

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Janet Hunnam
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This home is run by the local authority. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four young people 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 **outstanding**.

Young people thrive in a safe and caring environment where they receive outstanding levels of care support and guidance. They make significant progress in their education, health and personal development as a result of highly personalised support to meet their specific needs. An experienced and skilful staff team, led by proficient and effective managers, enables young people to develop positive, trusting relationships and build their confidence and self-esteem. Young people are happy and feel safe at the home.

Managers strive to maintain high standards of care and continuously develop new initiatives to provide opportunities for young people to make progress and improve their future life chances. A culture of safety keeps young people as safe as possible, resulting in young people reducing their risk taking behaviours.

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are making excellent progress, notably from their starting points at the time of admission, as a result of an outstanding level of care. Highly individualised support helps them develop trusting relationships, which builds their confidence and self-esteem so they feel valued and respected.

Young people benefit from close attention to their health needs resulting in substantial improvements to their health. Healthy eating has a high priority within

the home enabling young people to prosper from a nutritious diet and develop appropriate eating habits. Young people are taking greater responsibility for their own health and understand the importance of healthy lifestyles, such as abstaining from smoking. Detailed identification of each young person's specific needs, with intense support from staff and specialist agencies, results in significant improvements in young people's emotional and psychological well-being. Young people benefit from specialist input from the local child and adolescent mental health service who provide individual therapy and support for staff to promote young people's emotional and psychological health. Staff are trained to provide support and guidance in areas, such as sexual exploitation and drugs and alcohol awareness. This allows young people to become mindful of risks associated with certain behaviour. The structure and strategies put in place to support young people to manage their risk-taking behaviour assist them to settle, resulting in a significant reduction in such behaviour. At times, they may regress but staff consistently provide support to help them sustain their progress. A young person stated, 'I have grown up since I have been here and staff have helped me a lot.'

Educationally, young people are making substantial improvements. They gain from living in an environment where education is valued. They have a positive attitude towards their learning and development and school attendance is excellent. A parent commented that once the young person, 'started going to school, they have done very well.' Their educational achievement is noteworthy in relation to their abilities, including GCSE's and NVQ. Young people participate in activities in the local community, such as football club, fishing, cinema and bike rides. A young person held the Olympic Torch when it passed through the area. Within the home, young people contribute to the monthly magazine which is a colourful and vibrant celebration of events, young people's achievements and topical outside events. Young people are involved in the Children in Care Council. Within the home, young people work towards an Asdan award at an appropriate level, which accredits their personal and social development along with key skills.

Staff are extremely proactive in supporting young people to re-establish relationships where appropriate and maintain and improve family relationships. A social worker commented that the home is 'excellent at promoting contact' with a young person's family. Through close liaison with families and sensitive support, young people benefit from improved family relationships.

Young people are being very well prepared for a successful transition to independence or moving on to future placements. Independence programmes are tailored to meet individual needs and young people undertake basic tasks at a level suitable for their age and ability. Young people make their own medical appointments, attend these independently and visit the bank to change their account details. Staff pay rewards for positive behaviour into young people's bank accounts, giving them experience of accessing their money with a card and pin number in preparation for adulthood. Consequently, young people acquire a range of daily living skills to prepare them for changes ahead.

Quality of care

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

The welfare of young people is central to practice at the home. Young people share excellent relationships with staff and thrive in a nurturing and homely environment. Staff are sensitive and empathetic to young people's needs and foster respect for each other and an appreciation of equality and diversity. Relationships are supportive and good humoured and young people have ready access to senior members of staff, including managers, on an informal daily basis. This enables young people to develop confidence and trust in the adults who care for them knowing their views are valued.

