

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 is a small private children's home catering for one young person aged from 12 to 17 years who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Overall effectiveness

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

By living in a caring and supportive home environment young people are actively encouraged and enabled to make considerable and meaningful progress across all areas of their lives. Using personalised care planning the staff team systematically address specific needs enabling young people to achieve good outcomes by developing skills, self-confidence and emotional resilience to the best of their capacity.

Effective and responsive safeguarding practice ensures that young people are protected from significant harm, self inflicted or by others. Young people learn and practise strategies that will safely help to reintroduce them into the wider community. Young people respond positively to consistent encouragement, the care and support they receive from their staff team. By engaging positively with their carers young people can experience meaningful nurturing. Through experiencing trusting relationships with their carers social learning takes place and emotional resilience is enhanced.

Young people's views are influential in shaping the running of the home. They are encouraged to be fully involved in the decisions that directly affect their lives and practically influence the homes daily functions. They significantly inform all aspects of care being provided. By being actively listened to young people develop their sense of worth and ownership of their living environment. Because young people are listened to care planning and staff practice is meaningful, person centred and fully addresses their particular needs.

A competent and well-trained staff team ensures that young people are well cared for. Staff present the right mix of skills and experience combined with a detailed knowledge of the young people they care for, enabling appropriate informed support and guidance to be delivered by good-humoured, sensitive adults.

The home is very effectively managed. The emphasis on good quality and meaningful childcare practice is fully supported by promoting young peoples access to full-time education and meeting their health related needs. The home demonstrates its capacity for continuous improvement and development through its presentation, policies and evolving child care practice. Comprehensive and

informative monitoring systems confirming the quality of care and the manager's tenacity continuously helps to drive improvement.

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 at all times, having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of the children accommodated a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working at the children's home (Regulation 25(1)(b))	28/11/2011
31 (2001)	ensure all parts of the home used by children are kept clean and reasonably decorated and maintained; in particular the young persons bathroom and toilet. (Regulation 31(2)(e))	28/11/2011

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are assisted to aspire to their full potential aided by the care and attention provided by staff at the home. Staff demonstrate commitment, nurturing and resolve in providing support that helps young people to understand and appreciate their circumstances while practicing socially acceptable behaviours, useful skills and building emotional resilience within this safe environment

Clear placement plans indicate how individual needs are being promoted and what steps need to be taken to better promote positive outcomes. Staff help young people, despite sometimes encountering resistant behaviour, to address all of their day to day concerns, including those related to background, beliefs, religion and sexuality.

A healthy lifestyle for young people is promoted by raising personal esteem and always praising positive achievements. Medical and psychological needs are being addressed by providing regular access to in-house and external therapeutic assessment and counselling services. A balanced nutritious diet and access to activities that encourage exercise and promote personal fitness are incorporated into daily routines. By being fully engaged in the planning of meaningful leisure time young people are carefully introduced to meaningful, social, and recreational opportunities within the community.

Young people are making commendable progress with their education when considered against their starting points. They go to the providers own registered

school and attendance is exceptional. Young people clearly enjoy the variety of subjects that school provides both in and outside of the classroom. Reports confirm the positive ability and application of young people. Young people understand the importance of learning by being assisted to make informed choices such as in the development of social skills, for example, cooking.

In these ways young people are being effectively assisted to develop useful practical and social skills alongside a level of understanding that will help prepare them to make a future transition towards more communal living.

Quality of care

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

Staff at the home provide a good, consistent level of care for young people that ensures positive outcomes are being promoted by the placement

Young people are encouraged to develop meaningful relationships with the staff at this home based on trust. Staff provide a buoyant good natured atmosphere which young people find helpful, unthreatening and supportive, helping them to understand and more readily engage with the homes routines. For example young people are responding positively to the measures put in place to safeguard them as a result of challenging behaviour.

Young people are helped with the practical assistance of their staff team to access social and recreational activities that interest them. Special occasions such as school events and religious festivals are actively celebrated in the home to make these days a more meaningful event for young people. Young people are actively encouraged to express their views about how the home would better meet their needs and suggest changes that may improve the service they receive.

The use of sanctions by staff at the home are considered as counterproductive for developing trust and addressing the specific risky behaviour of some individuals. This helps young people to understand that although there are consequences arising from their behaviour they will not be rejected. Young people are taught that the few boundaries and rules that are followed are in place to ensure that they are kept safe from harm. Young people are invited to make comment upon any loss of privilege or physical restraint, which can be recorded on their behalf. Young people play an active role in helping to develop their individual placement and behaviour management plans to actively influence the care being provided. Talking about the effectiveness of these measures a social worker commented that she was very pleased with the effort staff make to keep the young person safe.

