

Inspection report for Children's Home

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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 is a single placement children's home for children and young people aged between nine and 17 years. It is operated by a national independent children's services provider. The home is situated in a residential area close to a seaside town. There is easy access to larger centres which can provide extensive sports and leisure activities.

The home is registered to accommodate children and young people who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. In particular, they may have a history of trauma, abuse or family breakdown. Short to medium term placements may be offered. Several staff hold qualifications in counselling and the home is supported by consultancy from a registered psychotherapist.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was a very positive key inspection of the home, which was announced with short notice to allow for the presence of the acting manager. There is currently no Registered Manager in post, so the future management arrangements are uncertain, but the company has a date set for interviews. The acting manager, who was the former deputy, is looking after the home to a high standard.

The young person was at home during the inspection and took part by showing the inspector her room and commenting on her care. The home achieves good outcomes for young people, with several outstanding areas. Particular strengths include the qualifications and skills of the staff team and the amount of individual support offered to young people. Placement planning documentation and attention to detail in meeting children's needs are also exceptionally good. Documentation and practice around young people's safety are also maintained and carried out to a very high standard.

Some minor areas for further work have been identified. Three recommendations have been made, none of which directly impact on young people's safety.

Improvements since the last inspection

Two recommendations were made at the last inspection. The first related to finding an independent person with whom young people may speak in order to establish reasons for any absence without authority. The home now has close links with the local police, who may speak with young people after their return to the home.

A second recommendation related to the fire risk assessment. This was re-inspected on this occasion and is very detailed. Both recommendations have therefore been addressed.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people's health care needs are met exceptionally well in this home. Staff currently prepare most of the meals, but encourage young people to help. The young person has been involved in cooking interesting meals appropriate to her cultural background. Staff have researched some recipes for her to follow.

Foods consumed are well recorded and show a healthy, well-balanced diet. The home has a small kitchen but benefits from a large garden, where some vegetables and fruits are grown for the table.

Young people's needs are identified on detailed health care plans. They are registered with local doctors, dentists and opticians. Keyworkers meet with young people each week, specifically to discuss health-related topics. For example, they may talk about misuse of drugs, alcohol or relevant sexual health issues. This work is linked with educational outcomes. Staff employ their considerable craft work skills to help young people to illustrate various health issues.

Some staff in the home have qualifications in counselling and other therapeutic skills. They receive training to guide them in relation to adolescent mental health issues and the risk of eating disorders. Staff may seek further advice from the company's consultant psychotherapist, who visits the home on a regular basis. He also provides training on attachment issues and child development and can advise on placement planning for individual young people.

All staff receive regularly updated training in first aid and in medicines handling. Receipts, administration and disposal of medicines are appropriately recorded. Any medicines in use are stored safely, although there are none in the home at present.

Appropriately signed consent forms are in place to authorise any necessary medical treatment. Young people receive an initial medical appointment with a local doctor soon after admission. During that appointment, the doctor authorises a list of non-prescription medicines specifically suitable for that young person. No other homely remedies are used.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Young people in this home have their own bedroom, but there is no lock on the door to ensure privacy. The reason given for this is that it is a home for one young person. Staff say that they always knock before entering the room, so privacy is not

an issue, but there is no risk assessment in place to justify the present resident not having a lock on her door. Young people have lockable storage space where they can keep personal items. They may have mobile phones during the day, but must hand these in at night.

The home has an effective complaints policy and log book in place. Young people receive the children's guide before, or soon after, admission to the home. This booklet explains how to raise concerns and how they will be responded to. There have been no recent complaints from young people or neighbours. Staff have worked very hard to reduce the previously high incidence of complaints from neighbours and there have now been none for almost two years. This has been achieved through good communication.

There are suitable measures in place to ensure the protection of young people from abuse, including full risk assessments and an agreement on safe use of the internet. The home has a copy of the Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures. These, together with regularly updated training, ensure that staff are aware of how to respond in the event of any disclosure or incident. The acting manager has attended a level 2 child protection course.

