

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Julian Parker
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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 private children's home is semi-rurally located. It provides medium to long term care for up to two children with emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Overall effectiveness

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

The home provides a caring and supportive environment that enables young people to make sustainable, meaningful progress across all areas of their life. Individualised, care planning sensitive to specific needs addresses practically assists young people to improve their self-confidence, emotional resilience and social skills.

Effective and responsive safeguarding practice ensures that young people are protected from potential harm and through their actions hurting themselves. Engaging with their plans and carers, young people experience nurturing and meaningful relationships. By being listened to young people are helped to develop their sense of self-esteem, self-worth and ownership of their living environment.

Young people's views can be influential in shaping the running of the home. Young people are encouraged to be fully occupied with the decisions that affect their lives and organise the homes daily functions. They significantly inform all aspects of the care provided.

Good management arrangements supporting a competent and well-trained staff team ensure that young people receive good quality care. Staff demonstrate the right mix of skills and experience combined with a detailed knowledge of the young people they look after. This enables informed guidance and the consistent delivery of care.

Effective management ensures good quality and meaningful childcare practice, promoting young people's access to full-time education and their health related needs. The home demonstrates its capacity for continuous improvement. Comprehensive and informative monitoring systems confirm the good quality of care underpinning a firm focus on attaining positive outcomes.

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
4 (2001)	ensure that the registered person provides a copy of the Statement of Purpose to the regulator. Regulation 4(2)	01/01/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the children's guide includes a summary of what the home sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, how a child can contact Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors. NMS 13.5

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Through effective staff interaction and within the short period since admission, young people are making good progress developing emotional resilience and understanding their background. The consistency of care provided clearly addresses and supports young people's feelings and self-perception. With guidance and by having explicit set boundaries young people increasingly manage their own behaviour and improve their levels of social acceptance.

Young people have a good understanding of the importance of cleanliness and healthy eating. By being encouraged to actively participate in chores such as keeping their rooms and the living environment clean they demonstrate ownership and pride in the appearance of their home. This helps promote young people's independence skills, confidence and understanding of social norms. Staff advise young people about healthy eating and the importance of diet for maintaining and promoting physical fitness.

Young people's views and wishes influence the routines and daily life of the home. At this early stage of placement, they are fully involved in the running of the home through key working sessions and liaison with staff ahead of the introduction of formal children's meetings that will help to formally compose the home's weekly timetable. Young people receive quality guidance and support from staff that ensures support with making appropriate choices, for example, about their behaviour, relationships and diet. Living in an atmosphere where their views can be heard and respected young people feel sufficiently confident to speak up to make their contribution.

The staff team actively promote contact arrangements between young people and their families. They organise, facilitate, and supervise direct contact that ensures

young people benefit from safe and appropriate contact with their family and people who are important to them. Staff recognise the importance of maintaining strong family links and openly explain why some arrangements need to be supervised or have controls applied, such as with the sensible use of the telephone. This supports young people, ensures that they are protected and safe while being practically included in the decisions that affect them.

Young people have achieved very good attendance at the provider's own school. By promoting individual experiences and skills building relationships with tutors and peers, steady and significant progress is achieved.

The home pursues clear objectives for continuing educational and social achievement that includes access to vocational training and work experience. Some young people are building confidence and self-esteem challenging perceptions about their ability that will support their future learning and preparation for eventual independence.

Quality of care

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

Management and staff demonstrate high levels of commitment to sustain relationships that ensure young people feel valued and included. Young people can develop meaningful relationships with supportive staff members who they can trust. They can experience new and positive relationships that prepare them to manage their individual behaviour and change effectively. For example, young people can spend time on a one to one basis with staff members who are not their regular key worker to engage in specific recreational or vocational activities. This process helps young people to develop their capacity to trust known reliable adults who provide care and supervise them.

Staff listen to young people's views, taking appropriate measures to address any concerns they may express. The home actively supports young people to make their voice and opinions known including when they are not happy with how they are being looked after, by knowing how to make a complaint. Young people have direct access to independent advice through an independent advocacy service as well as being able to contact their parents or social workers. Young people's views and opinions are fully expressed through their reviews and regular sessions with staff. Management plans are in place for the imminent introduction of more formal young people's meetings. This means that young people are valued and made aware that their opinions and views matter and are always taken seriously

Comprehensive pre-admission risk assessments and behavioural management plans for each young person includes history of known risky activity and interim plans to promote safety. These include the potential use of positive sanctions to structure and modify young people's unacceptable behaviour although the effectiveness of these measures has yet to be tested in practice. The use of an approved physical intervention can, if necessary, be applied but only in extreme and warranting circumstances to ensure young people are kept safe. Comprehensive records confirm

that this process is transparent and effectively monitored to inform practice improvement.

