaints or allegations made about staff are always dealt with quickly. The homes complaints file includes details about making complaints through advocates or their placing authority.

In practice effective behaviour management strategies are adopted using easily understood praise and reward systems. These may use certificates recognising achievement or enhance pocket money as incentives. Young people clearly understand that key workers will always speak with them during placement planning meetings following any recorded incident, inappropriate or risky behaviour.

Young people's views and opinions influence the way the home operates. Occurring informally through everyday living and within young people's meetings they help make the decisions that shape weekly life at the home. Young people are helped to understand how decisions are made, especially when it is not possible to act upon their wishes. Young people know that they can talk to their social workers and visiting advocates about any aspects of being looked after. Young people have access to information and staff advice that informs them of their rights.

Young people are helped to be involved in the development of their placement plans where their input is practical and safe, for instance in considering how much

unsupervised free time they may have. Key worker and daily observation and assessment recording enables the manager and staff team to evaluate the progress young people make. This information critically enables the compilation of reports that inform social workers and statutory reviews of progress. One social worker reported that, 'Staff are always available, approachable and helpful. They always update me of the child's circumstances and work with me on any issue regarding the child.'

By following the provider's guidance and policies relating to health; that promote physical and emotional well-being, children and young people receive attention directly from the provider or support from specialist agencies within the placing authority. Staff are able to address specific needs of individual young people, for example by providing helpful advice about quitting smoking, help them refrain from using harmful substances, eat a better balanced diet or take regular exercise to keep healthy. Where necessary other health professionals support plans which identify particular needs that cannot be met directly by the staff team; such as the emotional support provided by trained therapists for understanding specific behaviour. Regular training ensures care staff are up to date and equipped to deal with minor accidents or ailments and safely administer medication within the home.

Children and young people receive the help necessary to encourage them and practical support to attend and remain in education. Actual attendance is variable as each young person's needs and education provision is different and best suited to each individual's specific needs. All young people living at the home have made improvements in attendance and attainment during their residence, taking into account their starting point at the time of placement and the limitations placed on them by the placing authority based special educational provision. School attendance is improved because care staff work exceptionally well in partnership with the Looked After Children's Education Service to improve opportunities and outcomes for young people. A social worker commented, 'The home helped my young person attend school full time after she was refusing to attend at her previous residential home.'

The individualised needs of each young person including those related to their culture, religion, sexuality and background are well met by the homes location and diverse staff team. All staff members are expected to understand each young person's specific issues, their particular needs and the manner in which they communicate. The home works well in enhancing young people's esteem and quality of life by fully including them in the day-to-day decision making about all aspects of their placement while promoting inclusive, tolerant, socially acceptable behaviour in the wider community. Young people receive encouragement to engage in routines and activity designed to assist in developing tolerance and citizenship.

Sited in the city suburbs and located on a main trunk road the home has easy public transport enabling easy access to the broad range of community amenities and recreational facilities available locally. Considerable effort has been made to improve the building, particularly in communal areas to provide modern décor and comfortable furnishings that provide homely surroundings. Young people have use of a range of in house facilities, including a comfortable TV lounge, separate games room and computer to help prevent boredom. A compact if somewhat bland garden

area provides outdoor space for exercise. Young people are encouraged to respect and invest in their living environment. The building is well-maintained, kept clean and neutrally decorated. An effective building maintenance programme usually keeps on top of the homes upkeep and decoration. There are, however some parts of the home that require immediate attention such a damaged ground floor fire door and the replacement of broken bedroom furniture.

Up to date records of fire alarm tests, staff training, fire safety equipment checks and fire drills are maintained. Changes to the homes recently revised fire risk assessment relating to the relocation of some fire safety equipment, has not been forwarded to the local fire service as yet. This omission could potentially compromise any emergency response. Young people, however, confirm that they practice regular fire drills and know the escape procedures to follow should the alarms sound.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people say that they feel safe and do not have concerns about their safety. Presently they say that there is no bullying at the home because if they report this staff deal with the issues quickly and effectively. Staff training helps them understand and implement child protection procedures to keep young people safe. They understand safeguarding procedures and can formally report any child protection concerns they may have to the providers Child Protection Officer and the appropriate local authorities.