The home has excellent risk assessments in place to identify and address risks of bullying. If there were to be an incident of bullying, the acting manager says that a multi-agency meeting would be convened. The home would not terminate any placement due to bullying, but would work constructively with the situation. The manager is clear that racial abuse towards any person is totally unacceptable in the home.

There are clear procedures to guide staff in the event of a young person being absent without authority. The home has a pack which staff take with them when they go to search for the young person. This provides them with everything they need, including a photograph, description and all the necessary forms. The home has excellent links with the local police to help them to advise young people whose behaviour puts them at risk.

Sanctions in the home are fair and appropriate to the incident. House rules are clearly stated and explained to the young person on arrival. Physical intervention is carefully considered, especially when a young person has a specific medical condition. Advice is sought from the doctor and also from the company's physical intervention consultant. Any restraints are well recorded, with the relative positions of each member of staff drawn onto a diagram. This is very good practice.

The home has a family-style bathroom with a lockable door, which is shared by young people and staff. The water is very hot, with appropriate warning signs. However, the acting manager said that if a young person with specific disabilities is admitted, the temperature would be adjusted to a suitable level for that young person.

There are effective measures in place to ensure young people's safety in the home.

Induction into the fire procedures takes place for any new staff or young people. There is an excellent fire risk assessment and all fire safety checks are completed at the appropriate intervals.

There are also risk assessments in place on the premises, all activities and on individual young people. Travel packs provided for external activities are an excellent safeguard to help staff deal with any crisis whilst away from the home. These contain information about the young person, risk assessments and spare incident forms. A camera is always taken for recording positive aspects of the activity, as well as any untoward incidents.

Staff recruitment is managed to a very high standard. The company's human resources department run staff assessment days, but the home managers are directly involved in interviewing prospective staff.

Two staff files were inspected and both were found to contain all the recruitment check information required by Schedule 2 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001. Telephone checks are always conducted to verify written references and Criminal Records Bureau checks are renewed every three years. The company seeks references from any past employer linked to the care sector, so this is often more than the minimum of two required.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people's needs are met exceptionally well in this home. Staff are supported by effective and specialised training to help them in their work. There are detailed handover meetings between shifts in order to ensure that the incoming team can continue the work with the young person seamlessly. They hold regular one to one meetings with young people in order to address their specific concerns and needs. The home has access to specialised, qualified therapeutic support for young people.

Staff also address young people's need to maintain their personal history and identity very well. For example, they work with young people to provide memory books containing photographs and memorabilia to remind the young person of positive activities and events in the home.

The home ensures that young people are enrolled in a suitable educational resource appropriate to their needs. When there is a statement of special educational needs, this is reflected in the placement plan. Young people currently in the home have only recently been admitted, and so are not yet in education. The acting manager sees this as a priority and is working hard to arrange some educational provision.

In the meantime, the staff use imaginative ways to engage the young person in educational activities such as projects, work in the library and craft work. For example, they took the young person on a nature walk and collected items to make a nature collage. Staff also encourage young people to watch educational television

programmes to help with their learning.

Young people are encouraged to suggest suitable activities inside and outside the home. The young person is to go horse riding this week, because this had been an area of interest in a previous placement. Staff arrange many varied trips to local attractions. The home also has a very large collection of games and indoor activities.

Staff at this home show considerable and exceptional creative flair in their work. This has contributed towards the judgement of outstanding in this outcome area.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people have well-written placement plans which help staff to address their needs. Cultural information is recorded sensitively. The acting manager discussed how she had worked with the placing authority to help ensure that the current young person's cultural needs can be met by a staff team who do not reflect the young person's ethnicity.

Placement plans include every aspect of the young person's routine, interests and needs. The acting manager ensures that all staff are aware of the placement plan and any day-to-day changes. Handover meetings cover therapeutic needs in addition to routine information.

Placement plans are reviewed after any statutory review meetings. Key workers meet with young people before their statutory reviews and encourage them to express their views. Staff will assist with this if necessary.

