

Inspection report for Children's Home

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Inspector	Christy Wannop
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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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

This home provides short to medium term care and accommodation for up to two young people aged between eight and 17 years of age, who display either extremely challenging, inappropriate sexualised or destructive behaviours. The service is operated by a large national provider of children's homes. The home provides each young person with safe adult support, clear and consistent boundaries and access to a range of therapeutic, educational, social and health related services. At no time will the age gap between young people residing in the home be greater than five years. The manager is also registered for another small home one mile away, and the staff team are shared between these two homes. At the time of inspection two young people were in residence and both participated in the inspection.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was a full unannounced inspection that evaluated all key national minimum standards in each of the Every Child Matters outcome areas, plus organisation. This children's home has established outstanding outcomes for children over several inspections, and this continues to be the case. There are no regulatory shortfalls; and the service exceeds many of the national minimum standards. This inspection finds three shortfalls in the home's documentation. These relate to emergency admissions, children's involvement in their care plans and administration of medication.

The service has cared imaginatively for some very challenging young people within the last twelve months, and this inspection found that the home continues to provide an excellent standard of care and support. This helps young people in their education, personal, social and emotional development. The home's manager provides strong and effective leadership which results in staff being clearly focused and guided in meeting the needs of young people. Young people get close individual attention from trained staff. Relationships are based on respect and trust. Young people benefit from living in a home that is consistently managed and organised to achieve the best possible outcomes for young people with challenging needs.

Improvements since the last inspection

No were no previous actions or recommendations made at the last inspection in March 2010.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There are excellent arrangements to ensure that children have every opportunity to enjoy good physical, emotional, and mental health. Young people are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles, learn about sexual health and not get involved with drugs. Staff have a good awareness of emotional well-being and provide holistically for children to experience happy, healthy lives. There are excellent systems to identify young people's health needs and ensure that they get the health care they need. Social workers describe good liaison and consultation with specialist mental health professionals to promote good health. Arrangements for administration of medication are generally good, and in practice children receive the medication and first aid treatment they need from trained staff. However, the organisation has extensive policies and procedures for administering medicine and treatment, and documentation runs parallel to the home's monitored dosage system. These duplicate recording systems for medication are potentially confusing and do not combine to provide a robust audit trail of administration or stock control of medication.

Young people enjoy healthy, hygienically prepared and nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs. They have plenty of opportunities to plan, shop for and prepare meals of their choosing. Their involvement in this is very much part of the expectation of sharing meals in the daily life in the home. Menus show an adventurous range of meals from around the world, Asian curries and stir fries, Italian pasta dishes, and African foods. Social workers say that children like healthy outdoor activities, and are encouraged to choose healthy foods when they go shopping.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The service has previously established an outstanding focus on safeguarding and protection matters. Systems to ensure young people are safe and sound are well managed through strong leadership, effective policy, procedure and good practice.

Young people's privacy is respected and they know that information about them is generally confidential. Staff act as 'good parents' and protect them when it is necessary to search for items which may cause harm to them. Complaints about the home are investigated in accordance with the organisation's policy and the registered person takes account of these in her audits of the service. Young people know their complaints are taken seriously and feel able to make representation or complaint if they are unhappy with any aspect of living in the home.

Child protection systems are robust. Young people are safe and say they feel safe at the home. Trained and experienced staff promote young people's welfare and know what to do in the event of an allegation or suspicion of abuse and how to plan for,

and deliver safe care in practice. Professionals say that staff 'constantly' give young people advice about staying safe.

Bullying is well managed by staff who are alert to group dynamics and individual need. This results in young people being protected from power imbalances within the group and an atmosphere where bullying is known to be unacceptable. Young people want to be at the home and effective strategies result in a reduction incidents of going missing or running away. Young people do have behaviour that is very challenging and can be unpredictable and angry. Staff are trained to use physical intervention and each incident is described in a range a range of documents, including the required legal record. Staff help them to behave well and encourage socially acceptable behaviour through well thought out constructive responses. Strategies take account of the impact of cognitive ability and communication needs on behaviour, and the manager actively seeks behavioural support from advisors within the organisation and the child and adolescent mental health services. Social workers report that when children act inappropriately, staff try to explain how to change this kind of behaviour. They reward young people for positive attitudes and actions and encourage change through positive respectful relationships. Children say they get on well with most staff, that rules are, 'very fair' and they accept the consequences if they break them.

The manager takes comprehensive action to make sure that children live in a home that provides physical safety and security, and is free from unnecessary risks. Young people say that staff, 'tell me all the time about being safe outside.' Risk assessments are updated frequently and social workers are asked for their views as part of this process. Children are safeguarded from abuse by robust procedures for selecting and vetting all staff and volunteers and the monitoring of visitors. Recruitment processes and staff files are maintained at the organisation's head office. However the manager retains Schedule 2 evidence that shows all staff have been through a complete recruitment process and are safe to work with children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people receive excellent individual support, and say they can talk to trusted adults. The assessments and placement plan are the basis of the regular key working sessions and drive the quality of the work carried out by staff in their one to one contact with young people. Key workers are sensitive and fully informed about young people's individual needs and wishes. They give help and guidance about personal, health, social and sex and relationship education in spontaneous one to one key working sessions. Young people know that their cultural, religious and racial identities are respected and that any additional support for mental or emotional or physical health needs will be organised. Thorough, creative risk assessments describe individual need and promote opportunities for self reliance within a safe framework. The Registered Manager is tenacious in advocating for, and securing, essential additional services for children in need, including independent visitors, children's advocates, and additional therapeutic input.

