

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four young people with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The home is privately owned and the organisation operates other children's homes in the area.

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 **adequate**.

The home provides an adequate quality of care which promotes improved outcomes for young people. Young people have positive views about living in the home and they enjoy warm relationships with suitable staff. Young people are safe because staff and managers understand young people's individual risk taking behaviours and are vigilant to their circumstances and feelings. Good liaison with placing authorities and other involved agencies also helps to assure consistent, safe care.

Leaders and managers undertake required monitoring and support staff adequately through training and supervision. They understand that some of the home's current weaknesses have developed during fluctuations in the staff group and as a result of training and monitoring weaknesses. However, the quality of care young people are receiving in the home is now adequate rather than good. This is because work with young people is not taking place to the quality, consistency and timeliness that was demonstrated at previous inspections. In addition, managers have not identified these weaknesses themselves through their monitoring activities.

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
30 (2001)	ensure that if any of the events listed in Schedule five take place, the persons indicated in column 2 of the table in Schedule 5 are notified without delay. This particularly pertains to notifying Ofsted of events concerning the suspected involvement of young people in sexual exploitation. (Regulation 30 (1))	30/10/2012

Recommendations

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

- improve the timeliness and quality of personalised care to young people in order to support their social and emotional development (NMS 2.1 and 2.2)
- ensure that the home environment is well maintained and provides for young people to dine, study and prepare food comfortably (NMS 10.3)
- ensure that effective arrangements are in place for staff to deputise in the manager's absence (NMS 17.4)
- ensure that staff are supported to undertake in-service training to enhance their skills and keep them up to date with professional and legal developments. This relates specifically to drugs and sexual exploitation (NMS 18.1)
- ensure that the procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the home are effective. This includes effective monitoring and control of serious incidents and the quality of the provision. Ensure also that young people are regularly involved in contributing to the monitoring and have their views and any concerns seriously taken into account (NMS 21.1)
- improve the timeliness and effectiveness with which staff record, and help young people make a record of, significant life events (NMS 22.6)
- ensure that entries in records are recorded clearly and in a way which is helpful to young people when they access their files now or in the future. (NMS 22.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people have made some good progress to develop a positive self-view. Some

are continuing to engage with support services which provide them with specific help with issues personal to them. This helps young people to gain some understanding of their background and to improve their emotional resilience. Young people are enjoying the quiet and safe environment and feel settled and nurtured here. They are making some positive attachments. One young person says, 'It feels like home, the staff are brilliant and we do some wicked stuff together - everyone gets on and is always happy.'

Young people's physical health is adequate. They receive good support from staff to make and attend all relevant preventive and emergency health appointments. Some young people have reduced their smoking and drug misuse and are better informed to manage their sexual health. Young people take pride in their personal hygiene and appearance. They eat an adequately varied diet but are not always encouraged by staff to make consistently healthy food choices or to prioritise sport or active leisure activities.

Most young people are in receipt of some formal education or training and have generally good attendance. They benefit from tenacious staff and managers who negotiate returns to mainstream school or special college provision as appropriate to their needs. Some young people have made satisfactory achievements, taking into account both their attainment and attendance prior to placement. Young people are also acquiring practical and life skills to prepare them for independent adult life through working through a comprehensive independence training file. They discuss current affairs as part of their monthly young people's meetings. They think about issues such as women's rights and changes in fashion as well as sporting participation. This helps them to develop positive attitudes and critical thinking about their place in society.

Young people make a positive contribution to the home, for example by participating in meetings and group leisure outings together. They take responsibility for keeping their rooms tidy and are starting to prepare a 'beauty corner' in the lounge. Young people usually eat together with staff and sometimes help to prepare the meal or make a cake. They benefit from appropriate contact with family, friends and other people who are important to them. Free time to socialise with peers is available to those young people who can demonstrate that they can avoid risk taking behaviour.

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy sound relationships with staff and interact positively with others. They receive support to establish and maintain a daily routine which is suitably healthy and educational. However, young people receive too little individualised, focussed input from staff to address key difficulties in their lives. This is because key workers are slow to prioritise with individual young people the areas where most adult advice, help and support is needed. Staff also miss opportunities to undertake this work regularly. As a result, young people's emotional and social development progresses adequately, but not as quickly or significantly as it might. In addition,

entries in young people's daily records are frequently repeated and lack detail and accuracy, for example, 'has eaten healthily today'. This indicates a reduction in proactive work with young people about healthy outcomes and means that young people's individual records are less helpful to them, either now, or in the future. Similarly, staff are slow to start helping young people make a record of significant life events when they come to the home. Young people have recently left without any record of memories to take with them and young people who have been in the home a number of weeks have not started to make a record. This too is a missed opportunity to provide high quality input from the outset which best supports young people to develop a strong sense of belonging from which they can progress.

