

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Deirdra Keating
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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 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.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is owned by a large company and provides long term placements on behalf of local authorities. The home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to three young people of either gender between the ages of 10 and 17 years. The home offers care and accommodation for young people who may have emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Overall effectiveness

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

The service plans care for each young person that generally takes into account their individual needs and unique characteristics. However, this does not always translate into positive outcomes for young people. There are areas which the service promotes well including, education and listening to young people's views about the quality of their care. Relationships between staff and young people are changeable. Staff try to keep young people safe but this is not always possible as there are periods of major disruption at the service. During these times while young people may not recognise they are unsafe the events reported are concerning. The strengths and weaknesses of the service are recognised by the management team. However, the action taken to address some of these shortfalls has generally been ineffective resulting in the following areas for improvement being identified in the organisation, monitoring and facilities available in the home.

Areas for improvementStatutory 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
25 (2001)	ensure that there are a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working at the children's home (Regulation 25 (b))	31/08/2011
15 (2001)	provide children accommodated in the home at all reasonable times with a telephone, which they may use without reference to persons working in the home (Regulation 15 (a))	31/08/2011
23 (2001)	ensure that all parts of the children's home are free from hazards to health and safety, this refers to the unsecured and shattered first floor broken window panel and broken trampoline (Regulation 23 (a))	24/08/2011

21 (2001)	ensure that medicines are stored in secure place so as to prevent any child accommodated from having unsupervised access to it (Regulation 21 (a))	31/08/2011
31 (2001)	ensure that all parts of the children's home are kept clean and reasonably decorated and maintained.(Regulation 31 (2)(e))	28/09/2011

Recommendations

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

- provide a suitable environment that helps children prepare for and supports them into adulthood (NMS 12)
- ensure that physical restrictions on normal movement in the home for one child do not impose similar restrictions on other children (NMS 10)
- provide the necessary facilities for a range of activities, this is in particular reference to activity resources in the home and vehicles (NMS 10)
- promote management of the home that ensures staff's work is consistent with the home's policies (NMS 21.3)
- ensure that the registered provider's report of a visit carried out under Regulation 33 visit details actions to address any issues that are raised. (NMS 21.8 21.9)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people report that they are generally happy at the home and speak positively about the core staff team. Young people are provided with key workers they can identify with. Gender, age and race are all considered to help young people develop positive views of themselves and identify with staff. Good relationships with staff have helped young people develop skills in sport and activities that they enjoy. These help young people to channel energy and emotion constructively. However, young people's uptake of these activities is not always consistent. The staff work with young people to gain an understanding of their differences and promote acceptance and respect between one another. This works at times, however, there are discriminatory remarks made by young people to young people and to staff. The reports for these incidents include regretful comments and apologies from young people showing an emotional awareness.

Young people's general health needs are met and they are registered with local health professionals. The organisation employs therapeutic staff which some young people are willing to engage with in order to gain a better understanding of their individual backgrounds and family dynamics. Young people are supported to have contact with their families and some young people have their own mobile phones.

Other young people have no personal phone and there is no telephone provided by home which they can use without asking staff. This can make privacy for unrestricted contact difficult.

The house is in a rural location with easy access to local towns and amenities. The staff clean the house and a programme of refurbishment has been underway. Parts of the environment are clean, but this is not consistent throughout and some areas of the house and garden require cleaning and maintenance.

Young people have made educational achievements while at the service. They have regular routines of getting up and ready in the morning resulting in consistent attendance in school. Young people are supported well by staff regarding school and difficulties they encounter during the school day. Staff always take their concerns seriously and advocate well for young people. Young people feel supported in their attendance because they know staff will listen to their feelings and take action accordingly.

Some young people have completed their compulsory education and are preparing for adult lives. The manager and staff work closely with placing authorities to ensure that each young person's future needs are considered fully. Young people are encouraged to make preparation for independence and develop practical skills while at the home. These include using public transport, managing personal laundry and cooking evening meals. Space has been allocated for young people to buy and store food. However, young people cannot access these areas because they are kept locked and have to request even small and simple items from staff. This does not promote preparation for independence.

Quality of care

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

Young people speak highly of the permanent staff team and especially the manager. They have developed relationships with staff that contrast greatly. At times they are very positive but also deteriorate into abusive and destructive behaviour. There are also times when the house is fun and young people enjoy staff's company. Staff are genuinely attached to young people spending quality time away with them, taking them out for meals, playing board games and helping them stay physically fit. Staff provide care for young people in line with their individual backgrounds, cultural needs and unique characteristics as outlined in their placement plans. Staff have a sufficient understanding of these and make provision for their care.