Weekly residents' meetings provide a forum for young people to contribute to the running of the home by putting forward suggestions and requests relating to menus and activities. Recent requests include new bicycles and garden games, which have been provided. One young person commented they 'enjoy going out for bike rides as a family' and the outdoor games are evidently popular with some young people. Young people choose items for the house and their own bedrooms, giving them a sense of belonging and opportunities to develop their own identity. Key work and one-to-one sessions provide young people with individual opportunities to express their wishes and feelings. Young people know how to make a complaint but concerns are resolved informally without resort to the formal procedure. The new young people's guide, devised through consultation with young people, provides details of the complaints procedure and refers young people to the home's web site for further information. An advocate visits the home weekly to talk to new residents providing another opportunity for young people to express their views. Consequently, young people develop a belief that their views are important and they can contribute to decisions that affect them.

Thorough individual care plans identify each young person's specific needs and the support they need to progress in all aspects of their lives. Pre-placement planning, including visits to the young person's home or placement to obtain full information and allow the young person a successful transition, is a particular strength. A social worker noted how he is, 'impressed at how well the young person is settling in and the huge improvement with a young person in just a few days.' Young people have their own version of their care plan, designed to enable them to have more involvement in the process and a greater understanding of their goals and plans to help them progress. Key workers link the content of one-to-one sessions to particular development needs. Detailed recording demonstrates close attention to specific concerns and issues as they arise. Staff recognise each young person's vulnerability and plan sensitively to assist them. The routines of the home provide structure although staff are responsive and flexible to each young person's needs.

Young people live in an environment that actively supports their physical and psychological well-being. They enjoy healthy, nutritious meals, with a focus on including ample vegetables and monitoring each young person's daily intake of fruit and vegetables. Staff encourage young people to engage in healthy lifestyles including regular physical exercise. Staff consider young people's individual interests.

They facilitate and encourage particular hobbies and pursuits, such as fishing and learning the guitar. Staff promote young people's emotional and psychological well-being to particularly high standards. A parent commented that the young person 'is a lot calmer since being at the home.' Excellent working relationships with local child and adolescent mental health services result in young people having access to individual therapeutic intervention as required. When young people refuse to engage at this level, specialist workers provide in-depth consultations with staff to help them understand specific, complex behaviour and develop strategies for supporting young people. A worker from the child and adolescent mental health service attends team meetings to contribute to the review of the young person's care plan and advise on the support required. All aspects of care planning and intervention place emotional well-being as a guiding principle of practice. Highly effective partnerships with specialist external agencies provide expert support on a range of health issues. Staff have specific training to address issues with young people around sex relationship education and sexual exploitation. Such support enables young people to make informed decisions about their own health. A robust system for the administration of medication is in place.

The stable and committed staff team is proactive in supporting young people to attend education and achieve to their full potential. Education is highly valued at the home and embedded in the culture. From their starting points, which often include a sporadic and turbulent educational history, young people make exceptional progress and achieve excellent results enabling them to advance their education and fulfil their ambitions. The home enlists the support of specialist local authority education workers to build effective relationships with head teachers, ensuring young people have appropriate support to fulfil their potential.

The home is well maintained and very comfortable. There is a commitment to providing a pleasant, homely living environment. The spacious accommodation provides a variety of areas where young people can relax and pursue different activities. The large garden provides ample space for outdoor games, vegetable growing and relaxing. Meal times are pleasant, social occasions where young people and staff have good-humoured discussion and enjoy each other's company.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

A culture of safety protects young people. Structure and boundaries enable young people to feel safe at the home with strong relationships between young people and staff underpinning their safety. Staff understand the specific vulnerabilities of young people and appropriate measures are in place to protect them. Individual, detailed assessments identify risk-taking behaviour and strategies to minimise potential harm.

The home is proactive in minimising the involvement of young people in the criminal justice system. Training for staff enables them to have a full understanding of the youth criminal justice system. A worker from the youth offending team attends team

meetings to provide specialist advice and guidance for staff, enabling them to effectively support young people who may be at risk of involvement in criminal risk-taking behaviour. A joint protocol to reduce the prosecution of looked after children is in place with an emphasis on restorative justice and the home is working with the local police to develop this approach.

