

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspection date	28 January 2010
Inspector	Julian Parker
Type of Inspection	Key

Date of last inspection	23 July 2009
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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 outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

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

The provider operates small children's homes that generally provide for economy and mutual support. These are usually two-bedded homes coupled with a satellite unit. Although both homes may be overseen by a single manager, they operate independently with dedicated staff teams and a competent deputy manager who is usually NVQ Level 4 qualified. This children's home is registered to look after up to two young people, of either sex, between the ages of 10 to 17 years. Only one young person was resident during this visit. The home is located in a large former farmhouse style property in a semi-rural setting. The layout of the home allows staff to adjust the environment and the care provided to meet the needs of the young people accommodated.

Summary

This announced key inspection of the children's home, looks at all of the key National Minimum Standards other than the staff recruitment process within the Staying Safe outcome areas.

The home is judged as good. Young people receive individualised care that is consistently applied within a safely maintained environment. There has been no change of occupancy. Staff at the home make every effort to engage with young people and understand how to deal effectively with difficult behaviour.

The organisation of working practices is strong and the home functions well. The recently appointed manager provides effective direction and leadership to the staff team and promotes the importance of consistent practice and effective recording. This ensures that staff are clear about individual roles and responsibilities and provides effective care boundaries for the young people being looked after. This inspection has identified two good practice recommendations.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last interim inspection no actions or recommendations were identified.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The way in which young people's health is promoted by the home is focused on individual needs and their willingness to accept practical guidance from staff relating to many aspects of healthy living. Young people are able to make age appropriate decisions about their health but are always encouraged to avail themselves of the services provided by the GP, dentist and optician with whom they are enrolled.

Staff working at the home are competent in the administration of medication and first aid because they receive training that is kept up to date. Young people's medical needs are well recorded in the form of a health plan that is reviewed alongside their care plans.

Young people are encouraged to have a healthy balanced diet and develop their kitchen skills as a component of their independence programme.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Staff follow established company policies that have been developed to comply with regulatory requirements and good practice in areas that include: child protection and countering bullying, managing behaviour effectively and safeguarding children. There is a local procedure that is followed when young people go missing from care. Staff have access to and know about the Local Safeguarding Children's Board's guidance which includes how to recognise signs of child abuse. The company provides regular professional development and training opportunities to ensure that staff know how to look after young people safely.

The management of young people's behaviour is based on a sound knowledge of young people and by constant encouragement of acceptable behaviour. Young people know the standards of behaviour expected from them. Staff focus on positive aspects of behaviour and young people clearly understand how to gain rewards and privileges for behaving well. Young people are treated fairly and this is confirmed by the homes infrequent use of sanctions or behavioural controls and planned reduced staffing levels. Staff receive regular behaviour management training which includes the safe use of physical restraint. This training is refreshed annually and all reported incidents are evaluated by the home's manager.

Staff practically demonstrate their respect for young people's right to privacy and confidentiality. This is achieved by providing young people with their own bedrooms, although when necessary to protect individual safety, room checks are conducted following established procedures. The privacy of young people is also protected by their personal information being confidentially stored and staff communicating professionally about them with other stakeholders.

Staff awareness of potential dangers to young people is enhanced by the compilation of risk assessments that encompass all aspects of safety in the living environment, for example, the risk from fire, environmental hazards and those risks that emerge from challenging behaviour or recreational activities. Risk assessments are regularly reviewed and evaluate changes affecting the home, such as staffing levels or alterations to the home's routine. Young people are actively encouraged to respond sensibly to fire precaution drills.

Any concerns or complaints young people may have are taken seriously by staff at the home. The home has a responsive complaint procedure summarised in the young persons guide. Young people know how to complain and to whom they can make representations. Young people are provided with access to an independent advocacy service that promotes their right to be heard both with complaints and following any unauthorised absence from the home.