Staff value young people's views and spend time discussing household issues and listening to their ideas. Many of these requests shape the routines and activities in the house. Young people are fully aware of the complaints procedure which is made available with support and guidance about how to complain. Complaints from young people are investigated thoroughly and clearly, reporting shows outcomes of these with young people's comments.

The house is in a rural location and young people require driving or use public transport to access nearby towns. The service currently has only one vehicle making transport arrangements difficult to organise. Young people are strongly encouraged to undertake healthy pursuits that interest them and staff try to facilitate this as best as they can. There are some activities in the house such as a games room with air hockey and a computer. However, repeated incidents of damage have left the home with few resources and little to do. This was discussed at the inspection and addressed immediately by senior management staff.

Staff help motivate young people into building daily routines that contribute to successful attendance in education and promote healthy lifestyles. These include regular settling times, attending regular health appointments and provision of a healthy balanced diet. Staff cook healthy meals for young people, taking account of their tastes and preferences. Young people can snack, however, they have not learned to regulate food intake and therefore most foods have to be requested from staff resulting in a controlled and restrictive environment.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say that they feel safe at the home and can approach the manager with any concerns which they know will be investigated fully. There is a clear procedure for any allegations made by young people which involves the wider organisation and the local authority. Clear protocols are always adhered to in-line with the child protection policy to ensure that young people are protected from harm. This includes a robust recruitment policy to ensure staff are safe and suitable to work with young people.

Staff recognise each young person's vulnerabilities and triggers to destructive behaviours and try to reward positive behaviours. Despite this and extra staffing during the evenings there have been many incidences when young people have made themselves and staff unsafe at night. Young people have good intentions and show remorse following these disturbances. However, there is a culture of young people being abusive to staff and causing serious damage to the house. These incidences occur regularly and are increasingly out of control. This has resulted in young people who put themselves in highly unsafe situations in order to access areas that are locked including the medication cabinet. In addition vehicles have been taken and damaged and the house has been evacuated overnight following significant water and fire damage. Staff are keen not to criminalise young people but have had to call the emergency services on many occasions for their safety. Staff always take action to make young people safe and minimise danger. Staff have made adjustments to the home in order to prevent this resulting in a restrictive environment. There are constant repairs and replacements to damage, although, during the inspection hazards were observed following a recent incident. Staff try to provide interventions and have reflective discussions with young people about the consequences of their behaviour. However, this cycle continues causing a volatile

environment that places staff and young people in danger.

A series of challenging placements have resulted in behaviour being learned and copied by young people who are keen to be accepted in the peer group. Behaviour management strategies are not working adequately. The control methods used such as the restriction of access to several areas of the house has culminated in young people who go to greater and more dangerous lengths to access these areas. The locking of several areas also leaves some young people restricted due to others behaviour. Physical restraint is very rarely used by the staff, although, any physical contacts made with young people during difficult periods are reported on well with appropriate detail.

Leadership and management

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

The home is managed by a dedicated manager who actively participates in the day to day running of the home and leads the staff team through practice issues. The manager monitors the home and records compiled by staff, and has a realistic overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the service.

Regular visits are also conducted monthly these include talking to staff and young people and are detailed and thorough. The monthly reports raise concerns about young people's behaviour. However, no actions in response to visits have been raised to address some of the issues reported on. The home has an improvement plan and has partly undertaken a refurbishment plan to the décor of the house. However, constant repairs and replacements have minimised any improvements to the house and resulted in a house that requires urgent maintenance. Action was taken to address these areas immediately when raised during the inspection.

The aims and objectives in the statement of purpose are generally met. Policies and procedures underpin all areas of staff practice providing guidelines for all staff. However, in some instances these are not followed by staff or regulated by the manager.

There is an established staff team led by the registered manager and overseen by an operations manager. Contingency arrangements are made in the absence of the manager to ensure staff are supported. However, low staff numbers have led to staff trying to manage competing demands and young people having to wait around for long periods of time. In addition staff are lone working at times and staff rotas confirm that agency staff are often called upon. This has contributed to young people's behaviours becoming increasingly out of control.

Supervisions are up to date and staff say they feel supported by the manager. Records are stored in the office in locked cabinets and staff are careful to maintain confidentiality and security. Overall reporting is of a good standard and monitored well.

Equality and diversity practice is **satisfactory**.