Young people's educational achievement is actively promoted, valued and seen as part of their preparation for adulthood. They are supported to attend and enjoy school, and achieve according to ability in secondary school or college. The organisation operates a school locally and children may attend. Professionals appreciate the support staff give to young people in school or college, and staying with them, if needed, during lessons. They know that staff encourage children to spend wisely on computers and things that will benefit their education.

Young people can pursue individual interests and develop confidence in their skills and staff support and encourage them to engage in leisure activities that offer social opportunities. Young people are busy and not bored; they get the most out of life and enjoy recreation. One young person described enjoyable fishing trips and having specialist newspapers and magazines to support his interests.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The majority of placements are planned and children's needs are effectively and comprehensively assessed before they come to live at the home in these cases. However, the Registered Manager has not been involved in all admission decisions this year. Young people have been admitted in an emergency and without proper recorded consideration of the impact this would have on existing residents. Such admissions are not within the admission criteria for the home, although they have subsequently been safely managed. Individual placement plans are of good quality and are highly effective documents for the basis of day to day work in the home. Young people's needs and development are regularly reviewed through the statutory review system and also through the regular key working sessions. In this way, young people know they are cared for and are making progress at the home. One section of the placement plan is written in first person singular to reflect the child's voice, but one young person reported that these were not his words and he had not been involved in drawing up this section of the plan.

Staff help children to maintain constructive contact with families, friends and other people who play a significant role in their lives. Families are welcomed at the home and young people appreciate these good relationships with their families. Clear partnership working arrangements and good communication with families and social workers ensure this happens according to the placing authority plan and the young person's wishes. Children have a strong voice in the home. Staff encourage them to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the home is run through a range of formal and informal consultation meetings. All children, even those with communication difficulties are able to communicate their views and be active in making decisions about their lives. One child said, 'I shout sometimes. They always listen and things change'

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people have care and active support that helps them to prepare for adulthood. Staff implement Pathway Plans and work in partnership to secure smooth transitions to life beyond the children's home. Young people may not always wish to comply and staff are persistent in their message about self reliance and the need to build skills. Children say they are encouraged to save and can choose furnishings and decorations. They say they are helped to be independent through the programmes run by staff. Staff promote an independent attitude and some young people clearly enjoy cooking for themselves and others.

Children live in a pleasant home with enough space and facilities to meet their needs. Young people have plenty of private space in their large bedrooms, and share a lounge. A conservatory houses the dining room. There is one toilet and bathroom shared by children and staff. The organisation has administrative offices nearby and this provides additional space for meeting and training for staff.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The service is able to provide such well organised, sensitive care for children and promote their welfare because of effective leadership. Professionals say staff 'try hard' and are very dedicated to young people. This service is organised around young people's needs; it prioritises and seeks to improve their life experiences. Young people have the information they need about life in the home so they know what to expect, how they will be cared for and who they are likely to share with. Parents and placing authorities also have a clear statement about the operation of the home.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Policy, procedure, training and good practice helps children to know that their individual needs on the basis of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, age and religion are valued and the service is able to meet their diverse needs in everyday life in the home.

The Registered Manager is very experienced, well qualified and provides an authoritative, child focused steer for the staff team. The manager is also the Registered Manager for another small home nearby. The staff team is shared and works in both homes. Staff management systems ensure competent, confident, experienced staff provide the right care for children. One child said, 'when I leave I will miss them.'

There are clear deputising arrangements, with a deputy and two senior staff; and staff in charge of shifts have substantial experience. A high proportion have achieved NVQ 3 in working with children and young people. Staff are qualified, trained and experienced and there is a clear staffing policy of two staff to two children, day and

night. The Registered Manager ensures additional support children for who require higher staffing ratios. This works in practice to give children continuity, a mix of male and female staff, security and specific support children need for ethnic and cultural backgrounds and disabilities. Training and development opportunities are linked to the needs of the children and the purpose of the home. Staff are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare.

The welfare of the children in the home is promoted by thorough monthly monitoring by the senior management of the organisation and by regular review and audit by the Registered Manager. Children benefit from living in a setting where the feedback on how the home is operating is taken seriously and improvements are made when identified. Records about children reflect their individuality. They are securely stored and contribute to the child's progress and development.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure children's welfare is safeguarded by robust policies and procedures for administering medications; for example, that parallel recording systems for administration and stock control are robust and accurate (NMS 13)
- ensure children know the content of their placement plans according to their level of understanding; for example, are involved in creating the sections written in the first person singular or child's voice (NMS 2.6)
- ensure children move into the home in a planned and sensitive manner, for example by ensuring an admission impact assessment in all cases and no emergency admissions unless this is included as a function within the Statement of Purpose. (NMS 5)