The staff team take a proactive approach to managing and supporting young people's behaviour that may deter and prevent anti-social or criminal activity and encourage socially acceptable conduct. Through effective planning staff effectively utilise individual behaviour management strategies emphasise the use of positive rewards to influence behaviour. Young people are involved in this planning and are able to work towards achievable key targets based on acceptable behaviour. This means young people are actively involved in developing strategies for themselves that promote their own esteem and self-control.

Young people are cared for in accordance with their placement plan that identifies individual needs and the prescribed objectives set by placing authorities. Staff are fully aware of the aims and objectives of the placement working closely with other professionals to effectively meet these goals. Staff regularly produce comprehensive records that accurately reflect each young person's changing circumstances. In some cases young people's care plans have not been updated by from placing authorities following recent change to the placement and review meeting. This means that their case files are not fully up to date. One Social Worker confirmed that the Independent Reviewing Officer for the placing authority is presently compiling this review of the plans. The impact of this omission is however minimal because the home diligently makes its own records during statutory reviews to ensure young people are cared for in accordance with the latest plan.

Staff promote and celebrate young people's interests and talents. Young people are actively encouraged to identify and participate in meaningful activities in which they have an interest. For example, one young person has an affinity for personal fitness that the home actively assists by facilitating access to a local gym, giving dietary advice and by special menu planning. This means that young people are developing their understanding and ability to encourage personal development and success.

The home is located in a semi-rural environment, which meets many of the safeguarding needs of the resident young people. The house is very well maintained following a recent full refurbishment. It is very clean and sets comfortable, homely standards. Young people's rooms are personalised and decorated and furnished in a way that is relaxing for them, so that they feel valued and safe.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

By receiving staff support and living in a structurally safe environment, where they receive protection from harm and inappropriate influences, young people are being effectively safeguarded. The high level of concern and commitment to safeguarding by staff assists young people to experience emotional security and to feel safe.

The well-being of young people is acknowledged as being very important. Staff are

well trained in matters concerning safeguarding. Staff can effectively identify and respond to the indicators of abuse and self-harm. They know what procedures to follow to ensure that young people can be protected. Young people receive age appropriate advice about personal safety, including the potential risks posed by their peers or unknown adults and the possible consequences of their own risk taking behaviour.

Anti-bullying measures are in place monitoring behaviour within the home and in communal settings such as school. Young people are encouraged to talk to their carers whenever they have any worries or concerns. These are acted upon promptly. Through effective communication and information sharing placement and behaviour management plans practically reduce the potential risks to young people by adjusting the environment, staffing levels and routines to effectively respond to potential concerns. Should staff have any concerns about professional colleagues safeguarding practice, a whistle blowing policy is available for disclosure.

The particular vulnerabilities of young people are addressed by this placement. Its semi-rural location makes it very suitable for young people who would be vulnerable if looked after in a larger setting or more urban provision. The risks young people may experience in the wider community, including exploitation, self harm and criminality are well recorded and carefully managed. Clear, regularly reviewed risk assessments and an explicit placement plan explains how measures protect young people from the potential of harm.

Staff demonstrate by the quality of their supervision of young people that they sensitively balance safeguarding needs against individual rights and the age-related requirement that facilitate the considered risks that form part of normal adolescent development. Young people can engage safely in similar social experiences as their peers with staff support.

The semi-rural location of this home enables it to manage unauthorised absence effectively subject to its staffing level. Established protocols and meaningful relationships with the local police complement the homes practice however to date the present young people have not exhibited the need for such measures to be actively applied. Defined responses are in place should young people go absent from the home or from an off-site excursion. Staff are aware of the potential reasons and times when young people could attempt to go missing and use this information to help them deter and manage young people's behaviour.

On admission young people are informed about how the home can help them and what the few, explicit, house rules are. This key information is included in their young person's guide about the home and organisation. Through day-to-day living young people generally confirm that they accept the norms of the placement and comply with the standards of behaviour being expected. Staff know that behaviour may fluctuate and be unpredictable but have strategies and procedures in place to manage this effectively. Through praise and reminder of their achievement rather than shortcomings the staff place considerable emphasis on young people's positive behaviour. All staff adopt practice arising from jointly agreed strategies to encourage

and support the practice of socially acceptable behaviour in all situations.

