

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Paul Scott
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is one of a number of children's homes operated by a private company. The home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to two young people who may need support 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 **good**.

Young people live in a safe, caring and supportive home environment that helps them make good progress in many aspects of their lives. This is because staff are adept at understanding young people's individual needs. They make every effort to provide young people with a stable platform on which they can positively plan for their future. As a result, young people have become increasingly resilient, confidently facing up to the challenges they face in their lives.

Relationships are a major strength in the home. Genuinely strong attachments exist between young people and staff. This means young people feel valued and are provided with emotional stability that encourages personal growth and improves their sense of self-worth. Young people speak very positively about their experiences in the home. One young person said, 'Before I came here I had a lot of problems. Staff have really helped me.'

Individualised care planning is underpinned by effective, high quality support from staff. Improvements to the systems for reviewing the quality of care mean young people's development and progress are routinely assessed and monitored. This ensures young people continue to receive good quality care and identifies areas for improvement.

Young people live in a home that is well managed. Staff have a good understanding of young people's needs and a sound appreciation of safe working practice. Effective partnerships with safeguarding professionals, including the police, ensure young people's safety and welfare are consistently promoted and protected.

Requirements and recommendations are raised in order to improve formal communication with Ofsted, young people's preparation for independence, the management and administration of medication, the environment, and behaviour management. This will help drive forward further improvement and quality of care for young people.

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
37 (2001)	ensure that where the registered manager proposes to be absent from the home for a continuous period of 28 days or more, the registered person shall give notice in writing to Ofsted of the proposed absence and the details of the person who will be responsible for the home during the absence, no later than one month before the absence commences. (Regulation 37 (1) (a) and (2) (a-e))	05/12/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure there is a pathway plan in place for 'eligible' care leavers and that the home works collaboratively with the young person's social worker in implementing the plan (NMS 12.2)
- ensure medicines which are kept in the home are stored safely, in particular review the procedure for storing controlled medication (NMS 6.13)
- ensure there is an accurate written record of all medication, in particular stating the dosage of medication to be given to children during their placement (NMS 6.15)
- ensure the home provides a comfortable environment, in particular that staff have access to heating controls and can regulate the temperature in the home at all times (NMS 10.3)
- ensure children are encouraged to take responsibility for their behaviour and that methods of behaviour management do not lead to institutional practice, in particular, review the practice of cutting off the electricity supply to young people's bedrooms at night. (NMS 3.6)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Outcomes for young people are good. This is because they live in a home with a committed group of staff. Staff are skilled at making and sustaining positive attachments that enhance young people's trust, self-worth and confidence. Young people choose to work with staff who provide them with consistency and stability. This helps them develop a better understanding of their past and view their future with some level of optimism. As a result, young people make good progress and achieve many personal goals during their stay at the home.

Staff encourage young people to take responsibility for their health. They ensure young people are provided with the right support, guidance and information they require to keep themselves safe and healthy. This helps young people understand the importance of healthy lifestyles, relationships and the dangers of smoking and other substance misuse. As a result, young people can make informed lifestyle choices. For example, they engage with therapists and mental health practitioners as well as taking responsibility for contraception, relative to their age and level of understanding.

Young people are at different stages of their academic journey. Those that go to school talk positively about the progress they are making. One young person said, 'I like going to school and I am doing really well.' Young people say they are well supported when they have left school. They talk enthusiastically about finding work and confirm staff help them to positively engage with careers services.

Staff provide young people with the emotional and practical support they require to maintain contact with family, friends and other people who are important to them. All contact is risk assessed and staff work closely with families and family support services. This ensures contact is well planned, safe and a positive experience for young people.

Young people are afforded ample opportunity to acquire practical and life skills to prepare them for adult life. This means young people take some responsibility for household tasks including cooking, tidying and laundry. Age-appropriate decision making is also encouraged to help young people develop the necessary skills in preparing for and navigating the everyday world of being an adult. However, young people who are 'eligible' do not have pathway plans in place. There is some evidence that the manager has attempted to address this shortfall to little effect. Consequently, there are no formal plans in place to prepare young people for leaving care.

Quality of care

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

Young people are thriving in a nurturing and supportive home environment where staff provide a high standard of care. Young people say they 'are happy' and 'this is a great place to live.' There is a warm and good-natured atmosphere in the home because young people and staff enjoy exceedingly positive relationships. One young person said: 'The best thing about living here is the staff. I get on with them really well and we have lots of fun.' Staff make every effort to ensure young people are valued and respected as individuals. This means young people feel staff are concerned with their welfare and are comfortable talking to staff if they have any concerns or worries. Young people confirm they know how to complain but say, 'we do not need to because staff listen and do their best to sort things out.'