There is information available about the homes complaints procedure, written in a style suitable for young people to access within their welcome booklet, the young person's guide to the home. Young people understand they have access to the homes procedures and an independent advocate, although have not felt the need to use it because young people say that they have a good relationship with their staff

team and that the manager always listens to them.

Young people's placement plans are comprehensively written, including information obtained by assessment and directly from the views of young people. Young people contribute to their plans and know what information they contain because they are discussed with their key workers. Detailed information about the health, education and cultural needs of each young person are contained within plans that are reviewed within statutory timescales. The homes manager follows up on all review decisions in a timely manner thereby ensuring that the placement objectives are forwarded and properly conveyed to young people.

The home's daily routine supports and actively encourages young people's participation in education. Staff support young people's learning by a combination of classroom assistance, where necessary supporting educational projects and helping with homework. Young people have access to books, art materials and other educational resources within the home and at the provider's school site. Staff encourage the young people's desire to learn by playing general knowledge and word games and encouraging thematic interests generated by homework. School attendance is improving significantly because young people are helped to value the routine and importance of accessing education. The home's emphasis on personal achievement encourages young people to aspire by obtaining practical skills, certificates and working towards their potential of obtaining meaningful recognised qualifications.

Staff support and encourage young people to focus their recreational interests and abilities wherever safe and possible. They facilitate access to a broad range of leisure outdoor and recreational activities introducing meaningful legitimate experiences and variety to young people's lives.

The rurally located home is within reasonable access of necessary amenities and recreational facilities. Transport is provided as a necessary part of this care placement. The home is maintained well and generally kept very clean. Living rooms, kitchen-diner and sleeping areas are adequate in size, homely in appearance and furnished appropriately. Young people have sufficient space including their own personally decorated bedroom, a shower room and toilet although the latter does require some refurbishment. The single occupancy home is personalised by posters created by the young people and personal belongings confirming ownership and evidence of particular interests.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people live in a supportive and structurally safe environment where they are effectively protected from harm and as a result of their staff teams concern and commitment are able to feel safe and secure.

The safety of young people is prioritised because staff are very well trained in

safeguarding and confirm that they can recognise the indicators of abuse and self harm. They know what procedures to follow to ensure that young people are effectively safeguarded. Young people are given practical and age-appropriate advice about personal safety, including potential risks posed by peers or adults and the possible consequences of their own risky behaviour.

Anti-bullying measures are effectively monitored by staff when young people engage in communal settings such as school. Young people are encouraged to talk to their carers whenever they have worries or concerns with evidence suggesting that this is now happening. Social workers say that the manager and staff team liaise very regularly and effectively with them and other agencies to ensure vulnerable young people are suitably protected. There is effective communication to ensure safeguarding plans are implemented; some potential risks are reduced by adjusting the environment and staffing to respond to emerging concerns. Staff have access to a whistle-blowing policy should they have any concerns about professional colleagues or safeguarding practice.

The vulnerability of young people is directly addressed by this placement. Its rural location makes it very suitable for young people who would be at serious risk if looked after in a larger children's home or more community based provision upon admission. Social workers confirmed that this was one of the home's positive attributes at this stage in the young persons care plan as it has provided a further comprehensive assessment. The risks young people may present or experience in the wider community, including exploitation and criminality are well recorded and carefully managed. Clear, regularly reviewed risk assessments and an explicit placement plan explains how young people are being protected from harm. Adjustments in staffing have not always been sufficiently timely to address risky behaviour, indicating that the overall staffing complement level requires increasing.

Staff can demonstrate in their supervisory practice that they sensitively balance the young peoples safeguarding needs against enabling them to take the considered risks that are a component of normal adolescent development. In this way young people are enabled to enjoy similar social experiences to their peers by engaging in a range of recreational activities.

The rural location of this home enables it to manage unauthorised absence assertively subject to its staffing level. Established protocols and meaningful relationships with the local police complement the homes practice. Defined responses are in place should young people go absent from the home or from an off site excursion. The stability of the placement through the use of effective numbers of competent adults and positive relationships between staff and young people is improving and effectual. Staff are aware of the potential reasons and times when young people will attempt an unauthorised absence and use this information to help them manage young peoples issues and frustrations in an acceptable manner. The homes improved and proactive stance now deters young people from running off or putting themselves in risky or illegal situations.

