

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Liz Daniels
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Date of last inspection	6 January 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

This home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four young people who have suffered disruption in their lives and display difficult behaviour as a result. It is a large detached property set in a corner plot, in a residential part of the town. There is car parking for several vehicles to the front of the property and a large garden with a lawn and patio to the side and rear. The home has four single bedrooms and a sleep-in room for staff. A large dining room, study and lounge all provide communal relaxation space and a conservatory enables the young people to enjoy some quiet time. In addition, there is a well-fitted kitchen and utility room as well as two bathrooms and a shower room.

Summary

This unannounced inspection was the first visit to the home for the year April 2009 to March 2010. All of the key standards were inspected. The visit provided the opportunity to meet with the home's manager, his deputy and several members of the care team. Three of the four young people currently accommodated were at home for parts of the inspection and shared their views and experiences.

This setting provides a nicely decorated and comfortable home for the young people and an enthusiastic, motivated staff team are developing excellent measures to support them; meeting the young people's individual needs is seen as an integral part of how the home runs. The staff see their role as enabling the young people to achieve their full potential as well as ensuring they are kept safe, are healthy and have the opportunities they need to work towards independence and leaving care.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The three recommendations made at the last inspection have been met. As a result all complaints are now included in the home's monthly monitoring and the pages in the sanctions log are numbered. In addition, risk assessments now underpin the management of the chickens at the home.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The young people enjoy a choice of meals that are varied and healthy, whereby their good health is promoted. They help with meal preparation, shopping and learning about food costs; in addition, the vegetable garden the staff and young people are developing, as well as the chickens they keep, provide them with some home produce. The staff encourage the young people to eat healthily, although as the quantities eaten are not always recorded, reasons for weight gain or loss can not always be easily explored. Eating together in the home's pleasant dining room, enables the young people and staff to share views and discuss the day's events. All the staff are trained in food hygiene and ensure the young people have a basic knowledge as to how food should be managed safely.

Each young person's comprehensive health care plan details any health needs and the care required. The staff promote good health by encouraging healthy eating, exercise and outside activities as well as discouraging smoking, alcohol and substance misuse. Health education is discussed informally but is also a regular topic for key worker sessions and residents' meetings; appropriate referrals to supportive clinics or networks are made with the young people's agreement and they choose whether staff accompany them to appointments. Good liaison with health professionals ensures the young people are well supported during the emotional difficulties they experience. Illnesses, accidents or injuries are well recorded and body maps are used appropriately. A chronology of health events is now maintained and shared each month with the young person's social worker.

Medications are safely stored in a locked cupboard in the kitchen and there are good processes in place for the management and recording of medication and First Aid. As none of the young people are currently taking medications, recording could not be fully inspected. No non-prescription medications are kept at the home but a good arrangement with the young people's General Practitioner (GP) enables them to speak with a local pharmacist for advice and treatment for minor ailments. The staff are trained in the administration of First Aid and well-stocked First Aid boxes are in the home and company vehicle.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The young people's privacy is respected and any information about them is handled with sensitivity. Any room searching, entering rooms or sharing of personal information is underpinned by robust policies. The young people each have their own rooms and use their mobile phones for making private calls, but they can also use the home's cordless phone. Wherever possible a mixed staff group is on duty enabling sensitivity to gender issues.

The young people believe that any complaints they make are taken seriously, investigated and action taken. The procedure is well publicised and ensures any concerns are managed responsively and recorded appropriately, either by the local authority complaints officer or the home's manager. The monthly review of complaints recently introduced ensures their management is audited against the home's complaints procedure and any trends or themes are quickly identified. Staff are trained in 'recording skills' which includes training about complaints.

The staff respond appropriately to safeguarding concerns, whereby the welfare of the young people is promoted and they are protected. Robust policies such as mandatory safeguarding training for all staff and the requirement that all new staff have an enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosure prior to employment, underpin the home's procedures. There is also a tight 'net nanny' for the home's computers and their history of use is regularly explored by the local authority. In the event of any concerns, the Sussex safeguarding procedures are readily available for staff to reference and an 'on call' rota of senior managers provides additional support.