Staff set clear, consistent boundaries for young people and respond appropriately to anti-social behaviour. However, previously used daily behaviour reward programmes are not being consistently used or recorded at present. Staff also ensure that young people's wishes and feelings are taken into account in the running of the home, through monthly young people's meetings and daily discussion. Young people feel confident to voice concerns and complaints directly to staff. However, there are missed opportunities to communicate clearly and openly with young people about how to improve their behaviour. For example, team meetings and follow up letters afterwards to young people talk generally about 'behaviours' and 'unit boundaries' and do not explain to young people exactly what is being talked about. Similarly, some practices and boundaries seem rigid and are not under very regular review by staff and young people. For example, young people voice their concerns about not being able to keep the home's felt tipped pens in their rooms overnight or being able to eat late suppers in the kitchen. Staff are also sometimes slow to identify improvements which will enhance the quality of young people's daily life. For example, young people do not have any desk or dressing table space in their rooms and the dining table and chairs are presently insufficient for all young people and staff to sit together. The walk-in pantry light does not work, making it difficult to take part in food preparation. These issues hold back the quality of young people's care in what is otherwise a clean, spacious and high quality environment.

Staff work proactively with police, education and health professionals, parents and carers to promote positive outcomes for young people. This is particularly evident in their organisation to support family contact wherever this is appropriate, despite the rural location of the home. Staff also ensure that young people have full access to the services and support they need to meet their physical, emotional and psychological health needs. For example, there is prompt access to medical assessment and treatment when young people feel unwell or have accidents. Staff use robust arrangements for dealing with medication and are trained to use first aid. Medical and counselling follow up are also prioritised for young people who misuse drugs or who are subject to exploitation. However, staff have not received in-service training in the areas of drug misuse and sexual exploitation. As a result, staff skills are not enhanced to a high level and they are not kept well updated with professional and legal developments. This too holds back the quality of staff's work with some young people for whom these are significant issues.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people report that they feel safe in the home. One young person said, 'the staff can help you no matter what the problem.' Staff recognise young people's particular vulnerabilities and take appropriate action to address them. This is clearly evident in relation to the factors that may trigger young people going missing. Staff use clear practices and agreed arrangements with the police that minimise the incidence of young people going missing and staff also support effective action when young people do go missing. As a result, young people are protected and the incidence of them going missing is significantly reduced since being in the home. However, recording systems for significant and notifiable incidents are not being used consistently by all staff, and managers have been slow to identify this. As a result, placing social workers have not been informed promptly in every instance when drug misuse has taken place and the regulator, Ofsted, has not been informed of all instances when young people have been missing and were subject to sexual exploitation. These shortfalls have the potential to compromise the quality and speed of interagency responses to young people's risk taking behaviour. The quality of work done by staff to help young people move forward and away from risk taking behaviour is also being held back on occasions. This is because their views and feelings after incidents are not always promptly sought, discussed with them or recorded.

The home environment is physically safe and appropriately secure. Young people are in a rural location, away from large towns. This is appropriate to the needs and characteristics of the young people placed and enables work to be done with them about their risk taking behaviour, before they can earn back free time in the community. Staff are carefully selected and vetted, including adequate vetting and identity checks of agency staff. This ensures that young people are cared for by appropriate adults. Staff have received suitable child protection and safeguarding training and can explain their commitment to young people's safe care, including the organisation's whistle blowing policy. This provides evidence of staff commitment to safeguarding young people. Staff are also vigilant to the possibility of bullying between young people, particularly through the use of mobile phone messaging. Staff work satisfactorily to minimise this by supervising young people and ensuring that bullying is discussed regularly. Managers also monitor the use and incidence of restraint in the home and reduce its use wherever possible. As a result of all this, young people enjoy a relatively calm and settled home at present where restraint has not been required for any young people presently placed. Any searches of young people's possessions are carried out with due sensitivity and are appropriately recorded. However, the record of young people's views is not made in every case. This indicates a missed opportunity to address young people's specific issues promptly and successfully with them following a search.

Leadership and management

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

Young people benefit from a Registered Manager who has been in post for a few years. However, she does not presently have a deputy manager in place. Senior staff always lead shifts, but some staff have left, new staff are starting shortly, and agency staff are being used. These changes and pressures have resulted in reduced consistency of care and some shortfalls in the leadership and management of the home. Young people still benefit from sound, individualised care. For example, the gender and age mix of staff is specifically adapted to meet the identified needs and histories of young people placed. Young people have also recently been involved in the interviewing of new staff to the organisation. However, young people's care is of lesser quality overall than previously and managers have not identified how this has happened. For example, staff and managers overlooked the need to ensure that new resident young people should have early opportunity to practise a fire evacuation until prompted during the inspection.

Regulation 33 monthly monitoring visits regularly identify specific shortfalls in recording. Many of these centre around young people's views and feelings being recorded and worked with in practice. However, the monitoring has not proved very effective in fully ascertaining and evaluating young people and other stakeholders' contributions, views and concerns. In addition, monitoring both by the organisation's visiting senior managers and the home manager has not proved very effective in identifying significant shortfalls and omissions. For example, weaknesses in the recording and notification of incidents have not been noticed. Similarly, indicators of a reduction in the previously good quality input to young people's care by the staff have not been picked up through monitoring activity.

Young people benefit from an adequately run home. Leaders and managers can demonstrate the impact and value that living at the home has had on children and young people's lives and how their life chances have improved over time. Leaders and managers have a satisfactory understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home and have development plans in place. The provider ensures that the home is well resourced and continues to meet the aims and objectives of its statement of purpose. Young people are appropriately placed and are cared for by staff who receive regular, sound support and sufficient general and professional training. Staffing levels are appropriate to meet the needs of young people and there are positive, long established relationships with other agencies and placing authorities.

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.