Staff are very knowledgeable about young people's needs. Placement plans are informative and effectively implemented. They are highly individualised and clearly identify young people's needs based on their past experiences, cultural identity, behaviours and risks. Young people are fully involved in planning their care and making decisions affecting their lives. Staff regularly discuss plans with young people and other relevant people. This ensures young people receive individual support that is current and tailored to meet their specific care needs.

Young people's physical, emotional and psychological health needs are well met. Strong links with routine and specialist healthcare services ensure young people can promptly access the support services they require on a day-to-day basis. For example, young people benefit immensely from the programme of support they receive from the organisation's therapist, who works collaboratively with staff and other mental health agencies. The effectiveness of this approach is evident in the progress young people are making. Although arrangements for dealing with medication are usually robust, some shortfalls were identified with procedures for the management of medication. The equipment for the safe storage of controlled medication is not sufficiently robust for the types of medication which are now currently stored in the home. Also, medication records were not up to date because they did not accurately reflect the very recent changes to one young person's medication. Consequently, there is potential for young people's welfare to be compromised.

Staff work hard to provide an environment that encourages young people's learning. They are good at communicating the importance of education and work hard to motivate and support young people with their studies. For example, staff will regularly support young people in their learning environment and help them with their homework. Staff work effectively with education and careers services to ensure young people have the opportunity to access school, college and work opportunities.

Staff encourage young people to pursue their recreational interests and develop their individual skills and talents. Young people are taking part in a wide range of age-appropriate leisure activities to help them develop their social skills. One young person said, 'I do lots of activities. I have just started going to the air cadets where I have begun to make friends.'

Young people live in a large house that blends in with the neighbourhood and has

good access to local services and amenities. Staff and young people have personalised the environment to their individual tastes, in particular, young people's bedrooms, making it as homely as possible. One young person said: 'The house is really nice but sometimes it can be too hot or cold.' This is because staff cannot fully regulate the temperature in the home as they do not have access to the main heating controls.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say they feel safe at the home because staff care and always offer them good advice. Social workers confirm they have no safeguarding concerns and that staff make every effort to ensure young people are protected from harm. Safeguarding procedures are robust and staff are well trained. Detailed risk assessments are used as working documents by staff, who clearly understand young people's known risks and vulnerabilities. As a result, keeping young people safe is integral to daily practice.

Young people do not regularly go missing from home, but when they do, staff always take the right action to minimise the risks and secure young people's safe return. For example, staff will routinely search the local area and undertake welfare checks on known addresses. They work effectively with the police to ensure a proportionate response is taken, based on the individual concerns and the level of risk.

Young people respond well to the structure and boundaries staff implement. Staff respond positively to young people and remain calm through challenges. They effectively use their relationships with young people to help them manage difficult and challenging situations, supporting young people to learn alternative ways of expressing their feelings. Consequently, sanctions are minimal and restraints are few. Young people confirm this and say the rules are generally fair. However, in an attempt to help young people settle at night, there have been occasions when the electricity supply has been turned off to the sockets in some young people's bedrooms. Although young people did not see this as a punishment and it had minimal impact on them, this is not a reasonable approach to managing bedtimes. This practice ceased immediately once discussed with the manager.

The home has recently appointed a new deputy manager. Recruitment and selection procedures are thorough to make sure young people are protected. Visitors to the home are appropriately monitored to ensure young people are not exposed to people who present a risk to them.

Leadership and management

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

The home's Registered Manager is currently absent from the home. Ofsted was not formally notified of this planned absence or the proposed management arrangements

for the home. A new manager has been appointed to manage the home in the absence of the Registered Manager. This person is suitably experienced and is working towards a level 5 qualification. An application to register the new manager is currently being processed by Ofsted. The team's primary focus continues to be young people's care, well-being and safety. Consequently, the home has continued to be adequately managed, ensuring these changes have had limited impact on the quality of care provided for young people.

Young people benefit from being cared for by an adequate number of experienced and committed staff. The skills-set of the team has been further enhanced by the appointment of an experienced deputy manager who demonstrates a strong commitment to improving outcomes for young people. The staff team reports they are well supported in their work and receive regular supervision to discuss young people's needs and enhance their professional development. New staff are provided with excellent support to ensure they are appropriately inducted into the home, including introductions to young people. Good arrangements are in place so that unqualified staff have the opportunity to gain a relevant childcare qualification. All staff are provided with good training. This ensures they have the right support, knowledge and skills to meet the current and emerging needs of the young people living at the home.

The home's Statement of Purpose suitably informs interested parties of the aims and objectives of the home and reflects how the home operates in practice. Monitoring of the home is good and clearly outlines what the home does well and areas for improvement. Systems for reviewing the quality of care have been further improved to ensure they are evaluative and used effectively to promote further improvement and development. A number of quality assurance systems are used to ensure young people and stakeholders have the opportunity to offer their views about the home. Feedback is consistently positive about the service. One social worker said, 'I am very pleased with the service. They have excellent links with professionals to meet young people's holistic needs, helping them find stability and make progress in a supportive environment.'

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.