The home's ethos that bullying is unacceptable, alongside policies which aim to reduce the risk or opportunity for it to take place, is resulting in a very low incidence. The staff have a clear understanding of what constitutes bullying and intervene promptly if it occurs. In the event good records are maintained and strategies are put in place to reduce the risk of it continuing. Details of who the young people can go to for support if they feel intimidated are well publicised.

The staff at the home support the young people and recognise they must be protected if they become absent without authority. Risk assessments for each young person identify clear strategies the staff can take for each incident. The police are involved appropriately and comprehensive records are maintained. Each young person is treated positively when they return and can either see their social worker or the representative from the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) whom they know from his regular visits to the home.

Although acceptable behaviour is encouraged the staff respond constructively to the young people when they demonstrate inappropriate behaviour. A reward system endorses good behaviour and poor behaviour is managed through a restorative approach or sanctions when this is not possible; however, although the sanctions are appropriate they are not always fully recorded. These good measures have resulted in a low incidence of physical intervention. Comprehensive reports of such incidents are maintained although the log of physical interventions does not contain all the information required.

Good measures are in place to maintain the safety and security of the young people. The home is appropriately insured and positive steps are taken to protect against the risk of fire and other hazards. The required checks of equipment are undertaken and the necessary contracts are in place. There are appropriate risk assessments for the premises, activities and for the individual needs of the young people. However, personal items such as razors, left in communal areas, present a risk for the other young people accommodated.

Visitors are well vetted and the manager is fully aware of the measures that must be in place for the safe recruitment of staff. Staff files are held by the local authority's personnel department and good progress is being made in gathering evidence at the setting to support the recruitment process; however, as this is not yet complete this standard could not be fully inspected at this inspection.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The young people receive excellent individual support and professional services are accessed when needed. Records of key worker sessions show that they provide good opportunities for the young people to discuss their personal, health or social concerns, although the young people confirm that they are also able to approach any member of staff with personal concerns. The mixture of group and individual activities that are arranged, counter the risk of a young person becoming isolated. The young people are positive about the home's reward system, finding it a motivating way of focussing on their individual areas for development and they also enjoy the weekly 'Achievement Awards' which the staff present for additional accomplishments. Regular visits to the home by a representative from NYAS ensure all the young people can contact an independent person to act as their advocate and the staff enable the young people to access the professional services they need.

Education is promoted as valuable for the young people and the staff encourage them in their attendance and learning. Very good facilities are available for them to do homework and good learning resources are evident. For those young people involved in the 'Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network' (ASDAN) their course work benefits their GCSE work. The local authority's education liaison officer coordinates any additional education or flexible learning the young people need, as well as ensuring they all have a Personal Education Plan (PEP).

The staff support the young people in pursuing their particular interests. They are alert to the risk of individuals feeling isolated and encourage them to develop social skills through activities such as horse riding, involvement in local sport and going to the gym. Home projects such as keeping chickens, developing a wildlife pond and growing vegetables, are hobbies the staff and young people enjoy together; the staff also support the young people in applying for additional funding for youth opportunities, which is used for particular projects they choose. A recent get together with a group of young people from other countries enabled them all to explore each other's cultures and learn about different life experiences. The regular house meetings are a good forum for the young people to meet with the staff and express their choices about food and activities, as well as share their views about the home.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Each young person has a plan of care through their 'looked after child' framework, which the staff then use as a basis for a comprehensive care plan, health plan and risk assessments. Monthly reviews of the care plans, by the deputy manager and the young person's key worker ensures they are updated; any changes are also discussed and agreed with the young person concerned. The one to one sessions that are arranged between each young person and their key worker, provides an opportunity for them to raise any concerns and seek support; comprehensive records of these sessions as well as daily records are maintained. Monthly reports are forwarded to the young person's social worker and the care plans are always discussed at the weekly team meeting, whereby all staff are aware of any changes made.