The home has an excellent contact plan in place, which the social worker must complete before admission. Clear arrangements are made for contact and staff support family members in visiting their child as much as they can.

The home's admissions procedure is detailed and comprehensive. One recent admission was very traumatic for the young person, but this was no reflection on the home. Because of the emergency nature of the admission, the young person was not able to visit the home beforehand, but staff have worked very hard to help them to settle.

Young people are regularly consulted about the conduct of the home. They are invited to the first part of each team meeting and consultation takes place daily. The present young person does not have an advocate. This was discussed with the acting manager, who said she would raise it with the placing authority.

Although it is early days in the placement, relationships between staff and young people are very positive. Staff engage with the young person all the time and enjoy constructive activities together.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

There are currently no young people in the home who are working towards independence. However, previous residents of the home often contact staff and continue to receive support from them. The home has an independence programme which is used for young people at the appropriate stage in their placement. There are good links with a local charity shop, which provides work experience for some young people.

Young people are well provided for financially, with £7 per week pocket money and £12 for clothing. There are financial incentives in place to support good behaviour. The company has worked hard to ensure that young people from specific ethnic backgrounds have access to suitable hair treatments and personal requisites. Young men receive £1.60 per week less money than young women. This was discussed and the reason given by the company is that the additional money buys sanitary protection. However, young men also have personal hygiene needs specific to their gender, so this is not equitable.

The home is situated in a quiet residential street on the outskirts of a seaside town. It is close to larger towns with extensive sports and leisure facilities. The house is well presented, clean and provides good basic accommodation for one young person and the staff team. Furniture and fittings are of good quality. The young person's bedroom is pleasant and attractive. Staff had purchased flowers to welcome the young person to the home. These had been nicely arranged in her bedroom.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff have worked hard to meet the needs of young people from different ethnicity to themselves. The children's guide contains information about important religious festivals from a variety of faiths. The area for further consideration is the differential pocket money rate for young men and young women.

The home has a good Statement of Purpose which contains all the required information to help placing social workers and parents understand the aims and provisions of the home. The Statement is clear about the sort of behavioural or health issues that can be considered. Some minor amendments to the Statement were completed during the inspection.

Staff are supervised and supported to an exceptionally high standard. The probationary period lasts for six months and during that time, staff receive supervision every two weeks. Thereafter, supervision is monthly and there are annual appraisals. The company has a person in charge of therapeutic services who visits every month to provide consultation.

Staff in this home are exceptionally well qualified to work with young people. Six out of the seven people on the staff team are qualified to National Vocational Qualification at level 3 (NVQ 3). One recently appointed member of staff has been enrolled. There are plenty of staff on duty to meet young people's needs. Shift patterns are adjusted to minimise disruption to young people, so that some shifts run for 48 hours instead of the usual 24 hours.

Staff receive a comprehensive programme of induction to prepare them for working with young people. This includes food hygiene, child protection and first aid. The home has its own NQV assessor, who also holds a qualification in preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector.

The home has regular visits from the company's representative, who conducts an inspection to comply with Regulation 33 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001. The acting manager of the home finds the resulting reports useful, which is their main purpose achieved. However, the numerical scoring system for each aspect of the home provides limited qualitative information to an external reader.

The former Registered Manager has moved to another home within the company. The acting manager has kept very good records of her management checks within the home. She explained how she carries out this task and is clear about her monitoring responsibilities. The acting manager holds NVQ 4 in Leadership and Management and a qualification at level 4 in therapeutic counselling. She has five years of experience in residential childcare and has been the deputy manager of this home for three years.

The young person's file contains all the information required by Schedule 3 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001. Files are securely kept in the office and are not accessible except by those authorised to read them.

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 that young people can lock their bedroom doors if they wish to do so, unless there is a risk assessment in place supporting the absence of a door lock (NMS 9.1)
- ensure that young people of both genders receive equal allowances for personal requisites (NMS 11.9)
- consider reviewing the format of the Regulation 33 reports to provide qualitative information on the home's strengths and areas for further development. (NMS 32.1)