The behaviour of young people living at this home is usually good when considered

against preadmission concerns. On admission young people are informed about how the home can help them and what the few house rules are. This key information is reiterated by their children'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 learned how to effectively manage this. Considerable emphasis is placed on positive behaviour with young people being regularly praised and reminded of their achievement rather than shortcomings. All staff adopt jointly agreed strategies to encourage and support young people to expand their socially acceptable behaviour in all situations, both in the home and the wider community.

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 reducing. Improved recording enables staff and the homes management to review circumstances and effectiveness of such practice. Young people are aware of the circumstances in which such measures may be used and acknowledge these are always in extreme circumstances and only used to ensure they are kept safe. During inspection young people expressed no concerns about the rewards and sanctions used by the home.

Young people live in a physically safe environment. They are protected by an established routine of health and safety procedures, risk assessments and preventive checks. Staff carry them 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 is always repaired quickly.

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 thoroughly ensures that all appointed staff possess the relevant skills, competencies and qualifications to meet the needs of looked after young people. Appropriately rigorous systems are in place to ensure that all visitors to the home are suitably checked and supervised while on the premises. By applying these measures young people are kept safe and are being protected effectively.

Leadership and management

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

Young people live in a home that is well managed and effectively ensures they are safe with their best interests being promoted. The home comprehensively meets the aims of its Statement of Purpose. Social workers, young people and their families are reliably informed about the nature of the services and support provided at the home by accessing this document. The young person's guide is readable and delivers useful information about what the home provides in an age appropriate and friendly tone.

The manager and staff team demonstrate their strong commitment to delivering sensitive childcare practice tailored to address the individual, challenging and complex needs of the young people looked after. One social worker said that that the home had already delivered a better understanding and assessment of the young persons needs.

Young people are practically enabled to make substantial progress, when compared against their starting point, across the many aspects of their lives, including school attendance and educational achievement, their emotional development, how they develop independence skills and learning how to keep safe. The use of reflective practice helps the manager and her team develop and improve the service being provided to ensure that positive outcomes are being delivered that are appropriate and responsive to the needs of young people. Particular importance is placed upon listening to the views of young people while empowering them to understand that their behaviour directly effects their choice and the plans made for them.

The ongoing external and internal monitoring of the quality of care being provided is used to inform any practical changes required to ensure young people get the most appropriate, person centred service possible. Emphasis on the sustained improvement of the provision by the home, based on its previous performance, is a key goal of the manager. The manager believes that this enhances the progress being made by young people. The annual review of the quality of care is realistic in its aspirations and target setting for its current resident and has effectively informed a transition plan.

Young people are looked after by a very competent, committed staff team who exhibit a wide range of skills and experience. Staff turnover is low ensuring that young people can develop trusting relationships with their carers. All established staff possess relevant qualification for working with young people. Staff receive a comprehensive training programme that addresses the particular needs of this placement alongside the more pastoral needs of young people. Training provides staff with the statutory input, skills, qualification and knowledge to carry out their jobs effectively.

The team skills and abilities complement the needs of young people living in the home, however, staff numbers have at times been insufficient to respond sufficiently quickly to emerging needs. Staff are effective in dealing with the diverse needs of young people and maintaining contact with their families.

Staff meetings include emphasis on understanding aspects of equality for looked after children and about specific needs such as disability, mental health related behaviour, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and sexuality related issues. This dialogue helps to inform their practical and sensitive understanding of children from all backgrounds. In practice this openness to difference and focused sensitivity on particular children's needs appears to be working very well.

Staff are very well supported by their manager. The core staff team have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the high expectations placed on

them for providing informed, good quality childcare practice. Very good levels of support and guidance are provided by the manager and an understanding of behaviour is provided through feedback from the company therapists. Staff regularly receive one-to-one supervision and annual appraisals of their practice which informs their ongoing learning and development. Team meetings take place monthly involving the whole staff team who discuss the general operation of the home, to critically reflect on young people's progress and to consider ways in which the service may be improved.

The home's written records are securely stored and provide a comprehensive evaluation and confirmation of individual young people's needs, diversity, development and progress. Young people's records contain up-to-date information about them, including the relevant documents from placing authorities and comprehensive in house assessment. The manager is proactive in following up shortfalls from placing authorities. Placing authority social worker feedback said: 'I have no complaint or concerns about the home. Compared to many I visit it is excellent.'

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.