There are effective responses available to staff for the management of challenging behaviour by the use of an approved physical restraint methodology. The need to use these measures is minimal. Effective recording systems enable staff and the homes management to review circumstances and success of such practice. Young people are aware of the circumstances in which such measures may be used.

Young people live in a physically safe environment. They are protected by an established routine of health and safety procedures, risk assessments and battery of preventive checks. Staff carry these out regularly, including fire drills, to ensure the premises are safe and confirm that young people know what to do in case of an emergency. Any damage in the home quickly repaired to maintain the homes welcoming appearance and physical security.

The recruitment and selection of people working at the home follows robust company procedures and checks to ensure young people are looked after only by safe, experienced and knowledgeable adults. The manager confirms this through collation and inspection of staff files to ensure that all appointed staff possess the relevant skills, competencies and qualifications required to meet the needs of vulnerable young people. Appropriate, rigorous systems are in place to ensure that all visitors to the home have been suitably checked and are carefully supervised while on the premises. By applying these measures, young people can be kept safe and protected.

Leadership and management

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

Young people live in a well managed home that effectively ensure they are kept safe and their welfare actively promoted.

The home addresses the aims of its Statement of Purpose comprehensively. Social workers, young people and their families are accurately informed about the nature of the services and support provided at the home by accessing this document, however a copy has not been provided to the regulator to be fully compliant and updated. The generic young person's guide is readable and delivers useful information about what the home provides in an age appropriate and friendly tone; however, it requires amendment to update the regulator contact details as an available point of contact with inspectors for young people.

The present acting manager and staff team demonstrate very strong commitment to delivering perceptive childcare practice adapted to address the individual, often challenging needs of the young people looked after.

Young people are being enabled to make important progress, when compared against their starting point, across the differing aspects of their lives, including school attendance and educational achievement, their emotional development, how they

develop independence skills and learning how to keep themselves safe.

The acting manager's comprehensive review of existing practice practically helps to inform and improve the service provided to ensure that the delivery of positive outcomes that are appropriate and responsive to the varying needs of young people. Pragmatically listening to the views of young people while empowering them to understand that their behaviour directly affects the extent of the choices they may make informs placement planning.

The ongoing external and internal monitoring of the quality of care provision effectively informs those practical changes needed to ensure young people get the most appropriate service possible, including access to therapeutic and criminal justice provision. The importance of the sustained improvement of the home, based on its previous performance is fully recognised. The acting manager has satisfactorily addressed all unresolved previous actions and recommendations to confirm its current effectiveness. The inherited development plan is subject to substantial revision, appropriately reflecting the home's current occupancy and the staff team's greater increased aspirations for the home.

Young people are looked after by a very competent, committed staff team who exhibit an above average level of skills, qualification and experience. The team's skills and abilities can address the needs of young people living in the home by being effective in dealing with their diverse needs and by maintaining meaningful constructive contact with their families and placing authorities. A social worker commented on the positive dialogue she had with the acting manager and the suitability of the setting for the young person she had in the placement.

Staff meetings, while principally focusing on practice with young people, additionally include emphasis on understanding aspects of equality and diversity issues that affect looked after children such as disability, mental health related behaviour, criminality and cultural and ethnic backgrounds and sexuality related issues. This discussion helps to inform staff practice and the understanding of children from different referral backgrounds.

Staff are well supported by the present acting manager. They have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the high expectations placed on them. The good level of support and guidance being provided is confirmed by members of the staff team and the clarity they have about their practice. Staff receive one-to-one supervision regularly with annual appraisals of their practice informing ongoing learning and development. Team meetings take place monthly involving the whole staff team to discuss the operation of the home and review the young people's progress. This forum helps the team consider ways in which all aspects of the service may be improved.

The home's written records are securely stored and provide a comprehensive evaluation and confirmation of the young people's needs and progress. Case records contain the most up-to-date information about each young person, including the relevant documents received from placing authorities and ongoing in house

assessment. Where some documents have not yet been received these have been requested confirming the joint importance given to effective care planning.

A formal application for the vacant registered managers post for the home is being processed by Ofsted addressing the regulatory and management requirement for the home .

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.