

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 registered to provide care for up to four young people who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home is managed by a local authority.

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 **good**.

Young people receive high quality care, support and guidance resulting in them making significant progress in improving their behaviour and personal development. A skilled and experienced staff team led by effective managers are successful in providing personalised care to meet young people's individual needs. Positive and meaningful relationships between staff and young people enable them to develop self-esteem and confidence to overcome difficulties and improve their future life chances.

Young people's safety and welfare are central to practice at the home. Excellent collaborative working with outside agencies and appropriate safeguarding measures protect young people. Young people state that they can go to any member of staff with any concerns and their views are valued and respected.

Comprehensive monitoring systems are in place though not all Schedule 6 matters are included in the monthly quality assurance checking.

Areas for improvement

Statutory 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
34 (2001)	ensure the system for monitoring all the matters set out in Schedule 6 is established. (Regulation 34(1)(a))	10/09/2012

Recommendations

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

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people make significant progress as a result of highly individualised support, which helps them develop social skills and self-confidence. They benefit from forming trusting relationships with staff so they feel valued and respected.

In a caring and nurturing environment, young people understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and take steps towards making appropriate choices such as giving up smoking cigarettes. They receive excellent support in all aspects of their health care. Staff support young people with specific health needs to attend medical appointments. They have access to advice on health issues from within the staff team and community resources. This ensures young people have information to make choices and have an awareness of risk attached to some behaviours such as smoking and alcohol misuse. Young people benefit from the specialist input from the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service who provide individual therapy and support for staff and this promotes their emotional and psychological wellbeing. Consequently, young people's behaviour improves along with their social interaction with others.

Educationally, young people make good progress from their starting points. Staff liaise closely with school staff and the local looked after children education specialist to provide support for young people in relation to their individual education needs. If young people experience particular difficulty attending school, specific support ensures they continue to make progress. Improvements in young people's behaviour enable them to positively engage in education to advance their future life chances. They participate in positive activities in the local community such as a local youth club, going to the cinema and fishing. Within the home, young people make a positive contribution through constructive activities such as planting a vegetable patch in the garden.

Staff recognise the importance for young people to keep in touch with their family, friends and significant people. They are extremely proactive in promoting and sustaining contact by liaising closely with young people's families and providing sensitive support if young people encounter difficulties. Consequently, young people benefit from improved family relationships.

A focus on independence skills within the home enables young people to develop daily living skills in preparation for their transition to adult life. They are encouraged to do basic tasks at a level suitable to their age and ability. As they near the stage for moving to a semi-independent placement, more structured plans prepare them for life with much less support. Programmes are in place to give them experience of budgeting, planning, shopping and cooking meals with staff assistance if required. Staff encourage young people to seek part time work as they develop independence and experience employment through voluntary work with local charities.

Quality of care

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

Young people thrive in a nurturing, homely environment where the welfare of young people is central to practice. Interactions between staff and young people are supportive and good-humoured enabling young people to develop trust and respect for adults who care for them. An experienced, stable staff team, guided by proficient and skilful managers, provide extremely high quality care for young people. They model mutual respect and support for each other, which contribute to a positive culture at the home. Staff are keen to acknowledge and celebrate the progress and achievements of young people.

Young people's views are valued and staff actively consult with them through young people's meetings, daily discussions and key work sessions. Staff ensure that young people receive a response to their requests and suggestions and that they receive an explanation when it is not possible to act on their wishes. Young people know how to make a complaint but in general, issues are resolved without resort to the formal complaints procedure. Consequently, young people benefit from staff listening and responding to their opinions and feel they are valued. An independent advocate visits the home monthly, providing an additional opportunity for young people to express their opinions.

Care plans for young people are of a very high standard with detailed identification of individual needs and progress achieved. Staff involve young people in this care planning process through key work and one-to-one sessions and through individual target setting for their reward and incentive scheme. A child-friendly care plan is currently being introduced to further the involvement of young people in their own care plan. Close, weekly monitoring of these plans allows staff to respond to young people's changing needs and to provide relevant and constructive support to help young people overcome difficulties and make progress.

Young people live in an environment that actively supports their physical and psychological well-being. They enjoy healthy, nutritious meals and make suggestions for the menu. Staff are aware of the importance of ensuring a range of vegetables and fruit is readily available. Young people receive excellent health care and staff promote their emotional and psychological wellbeing to particularly high standards. 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 the weekly team meeting to contribute to the review of the young person's care plan and advise on the support provided. All aspects of care planning and intervention place emotional wellbeing as a guiding principle of practice. Highly effective partnerships with specialist external agencies provide expert support on a range of health issues. A trained member of staff addresses 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.

Staff are proactive and committed in supporting young people to attend education and make good progress to fulfil their potential. If young people encounter difficulties, staff enlist specialist support and work together with the school to overcome impediments to young people's learning. Staff have arranged for a tutor to provide additional individual support for a young person during the summer holidays. Young people enjoy a range of enjoyable activities, which also provide opportunities for extending their social experiences. Staff encourage young people to try a range of different activities based on their individual interests and facilitate young people's specific requests such as attending church.

