

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Liz Daniels
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Date of last inspection	11 February 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 from within the local authority who have suffered disruption in their lives and display difficult behaviour as a result. It is a detached property set in its own grounds, in a residential part of the town. There is car parking for two vehicles at the front of the property and an enclosed garden with a lawn and patio to the rear. The home has four single bedrooms and a sleep in room for staff. A dining room, study, lounge and conservatory all provide communal relaxation space. In addition, there is a well-fitted kitchen and a utility room as well as a bathroom 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. The four young people currently accommodated were at home for parts of the inspection and they, as well as a previous resident at the home, shared some of their views and experiences.

This setting provides a comfortable home for the young people and a caring staff team support them; meeting the young people's individual needs is seen as an integral part of how the home runs. The staff are keen to enable the young people to achieve their full potential as well as ensure they are kept safe. Satisfactory measures are in place for managing the home and to keep the young people healthy.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Two actions were issued at the last inspection, both of which have been met. As a result, the records detailing the management of behaviour are comprehensive and the management of complaints is now monitored as part of the home's quality assurance.

Three recommendations were also made and all have been undertaken. Consequently, the home has written confirmation that it is included in the local authority's public and employee liability insurance. Similarly, the home's fire plan details the fire exits and the times of fire drills are recorded. In addition, appropriate recruitment records are maintained at the home.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The young people enjoy varied meals that reflect different cultures as well as their individual choices. They can choose to help with the shopping and meal preparation, and the staff encourage them to eat healthily. However, the weekly menus do not specify the fruit and vegetables provided; in addition, the details of fresh food or the quantities eaten are not always recorded whereby over-eating or other eating disorders cannot easily be explored. Eating together in the home's dining room enables the young people and staff to share views and discuss the day's events. Most of the staff are trained in food hygiene.

Each young person's health plan details their health needs and the care required. The staff promote good health by encouraging exercise and outside activities, although they do not actively discourage the young people from smoking. Liaison with health professionals and therapists ensures the young people are well supported during the emotional difficulties they experience; a representative from the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) also regularly attends staff meetings to provide advice and support. Illnesses, accidents or injuries are well recorded and body maps are used appropriately.

Medications are safely stored in locked cupboards in the office, are administered by appropriately trained staff and records are kept. However, the recording system in place does not always accurately reflect the balance of stock held and medications are not included in the home's monitoring for Regulation 34. All of the staff are trained in the management of medications and some in the administration of First Aid.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The staff respect the young people's privacy and handle information about them with sensitivity. Any room searching, entering rooms or sharing of personal information is underpinned by a comprehensive policy for privacy and confidentiality. The young people each have their own room, which they can lock, and use of the home's cordless phone or their own mobile enables them to make calls in private.

Complaints are taken seriously and investigated appropriately. The young people's guide confirms who the young people can talk to if they wish to complain and details are well publicised in the home; all the young people have regular access to an advocate who can speak on their behalf. The young people confirm that they know how to raise concerns and believe they are listened to. Most of the staff have had training in 'dealing with complaints' as part of their training for the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and complaints are monitored as part of the monthly visits to fulfil Regulation 33.

All the staff are trained in child protection and good safeguarding procedures protect the young people. The Sussex safeguarding procedures are readily available in the home for the staff to reference and all staff have an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure before employment.

The staff promote that bullying is unacceptable and this ethos, alongside the close supervision of the young people, limits the chance of bullying. The staff are alert to those young people who are likely to bully as well as those who are vulnerable and their clear understanding of what constitutes bullying enables them to intervene promptly if it occurs. They follow through any incidence with the individuals concerned, as well as at staff meetings, ensuring trends are identified and appropriate support is accessed.

The staff are responsive to unauthorised absence. In the event, they recognise that the young people need support and must be protected. Individual risk assessments identify clear strategies they can take; the police are involved appropriately and comprehensive records are maintained. Each young person is treated positively when they return and are seen by their social worker to consider the reasons for their absence. A representative from the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) also regularly visits the home and the young people know how they can contact him if required.

Acceptable behaviour by the young people is promoted and the staff respond constructively to them when they demonstrate inappropriate behaviour. A reward system endorses good behaviour and poor behaviour is appropriately managed through sanctions, if a restorative approach is not possible. Physical intervention is also used when there is a risk to an individual. Good records of such incidents are maintained and both logs are monitored as part of the home's internal monitoring. All staff are trained in 'Promoting Respect in Care Environments' (PRICE) techniques.

Good measures are in place to maintain the safety and security of the young people. Appropriate risk assessments are undertaken for the premises, individuals and activities the young people take part in; the setting is also appropriately insured. Positive steps are taken to protect against the risk of fire and other hazards; regular fire drills include all the permanent staff and young people over the year, although records suggest that some of the sessional staff who work regularly at the home are not trained in fire evacuation at least once a year. Substances hazardous to health are appropriately stored and many data sheets are held although, as there is no index, the staff cannot easily monitor that all products used in the home comply with the 'Control of Substances Hazardous to Health' (COSHH) requirements.

Robust recruitment procedures aim to prevent the young people from being exposed to potential abusers. All the necessary information is received prior to employment and any agency staff employed are required to have a current CRB disclosure. Visitors and contractors are well monitored whilst on site.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The young people receive good individual support and the staff access professional services to help them when needed. Key worker sessions provide opportunities for the young people to discuss their personal, health or social concerns; however, records suggest some of the young people have long periods without spending focused time with staff members or their key worker. A mixture of group and individual activities are arranged and each young person is also encouraged to pursue their particular interests. 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.

