

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Sharon Treadwell
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This home is one of a number of children's homes operated by a private provider organisation. The home is registered to accommodate two young people with emotional and 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 **outstanding**.

This home is outstanding because of the exceptional progress that young people make in relation to their starting points. Young people, their families and placing social workers have consistently positive views about the quality of care within the home and about staff practice. A comment from a parent sums up the very positive areas they identify: 'The rules and boundaries are clear here and there is real consistency in challenging inappropriate and unacceptable behaviours and they just keep at it. Things are never left, they are always followed through. The move to this home is the best thing that's ever happened for my child.'

Care planning and delivery is strongly individualised. Young people's extremely positive relationships, with the staff, support and encourage them to become more confident and able. The home has excellent working relationships with young people's families, placing authorities and associated professionals and young people's needs are central to these. Young people here really do benefit from a 'team around the child' approach.

The staff are ambitious for the young people to achieve their maximum potential and have excellent awareness of their individual care and support needs. They establish clear structures and boundaries, within which young people thrive. The stability and security, which these provide, enables young people to grow and mature progressively and to feel safe. Robust, individualised behaviour management strategies and risk assessments help young people to refine their more challenging behaviours within a safe and nurturing environment.

The manager and staff team are both reflective and responsive. This ensures that they quickly recognise and address any potential areas of weakness in either care or recording practices and that they consistently strive to improve the capacity of this service to improve outcomes for young people placed.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that young people, and the home, are provided with contact details for the young people's placing authority children's rights service (NMS 1.5)
- ensure that all rooms (with specific reference to one bedroom) are free from avoidable hazards (NMS 10.3)
- ensure that all staff receive first aid training at appropriate intervals (NMS 6.7)
- consider the potential improvement that the appointment of a deputy, with specific responsibility for this home, would make to arrangements for ensuring appropriate management cover when the registered manager is absent. (NMS 21.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

The young people, currently accommodated, have made exceptionally positive progress while living at this home. Young people are growing and maturing well because they are in a safe and well-structured environment where their behaviour is consistently well managed, within clearly stated boundaries, and their safety is strongly prioritised.

Young people have developed a more positive self-view and have acquired a better ability to interact positively and appropriately with their family, their peers and adults. For some young people, where family relationships had reached crisis point, bridges have been built as those young people are helped to understand and manage their feelings and to better manage behavioural traits, for example those associated with Asperger's syndrome. Where young people were exhibiting very violent and aggressive behaviours, these have significantly reduced. Young people respond well to the imposition of consistent and realistic boundaries, which have supported and encouraged them to review and refine their more challenging and socially unacceptable behaviours.

Young people develop a real sense of self-worth because they have sound relationships with staff who they trust and see as 'fair and honest'. Young people's individuality is strongly valued and celebrated and they feel that the staff really care

about them. Both young people made the same comment: 'The staff here understand me really well.' Young people make steady and consistent progress, which is recognised and rewarded and this makes them feel proud of themselves and of their achievements. Again both young people said virtually the same: 'I've made lots of progress generally and grown up a lot' and 'I think I have made real progress, some of this is because I've grown up now.'

Young people make significant progress in their willingness to engage positively with health service professionals such as the child and adolescent mental health service, dentists and opticians and, as a result, their mental and physical health has improved. One young person has managed to give up smoking recently, with encouragement and support from the staff.

Young people are engaging positively with education. Those still at school have 100% attendance and their school reports demonstrate the progress they have made in terms of both engagement and achievement, with good GCSE grades forecast. School reports contain comments such as: 'has changed considerably this year and is able to go with situations far more readily'; 'shows a bit more empathy with peers'; 'is more willing to get on with work without me there constantly.' One young person now has ambitions to undertake four A levels and hopes to apply for a university place. Young people are undertaking successful work placements to help them prepare for the transition to adulthood. Those who have left school are combining work experience and college attendance to promote their continuing development.

Young people are acquiring better self-care skills and are engaged, to varying degrees, in independence programmes to help them improve skills such as independent travel, money management and housekeeping. Some have been reluctant to engage consistently in independence programmes and their mental health issues, relating to Asperger's syndrome, do place limitations on their capacity in this area. Because programmes are personalised and flexible the young people get high levels of support to encourage them to achieve their maximum potential.