The manager ensures that no new member of staff starts to work at this children's home until the necessary vetting checks have been completed and cleared. These arrangements help to ensure that those staff working at the home are suitable. All visitors to the home are monitored because they are required to provide evidence of identity and sign a visitors' book. Staff personnel files were not accessed at this visit due to them being held at a central location in the provider's head office.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The current arrangements made by the provider for the education are good. Teaching staff at the company school have regular contact with the home and effectively contribute to the young persons placement plan. Although each young person's education timetable is tailored to provide a mixture of vocational and academic study, reflecting individual needs and ability, the uptake of this opportunity is erratic.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

All admissions to the home are planned and young people are met and consulted with as a part of this process. The likes and dislikes of young people are ascertained and the information gathered used to prepare for their move to the home. Staff are well briefed prior to a young person's admission to ensure that the process is child friendly, sensitive and sets a good example for the future of the placement.

Being presently used for single occupancy, the manner in which young people are enabled to express their views about all matters relating to their care is ongoing and informal; none the less, young people's views are taken seriously and well recorded. There is evidence that the home responds positively to such information when suggestions are in the best interest of young people.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people live in a traditional style home that is domestic in scale, homely in character, well maintained and decorated pleasantly. The home is comfortably furnished providing young people with a good quality living environment. The home has a large functional garden that previous residents have found beneficial. Young people enjoy their own well-appointed and individualised bedrooms and a choice of bathrooms. Young people's personal private space does not, however, reflect the same level of care and tidiness as the home's communal areas.

Young people are helped to prepare for eventually leaving care by acquiring and being encouraged to put into practice the skills needed for adulthood. Life skills may be learnt through limited involvement with some of the core tasks involved with running the home such as; shopping, personal budgeting, cooking and undertaking selected daily household chores. The home evidences its practice by producing, in conjunction with placing authorities, formal 'Pathway Plans' to confirm its practical and opportunity directed approach to teaching independence skills.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Young people are well supported by competent, trained staff who know about each young person and are committed to providing safe, consistent care. The recently appointed manager supports her staff by selecting her team according to how they can best meet the young people's needs and by facilitating staff access to ongoing professional development. Staff have attended all statutory training and additional courses. The manager's own professional training needs are yet to be addressed.

The home's Statement of Purpose includes the information outlined by Schedule 1 of the Children's Home Regulations. This details accurate information about what services the provider and the children's home make available.

The home is sufficiently staffed. The daily rota confirms that the complement is as detailed within the home's Statement of Purpose. All staffing shortfalls are covered by in-house staff or by known staff from other company homes, thereby reducing any potential for disruption to routine or the level of support being provided. The arrangement for safe one-to-one work with young people is fully addressed by the home's risk assessments that remain subject to constant review to ensure individual safety at all times. Staff base their day-to-day practice on the company's comprehensive policies, procedures and guidance.

The home has established monitoring processes that confirm the operational efficiency and quality of care being provided. In-house monitoring remains effective and informs staff practice. External monthly monitoring takes place through the use of an independent Regulation 33 visitor. Feedback from young people is sought as a feature of this process to reflect service user views. Any proposed future improvement for the home is not accurately reflected by the home's current Annual Development Plan.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The particular level of detail contained within the young people's plans, case files and daily recording documents confirms that all staff who have contact with the young people know of their particular differences and difficulties. From this level of detail staff are enabled to develop their practice to fully support individual development that includes any cultural needs.

The home is very organised and well managed. This effectively contributes to the safety and development of young people. Individual case file recordings reflect this level of organisation. They are securely stored and arranged in a manner that is accessible to all the staff. Young people know the contents of their files and may request access to them. Young people are encouraged to contribute their thoughts and comments to these documents through many of the homes individualised report formats and keywork sessions.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- ensure that the annual development plan is up to date (National Minimum Standard 33.5)
- ensure that the homes manager attains an appropriate NVQ4 equivalent management course. Regulation 27(4)(a) (National Minimum Standard 31.5)