The young people's care needs and progress are reviewed twice yearly within the 'looked after child' framework. The staff encourage them to attend but always ensure they ascertain their views and advocate for them when required. The reviews are seen as an important forum for representatives from education, health and supportive networks to share their views with the young person and family members. All the required paperwork is held in the young person's file and is available for them to access with staff support.

The staff encourage and support the young people to maintain contact with their families and those who are important to them; equally they are supported when contact is not deemed appropriate. Contact arrangements are agreed at each young person's review and discussed during key worker sessions. Clear policies and procedures underpin the practices in place and good record keeping enables the frequency and progress of contacts to be monitored.

All admissions to the home are planned and emergency admissions are avoided unless necessary for a young person's welfare. Information about the home is available for the young person as well as their parents or carer and they are encouraged to bring small personal possessions with them. Similarly the staff aim to ensure a young person is prepared for moving from the home and to facilitate a smooth transition.

The ethos of the home is that the young people share any concerns and are involved in key decisions about their lives. The staff are open and clear in their approach to the young people and there are many avenues for the young people to exchange views amongst themselves and discuss how the home is run. The young people say that they feel well listened to and that the staff respond quickly to meet their requests.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Very good steps are being taken to enable the young people to learn skills for becoming independent, which supports them in preparing for leaving care. Areas for development are detailed in their Pathway Plans and although none of the young people currently accommodated are eligible for a 'looked after child' leaving plan, the daily life of the home provides opportunities for each young person to gain the knowledge and many of the skills required for future independent living.

The setting provides a pleasant, comfortable home which is decorated, furnished and maintained to a good standard. The house is a large detached property with a good sized garden, situated in a residential area within easy reach of shops and facilities. Set back from the road, there is space for several cars to park by the house and a large enclosed area to the back of the home provides a safe recreational space for the young people. The exterior of the property is in a good state of structural and decorative repair. Internally there is a large lounge and a smaller sitting room which is currently used as a study and education area; both are appropriately furnished and enable group or individual activities. In addition, a good sized kitchen and dining area provide space for meal preparation and for all to eat together. Each young person has their own bedroom which is personalised to suit them.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The home's Statement of Purpose is comprehensive and reflects what the setting sets out to do for the young people, how they will be cared for and what services they can expect. A young people's guide is also available in a format which is appropriate for the young people.

The home continues to be managed by a knowledgeable, experienced and well qualified manager who is also the registered manager for another home and shares his time between the two settings. He is supported by an experienced deputy manager who takes a lead in the operational day to day running of the home. Two staff are currently undertaking their probationary training but the remainder are either trained in the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) for the care of children and young people at Level 3 or above, or are undertaking the course.

There are sufficient staff rostered to care for the young people and meet the home's Statement of Purpose, with sufficient time for the completion of records and hand over of information. With the use of sessional staff to cover any shortfalls, no agency are used. All the new staff undertake a comprehensive induction programme and good access to training is enabling the staff to be updated in key areas. In addition, timetabled supervision ensures the staff team is supported and training needs are identified.

There is good monitoring of the care of the young people and the home's performance against its Statement of Purpose. All the appropriate records are reviewed at least once a month and the frequency or trends in events are identified; discussion with the staff ensures their significance is recognised and appropriate action taken. In addition, the monthly visits to comply with Regulation 33, which are undertaken by an independent representative on behalf of the local authority, enable a robust scrutiny of the service; documents are sampled, signed and dated and recommendations are made which are addressed.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The ethos of the home is to recognise and support the different cultures, abilities, communication needs, language and faiths of all those accommodated. A mixed staff team ensures that the individual personal, social, health and emotional needs of each young person are explored and care given to meet them.

Each young person has a file that is a permanent and secure record of their history and progress. They can request to see it and to learn what is in it, as appropriate and with staff support.

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 Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
22	maintain an accurate and up to date record of measures of control used, as set out in Regulation 17	31 July 2009
23	ensure all parts of the home are free from hazards and implements such as razors are not left in communal places (Regulation 23).	10 July 2009

Recommendations

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

- record the quantities of food eaten whereby weight gain or loss can be easily explored (NMS 10)
- ensure that the details of all consequences are recorded in the sanctions log (NMS 22).