Some children and young people do occasionally go missing from the home. The related protocol takes account of individual risk assessments for each young person and confirms notification of all relevant professionals and agencies when such events occur. By taking seriously the impact of this behaviour and the potential risk to each young person the home is making steady progress by reducing the frequency of this behaviour while developing good working relationships with parents through identifying circumstances when young people are likely to go missing from home. Practical support from the local Community Support Police Officer informs young people of the risks and pitfalls of this behaviour. Comprehensive records confirm that appropriate action is always taken to return the young person to the home safely. Children and young people's safety improves through the rigorous approach taken to manage all unauthorised absences from the home.

Positive relationships between staff and young people benefits the management of behaviour. Individualised behaviour management plans advise staff how best to support, guide and influence young people. The home is effective when addressing difficult or challenging behaviour, helping children and young people establish routines that bring about gradual but positive change. Through immaturity and unfamiliarity with routine some children and young people experience difficulties managing their behaviour. Consistent support and set routines helps moderate such incidents without the need for the use of physical intervention. Annual training in the application of an approved methodology of physical restraint is provided for staff, but

in practice this is rarely used. Sanctions are seldom used other than when restorative measures are imposed to repair deliberate damage inflicted to belongings or the fabric of the home.

Because the manager is aware that changes to staffing may be disruptive, the stability provided for young people is important to ensure wherever possible staff from the home manage identified weaknesses or shortfalls in the daily roster. Young people therefore benefit from knowing which staff will be looking after them. Only suitable adults are employed at the home having been authorised by the provider's recruitment policy and practices. These ensure that all staff are thoroughly vetted before they start work with children. Visitors to the home must provide evidence of their identity and sign a visitors' book confirming their purpose for visiting and have staff oversight while in the home. These safeguarding systems ensure that young people receive staff reassurance and protection from unauthorised individuals.

The health and safety of all residents and visitors is taken seriously by the home. Effective management of the overall physical safety of the home is by on-going review of any potential dangers identified through generic and specific risk assessments that cover all aspects of daily living. An on-going maintenance programme addresses most environmental shortfalls in a timely manner. These potential risks include those from fire hazards, from the behaviour of young people and from recreation or outdoor activities. Risk assessments take into account changes to the daily routine, shortfalls in the fabric of the home and staffing levels. Suitable public and employee liability insurance is in place.

Leadership and management

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

A qualified and experienced Registered Manager supported by a committed staff team provide the home with consistent stability that affords children and young people support and security in their placement. Care staff aim to deliver a high quality of care that enables positive outcomes to be achieved.

Quality assurance systems which include consultation with external stakeholders, such as placing authorities, along with more regular input from young people, informs the managers day-to-day practice and the homes development plan. All placing authority social workers comment very positively about working as partners with the home to progress the placement plans for the children they supervise.

The operation, function and staffing numbers are accurately stated by the home's Statement of Purpose document. Maintaining staffing consistency through staff commitment to the home reinforces children's trust in their carers. Management records and staff feedback confirm that regular supervision and annual appraisal of individual performance effectively supports staff practice.

Staff access to the provider's comprehensive policies, procedures and guidance enable care practice to be enabled and developed. On-going staff training

opportunities further enhance individual skill development positively contributing to the overall competence and tenacity of the home when dealing with a broad range of emotional and behaviour difficulty.

Young people's personal records are stored securely and kept confidential. They cover all matters required by the regulations, inform staff practice and confirm how children can receive help and support to achieve; however not all individual records are completely up to date and this can reduce the effectiveness of staff communicating important child related information.

The home benefits from monthly monitoring visits by an independent person and the manager undertakes in-house quality control monitoring. The frequency and focus of the latter, while meeting regulatory requirements, does not always meet with the providers own procedural expectations. This means that record monitoring and audit trails confirming how the manager has addressed potential concerns is not always immediately obvious.

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* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.