Young people live in a home that provides a good standard of accommodation and a pleasant, homely living environment. Staff support young people to personalise their rooms and bedrooms reflect the individuality of each young person. Meal times are pleasant social occasions where young people enjoy good-humoured discussion. A large garden provides space for outdoor activities and relaxing.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **good** 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. Excellent liaison with outside agencies results in effective partnership working to protect young people. The local police co-ordinator comments that staff are 'very proactive' and the home 'is taking all the right steps to keep young people safe'. Individual, detailed assessments identify risk taking behaviour and strategies to minimise potential harm.

Protocols have been agreed with the local police to effectively manage instances when young people are absent from the home without permission and when young people will be reported as missing from home. These are based on risk and their individual level of vulnerability. Detailed individual risk assessments identify particular issues, strategies to reduce such behaviour and managing their return to the home.

Managers attend monthly meetings with the local police and other professionals when young people persistently engage in such risky behaviour. This ensures all professionals are fully informed and working together on strategies to keep young people safe. The local police state that communication with them is excellent. Staff receive regular training in safeguarding young people and the staff team has a positive ethos of protecting young people. Consequently, the incidence of young people going missing or being absent without permission is reducing.

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. Restraint has been used only once in the previous eleven months. Staff apply the principles of restorative justice to enable young people to understand the consequences of their actions when they behave inappropriately. Where sanctions are applied, they take into account young people's age and ability to understand its imposition. Records of sanctions are appropriate. A young person commented that sanctions are 'fair'. Managers closely monitor these measures and discuss their effectiveness, during team meetings, in changing young people's behaviour. Staff are consistent in applying behaviour management strategies through clear boundaries and promoting positive behaviour, resulting in a reduction of inappropriate behaviour.

The management of health and safety in the home is good and helps protect young people 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**.

The Registered Manager and her deputy effectively and efficiently manage the home to an outstanding level. They provide excellent leadership and strive for continual improvement. This is evident through an extensive understanding of the home's strengths and areas for development. The needs of young people are central to care practice, planning and development with all decisions focusing on their best interests. A development plan is in place with improving young people's outcomes having a high priority along with increasing the involvement of young people in decision making. The requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection have been acted upon. Complaints are appropriately investigated and resolved.

An ethos of continual improvement is inherent in the home. Staff report that as a

team they focus on improving the care they provide for young people by, for instance, monitoring young people's care plans and behaviour management strategies for their effectiveness, during the weekly staff meetings. The presence of the child and adolescent mental health worker at these weekly meetings is a valuable resource in this process, enabling staff to devise strategies with a deeper understanding of the meaning of young people's behaviour.

Staff report that the team has developed considerably and are confident and supportive to each other. This enables them to openly review their practice and accept constructive criticism from each other which improves the quality of care. The manager and deputy manager have clearly cultivated this open team culture with considerable success and to the benefit young people.

The management team have high expectations of the staff and their standards of practice ensuring the culture of the home is proactive, vibrant and young person centred. Managers take initiative and are particularly effective in forward planning and liaising with outside agencies to ensure all appropriate strategies are in place to meet the needs of young people and protect them. For example, the manager meets with the local co-ordinator for missing persons before agreeing to the placement of young people. This enables strategies to be discussed and agreed for minimising risks in the context of historical behaviour and keeping the young people safe.

Managers focus on safeguarding issues and utilise all available resources to minimise the risk of harm to young people. Developments in this area include working with outside professionals to reduce the risk of sexual exploitation. A further example of excellent management practice is the manager's vigilance when considering new admissions. She is extremely mindful of safeguarding issues in relation to the specific vulnerabilities of existing residents in assessing the effect a new resident may have and the increased risks they may pose. Outside agencies report that management is very good at the home and has greatly improved in recent months.

The Statement of Purpose is clear and informative. The home meets the expressed aim of helping young people overcome difficult early childhood experiences and to work with them, alongside others, to improve their life chances. The home provides a nurturing and safe environment where young people can thrive and make significant progress. Partnership working with external agencies is a key strength of the home enabling young people to benefit from specialist support, advice and guidance.

The home seeks to improve the already excellent standards of care wherever possible and has a positive, forward looking approach. A comprehensive quality assurance system includes monthly monitoring of the quality of care provided and of the progress that young people make in relation to key performance indicators such as education attendance, health, their contact with families and incidents. Close monitoring of absent without permission records identify patterns of behaviour and strategies to minimise risk to young people. Such rigorous scrutiny enables management to identify shortfalls without delay and take action to sustain the high

quality of care necessary to secure young people's progress. However, some required matters are not included in the monthly quality assurance checks. Reports of the monitoring that takes place in line with Regulation 33 are detailed and thorough. Recording of significant events is in place, with ensuing action and notification to the relevant authorities. Records are well-organised, clear and up to date. These effective processes ensure the provision of high quality care and underpin good outcomes for young people.

An experienced, confident, stable staff team are committed and provide consistent high quality care for young people which improves their life chances. Staff are extremely well supported through regular supervision, relevant training and effective leadership from the management team. All staff are qualified to the required level and staff recently employed undertake the required induction programme before commencing the working in care award. Management conduct staff appraisals, staff report two in the last year, which staff state are of high quality, constructive and focused on improving outcomes for young people. Weekly staff meetings provide a forum for reflection and open discussion amongst the staff team on current work practice, young people's progress and new ways of supporting young people to improve their outcomes.

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.