Education is promoted as valuable and the staff encourage the young people in their school attendance and learning. Suitable facilities are available for them to do homework and the education liaison officer is a valuable resource to provide additional educational support and flexible learning; she also ensures all the young people have a Personal Education Plan (PEP). Poor school attendance and the reasons for it are fully explored; very good communication between the schools, home and local authority education liaison officer underpins the home's support for the young people in their learning.

The staff encourage the young people to pursue their particular interests whereby they can develop confidence in their skills. Some activities are arranged for them but equally the staff recognise the young people's need to have 'free time' when they may wish to be alone. They are alert to the risk of a young person feeling isolated and the strategies they put in place are aimed at ensuring they all feel included. House meetings provide a forum for the young people to meet with the staff and express their choices about food and activities, as well as discuss the home.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The young people's needs are assessed and their 'looked after child' placement plan underpins the home's individual care plan, risk assessments and health plan. The one-to-one time they spend with staff members or their key worker provides an opportunity for them to discuss their plan, as well as seek guidance, support or advice. Records are maintained and a report sent regularly to each young person's social worker.

Reviews of care are generally held as required within the 'looked after child' framework. Representatives from education, health and supportive networks are invited and the young people are also encouraged to attend; seeking the young people's views as well as encouraging them to be involved in the meetings helps them to feel included in the process. All the required paperwork is held in the young person's file and is available for them to access with staff support.

The staff know each young person's contact agreements and support them in maintaining contact with their families, friends and significant others, as appropriate. Equally they are supported when contact is not deemed appropriate. The home's policies and procedures underpin the practices in place and good record keeping enables the frequency and progress of contacts to be monitored.

The admission process is well planned and structured; unplanned admissions are avoided unless necessary for a young person's welfare. Similarly, the staff support the young people in learning to be more independent which helps prepare them for leaving care.

The staff provide informal opportunities for the young people to share any concerns and be involved in daily choices within the home; there are several avenues for them to exchange views amongst themselves and be involved in key decisions about their lives. In addition, the views of the relevant contact officers for the young people are sought informally by phone and during their visits to the home.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The staff encourage the young people to learn skills that prepare them for leaving care and their move into independent or supported living. Their pathway plans identify their learning needs and the young people are encouraged to be involved with the daily life of the home. Once eligible the staff work in conjunction with the '16 plus' team to facilitate a smooth transition when the young people move from the home.

The house is a detached property with an enclosed garden at the back and a paved area at the front, suitable for cars to park; road parking is also available. It is situated in a residential area within easy reach of shops and facilities. Internally there is sufficient communal space to enable the young people to meet together or have some quiet time. A conservatory recently added to the home provides an ideal space for the young people to play snooker or relax. The well-fitted kitchen and dining room provide space for meal preparation as well as for the young people and staff to eat together. Each young person has their own bedroom which is personalised to suit them. However, there is an offensive odour in one area of the home which the staff are aware of and are working hard to address the cause.

The setting provides a comfortable home for the young people. It is nicely decorated and well furnished. Repairs are undertaken promptly whereby the interior and exterior of the property are maintained in a good state of structural and decorative repair.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The home's Statement of Purpose reflects how the setting operates, how the young people will be cared for and what services they can expect. A comprehensive young people's guide is also available.

A knowledgeable, experienced and well qualified manager continues to lead the staff team at this home and another home in a nearby town, sharing his time between the two settings; a deputy manager supports him by taking a lead in the operational day to day running of the home. All the permanent staff are trained in an NVQ for the care of children and young people at level 3 or above, or are undertaking the course.

Sufficient staff are rostered to care for the young people and meet the home's Statement of Purpose with enough time for the completion of records and hand over of information. With the use of sessional staff to cover any shortfalls, minimal agency staff are used. The home's induction programme as well as good access to training ensures all the permanent staff are updated in key areas. In addition, the annual appraisals and timetabled supervisions enable training or development needs to be identified, as well as provide opportunities for reflection on practice. However, it is less clear that the training needs for the sessional staff who work between the local authority homes are as well identified.

Quality assurance processes monitor the care of the young people and the home's performance against its Statement of Purpose. However, not all aspects of Schedule 6 are included in the monitoring undertaken to comply with Regulation 34; in addition, it is not possible to track the sampling done to fulfil the quality audit, as some records are not signed or dated by the manager (or his deputy) at least once a month. Monthly monitoring visits are undertaken by an independent person on behalf of the local authority. A comprehensive report then directs the manager towards areas for improvement, although is not always seen by the deputy manager who takes the lead in the day to day running of the home.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. 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. They recognise and support the different views, needs and cultures of any young person accommodated.

Each young person's file is a permanent record of their history and progress that is stored securely. It can be accessed and read by the young people 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 Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
12	ensure that the young people's health is promoted and in particular that guidance and support is given to actively discourage them from smoking (Regulation 20)	9 October 2009
13	keep an accurate record of all medication, prescribed and non-prescribed, and ensure medication monitoring is included in the home's quality assurance (Regulation 34, Schedule 6)	2 September 2009
24	ensure the home is kept free from offensive odours (Regulation 31)	2 September 2009
33	ensure the records and matters referred to in Schedule 6 are monitored and signed at least once a month to identify any patterns or issues requiring action (Regulation 34).	9 October 2009

Recommendations

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

- ensure the young people are provided with a varied diet that is wholesome and nutritious (NMS 10)
- ensure the stock balance of medications is recorded on the Medication Administration Records (NMS 13)
- ensure all staff who regularly work at the home are included in fire drills over the 12 month period (NMS 26)
- maintain an index of products used in the home and the corresponding product data sheet, to comply with COSHH (NMS 26)
- ensure a copy of the report from the monthly monitoring visits is available for the staff to read and respond to (NMS 32)
- ensure the training needs are identified for all staff who work in the home (NMS 31).