Young people's views are reflected well in placement planning and they have good opportunities to voice their opinions at regular house meetings where they help to determine the menu, plan activities and talk about any planned work around the home. Young people really value the time they spend with key workers and these sessions help them to understand their histories, behaviours and feelings. Young people talk animatedly about their individual personal hobbies and interests, such as horse riding and music, and how staff support them to pursue these.

Parents and social workers are extremely confident about the positive impact that placement at this home has had on young people's future prospects. Parents say: 'I am really proud of where he has moved on to. He has blossomed'; 'Consistency is the key, they really understand and meet her needs'; 'the home have helped transform my child's life for the better.'

Young people receive good information about what life at the home will be like from the young people's guide and from their interactions with staff. They are very aware

about how to complain and contact details for a range of national advocacy services are easily accessible for them. The young people's placing authority has not, however, provided details of their own children's rights service to either the young people or the home.

Quality of care

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

Young people are looked after by an experienced, dedicated, child-focused staff team who have high aspirations for them. There is tremendous flexibility evidenced in the work staff undertake with young people and individuality is recognised, celebrated and valued.

Placement planning is exceptionally robust and is highly responsive to young people's individual needs. Placement planning incorporates a behaviour management plan, a health care plan, a daily living plan and a contact plan and this ensures that young people's individual needs in all areas are given thorough and careful consideration. Clear education planning, structured routines for young people in terms of completing homework and bedtimes, and strong relationships with schools ensure that young people's educational attendance and achievement and work ethic is strongly promoted. Placement plans reflect realistic and achievable goals and their content is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect young people's progress or specific areas of difficulty. On each shift every young person has a member of staff specifically allocated to them to ensure that their support needs are fully monitored and met. Young people's designated key workers undertake very frequent individual sessions with them to talk about future plans, behaviours, feelings and relationships as well as discussing issues relating to education, health and social skill development. This approach ensures that young people's very individual care and support needs are consistently the primary focus. A good example of the flexibility of staff was when a young person was noted to be in crisis and amendments were made to the rota to limit the number of staff, specifically working with that young person, to those the young person related most positively with. This helped the young person to work through the crisis period and limited their stress and distress at a difficult time.

Young people's health care needs are well met. Young people are encouraged to visit the doctor, dentist and optician when needed. Staff have managed to encourage a young person to receive dental treatment where several years have elapsed since their last visit. Medication is safely administered and properly recorded. Staff receive regular updates to first aid training but, currently, two staff members are overdue for receipt of this training.

Staff have a very sound awareness of young people's histories and their work with young people demonstrates an excellent grasp of the young people's individual needs and functioning capacity. The support that staff provide is consistent and is responsive to young people's expressed and observed needs. Staff have, for example, accompanied young people to school or college, at the young people's

request, because they have said it reassures them.

Staff build exceptionally effective partnerships with young people's placing social workers, associated professionals and young people's families. Social workers and parents effuse about how good communication is between themselves and the staff saying 'Their communication is spot on, they always ring to update me of everything.' The manager and staff are involved in monthly core group meetings in respect of each young person. These meetings involve all associated professionals getting together with young people's families to discuss progress, presenting issues of concern and the continuing capacity of current plans to meet the young person's needs. It is this 'team around the child' approach, according to professionals, staff and families, which engenders the consistency that helps young people to make such commendable progress.

Generally the home provides a very comfortable and homely environment and young people value this. Where young people have inflicted considerable damage to the premises, early in their placements, this has now ceased and young people's families say that the young people now very strongly regard this as their home. A young person has, however, accumulated an extremely large amount of electrical equipment. This, together with the young person's propensity to untidiness with their personal belongings, means that the bedroom is extremely cluttered. Although this has been discussed with the young person, in terms of health and safety, it has not been satisfactorily addressed. Should the young person need to exit the room at night, in an emergency situation, there is currently not always a clear pathway for him to do so.

The staff are proactive, not only in facilitating contact for young people with their families, but also in working with young people to make sure that contact is positive and enjoyable. Staff support has helped young people to improve relationships with their families, where those relationships had become strained because of the young people's presenting behaviours. One parent comments: 'The home has been brilliant in supporting my son's educational, emotional and healthcare needs. Staff are approachable and available even in the most difficult circumstances. They have been great in helping me keep contact with my son who lives at a great distance'.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Staff have a very good understanding of their reporting and recording responsibilities should child protection or safeguarding concerns arise. Clear and robust policies and procedures guide them in this.