Young people report they feel safe at the home. Staff are proactive in identifying any signs of bullying and take immediate action to deal with such behaviour. Respect for each other is part of the culture at the home. Staff continually promote positive behaviour through individual reward charts, which motivate and provide incentives for young people to meet their targets. Training in managing challenging behaviour ensures that physical intervention is a last resort. Restraint is extremely rare as the skills and experience of staff in the use of de-escalation techniques averts potentially difficult situations. Physical intervention has only been used once in the last six months. Sanctions are also used infrequently. Young people have opportunities to extend their knowledge and awareness of potential risk such as internet safety.

Clear protocols agreed with the local police and an acute awareness of each young person's vulnerability if they leave the home without permission ensure swift and effective action. From young people's starting point on admission, significant reductions are evident in the incidence of young people leaving the home without permission. Staff liaise closely with the local missing person's co-ordinator who visits the home and sees each new resident individually. Young people have worked with staff in devising a new questionnaire for a young person to complete when they return to the home after being absent without authority. It utilises visual prompts effectively to gather information in a way that is not intimidating to young people.

The staff team has a positive ethos of protecting young people and promoting positive behaviour. Training focuses on safeguarding young people and protecting them in relation to specific dangers, such as sexual exploitation.

Excellent health and safety measures protect young people and staff from the risk of harm. All checks are up to date, appropriate fire safety measures are in place and risk assessments identify potential hazards and risk-reduction measures. The home follows robust recruitment procedures carried out by the local authority's human resources department, thus protecting young people from the employment of unsuitable people.

Leadership and management

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

Managers of the home are highly effective, providing outstanding leadership. They are continually implementing new initiatives to improve the high quality standards of care to enable young people to achieve significant outcomes. The needs of young people are central to care practice, planning and development, with all decisions focusing on their best interests. The home manager has recently been appointed to manage this home and another of the local authority's children's homes. He is

applying to register for both homes. The home manager and deputy manager have a wealth of experience and clearly understand the needs of young people and the support and guidance staff required to meet their needs.

No requirements or recommendations were made at the previous inspection. Developments since the last inspection demonstrate a forward-looking approach to continually providing excellent standards of care. Improvements include a greater focus on developing young people's independence skills. The Monday Munch Club is evolving into a fruitful experience for young people where staff organise a themed evening encompassing many aspects of a country's culture alongside a meal specific to the country. Young people are enthusiastic about these events and staff involve them in preparing the food which informally develops their range of cooking skills. The deputy manager is embedding the ASDAN awards into all aspects of the home enabling young people to gain accreditation for their personal development and acquisition of key skills through enjoyable, positive activities. Staff have a wide range of skills, which they use constructively to provide opportunities for young people to extend their experiences, develop new skills and acquire knowledge which will be of value in their adult life. Consultation with young people is an area that managers are keen to develop. Young people have been involved in devising new questionnaires to obtain information when they have been absent without permission. Other initiatives include fostering improved relationships between young people and the police by inviting the community police to visit the home regularly and informally with the aim of changing the negative perception some young people have of the police.

Rigorous and robust monthly monitoring takes place through a comprehensive quality assurance system. This enables managers to track young people's progress in relation to key performance indicators, such as education attendance, health, contact with families and incidents. Close analysis of this information allows managers to identify patterns and trends and rectify shortfalls without delay to sustain high-quality care to secure young people's progress. Regulation 33 reports are detailed and thorough and include consultation with young people and staff.

An experienced, confident and stable staff team is committed to providing consistently high-quality care for young people to improve their life chances. The home has a commitment to providing high-quality training and continuous professional development. All staff have the required qualification and mandatory training, which is supplemented by a range of training opportunities to extend staff's skills and knowledge to support young people effectively. Staff are flexible and change their ways of supporting young people to meet their specific needs. For example, they are adapting the way they present information to young people to a more pictorial, visual format to make it easier for young people to understand.

An open, supportive culture exists amongst staff resulting in a high level of consistency in their delivery of care for young people. Agency staff are not used, which ensures continuity of care for young people and develops their sense of safety and security as strangers do not care for them. Staff receive excellent levels of support and supervisions. Staff report that they feel extremely well supported and guided to carry out their tasks with informal support, guidance and encouragement

consistently given.

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.