Young people feel safe at the home and their families and placing social workers are confident about their safety there. Behaviour management is a real strength of the staff at this home because staff take time to fully understand how the young people's past experiences, mental health issues and moods influence their attitudes

and behaviours. Staff are trained in behaviour management, physical intervention and safeguarding and this training guides their individualised approach to young people's presenting behaviours. Sound and trusting relationships, robust routines, strong boundaries, clear communication and effective team working ensure that behaviour management plans are consistently implemented and are effective in helping young people to behave in a safer and more socially acceptable way.

Very robust individual risk assessments ensure that young people are able to engage in a wide range of activities with proper support and supervision. Where young people have previously demonstrated a propensity for absences without authority, promoting concern for their welfare and well-being, these have significantly reduced. There has been only one instance of this since April 2013. When this presented as an issue of concern with a young person, at the time of initial admission, the home utilised its protocol with the police to hold an intervention meeting to discuss strategies to reduce risks to the young person's safety. Where young people have previously engaged in self-harming behaviours this has also reduced. The staff have received training in the areas of self-harm and child sexual exploitation to ensure that they are fully equipped to support young people where these behaviours are seen as a potential risk. Risk assessments clearly identify the actions staff should take initially to help young people to regain control over their own behaviours. Young people are actively involved in discussing strategies for managing their behaviours and it is particularly positive that each young person's behaviour management plan identifies their preferred hold, should physical intervention be necessary. The use of physical intervention has significantly reduced as young people have settled in placement, established relationships with the staff and been supported to reduce their levels of aggression towards themselves and others. There have been no physical interventions since April this year.

Staff utilise key work sessions to promote young people's awareness of their own personal safety and to help them to realise which of their behaviours place them at increased risk of harm. These sessions incorporate discussion of how to recognise and manage bullying. None of the young people identify bullying as an issue for them.

Clear and well understood fire evacuation procedures and sound health and safety checks promote young people's safety within the home. There are very robust recruitment processes and all visitors to the home are monitored and checked. This protects young people from exposure to adults who could pose a threat to their safety.

Leadership and management

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

The Registered Manager has been in post since September 2007, when the home was initially registered. The home has consistently retained a good or outstanding rating in all subsequent inspections by Ofsted. Where requirements or recommendations have been identified, during those inspections, the home has

consistently addressed them in a timely and appropriate way. One recommendation was made during the previous inspection, which related to the need for young people's individual records to better reflect the home's policy on physical restraint. This has been implemented and additional personalisation incorporated with young people's behaviour management plans now reflecting their preferred hold, should restraint be required.

The manager is registered to manage two children's homes, belonging to the provider organisation, which are geographically closely located. There is a deputy manager who manages the homes in the manager's absence. Generally the manager and deputy, between them, provide a consistent managerial presence in both homes. This provides for excellent managerial oversight and monitoring of practice and supports them in consistently communicating their high expectations to staff about sustaining improvement. When one of them is absent the capacity to maintain that consistent presence is restricted. There is no failure here to meet national minimum standards, since there are a significant number of experienced and qualified senior staff, but the provider organisation is recommended to consider the improved managerial capacity that a deputy allocated to each of the homes would provide. A staff team of sixteen operates across both homes.

Care provided to young people is wholly responsive to their needs because there are robust systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the care and support they receive. There is real flexibility to review and revise the way that care and support is given, if it is not helping young people to achieve care plan objectives or helping them to refine challenging or potentially unsafe behaviours and attitudes. Monthly core group meetings represent an extremely effective way for the home to review, with all associated professionals and young people's families, the progress young people are making and any refinements needed in respect of care delivery.

Staff receive good quality training with regular updates in core training such as safeguarding, health and safety, equality and diversity and behaviour management. Staff training is tailored well to help them to meet the specific needs of the young people they care for. Staff have received autism training and have had support and advice on meeting young people's specific needs.. This has supported them well in meeting the needs of young people with Asperger's syndrome. Team meetings and regular, individual supervision provide opportunities for them to reflect on their work with the young people and discuss their own development needs.

Both the manager, and the provider organisation, maintain robust oversight of practice within the home and give sound consideration to presenting patterns and trends. The manager's monthly monitoring report is comprehensive and incorporates a thorough examination of all records. Monthly visits to the home, on behalf of the provider organisation, examine all areas of care practice and incorporate the views of young people, their families and their placing social workers.

Records, relating to young people, are retained to a very high standard. These records provide young people with a clear and comprehensive overview of the time they spend at the home and a very clear demonstration of the commendable

progress they have made.

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.