

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Michael Williams
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is run by a care company. It provides care and accommodation for up to three children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and learning disabilities. Two children can be accommodated under short-break arrangements and a further child can live at the home.

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**.

Taking into account their starting points at the time of their placements, young people make good progress across all aspects of their welfare and development. They are helped to achieve this by the good support they receive from staff. Placement planning is very individualised to meet the personal needs of each young person and is implemented in practice.

Staff have a good understanding of safe working practices which they effectively follow in conjunction with external professionals when necessary. Young people strongly agree that they feel safe at the home. Staff follow identified strategies to protect young people from areas of risk. Any concerning behaviours are well-managed by staff. Appropriate boundaries and rules are set and are consistently followed.

The leadership and management arrangements are good. Together the acting manager and the company's head of care, who visits monthly on behalf of the responsible individual, effectively identify and address any weaknesses to secure future improvement.

Young people mostly strongly agreed with a number of positive statements about the home. They described the care and support as very good. They said the home could do 'nothing' better and that the following is good about the home: 'I like this house because the staff are nice;' 'it is very organised and supportive of all my needs;' and 'I'm always encouraged to be the best I can, and when I have had to face difficult

and uncomfortable situations they are always there for support.'

A placing social worker mostly agreed with a number of positive statements about the home and described the services it provides as good.

One recommendation has been made to make the selection and vetting of staff working with children in the home even more robust than it currently is.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- make telephone enquiries, as well as obtaining written references, a part of the process of checking references for all people seeking to work in or for the children's home. (NMS 16.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Taking into account their starting points at the time of their placements, young people have achieved good outcomes. One young person diarised how they were before moving into the home and after leaving it as follows: 'Before you could tell I needed stability, I wasn't very strong. After, I smile a lot more, I got stability, I got stronger.' The young person living at the home is making good progress towards achieving agreed short and long-term placement objectives, such as reducing challenging behaviour, improving the quality of family contact and promoting educational attendance and achievement.

Young people make good progress in developing a positive identity, self-esteem and knowledge and understanding of their background. They make and usually sustain positive relationships with staff in the home and, where needed, re-develop positive relationships with their family. Young people's case records include personal details, such as their religious and cultural needs, and individualised placement plans to address their specific needs.

Young people's physical, emotional and psychological health needs are very well met. They are helped to understand their health needs and to begin to take responsibility for them. Young people's health needs are detailed in their individual health plans and these are regularly reviewed. Where agreed, health plans can include play therapy sessions with the company's play therapist.

Young people are able to actively express their views, wishes and feelings, and they know that they are taken into account both in the day-to-day running of the home and in important decisions about their lives. Young people participate in regular key

worker sessions, in important meetings about their lives, and in house meetings. Staff also seek and take account of written feedback from young people and their parents.

Taking into account their starting points at the time of placement, young people's educational attendance and achievement is good. For example, young people who have previously been excluded from school have access to appropriate education, such as home schooling, to support them to resume full time education; this can either be at the company's independent school or in a mainstream school.

Young people are actively and positively involved in activities in the home and the community. Young people strongly agree that staff help them to be involved in out of school activities that they are interested in, such as going to the cinema and baking. A social worker commented that they have been impressed with the activity options open to the young person they have in placement. When appropriate, young people are confident about their readiness for leaving the home and moving to independence and adulthood.

Quality of care

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

Staff are consistently concerned with, and actively promote, young people's welfare. Young people described the care and support as very good.

Staff use individualised behaviour strategies to help young people enjoy good relationships with them, other adults and other young people. Staff also positively promote and support young people's family contact. A placing social worker commented, 'The staff are strong on liaising with families and in facilitating contact.' Together this has impacted positively on the relationships that some young people have with their parents during contact visits with them.

The home operates an effective reward scheme with young people to promote positive behaviour and relationships. Good behaviour is rewarded and unacceptable behaviour is fairly sanctioned; sanctions are recorded in the sanctions and rewards logs. A placing social worker commented: 'The staff have been able to reduce the amount of violent outbursts and to help this young person settle successfully at night time.'

The running of the home and the delivery of young people's care is significantly influenced by young people's views, which they share during individual key working sessions, meetings regarding their care and house meetings. The home has not received any complaints, either from young people or other people, since the last inspection.

Young people are central to the planning and review of their care; staff ensure they are consistently involved in these processes. This ensures care is tailored to their individual needs and is focused on achieving clear outcomes. Each young person has

an up-to-date placement plan. It includes an overview of the reason for their placement and identifies targets for how they can achieve Every Child Matters outcomes for children.

Staff actively promote young people's educational attendance and achievement. When they encounter barriers to these, such as young people being excluded from school, they work proactively with relevant school professionals to try and overcome these barriers; for example, by providing home schooling and/or a new school placement.

Staff also work proactively with health and safeguarding professionals and the police to try and secure positive outcomes for young people. For example, staff participate in meetings for young people subject to a child protection plan, and meet with the missing persons co-ordinator within the local police when necessary.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people strongly agreed that they feel safe at the home. To help protect them, from risks such as absconding and violent/aggressive behaviour, each young person's case record includes a risk assessment and management plan; these are implemented in practice and regularly reviewed. Safeguarding disabled children forms part of the company's safeguarding children policy and procedure, so that children placed for short breaks are safeguarded too.

A young person has not gone missing since the last inspection. Staff and managers are aware of current legislation and government guidance on the measures they can take to prevent a child leaving without permission and do not exceed these. For example, they know that a child may not be restrained for the purposes of preventing them from running away.

Physical restraint has been used seven times since the last inspection, but not recently. It has been used and recorded appropriately. Sanctions have also been used and recorded appropriately, and have effectively addressed unacceptable behaviour.

Staff have strong and proactive relationships with the local police and local safeguarding professionals to support and promote young people's safety. These relationships are often key to effectively resolving any concerns that might arise from significant events relating to the protection of young people. However, there have been no such events since the last inspection.

To help prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm young people, the company's staff recruitment procedures more than meet requirements. However, a recommendation has been made that telephone enquiries are made with referees as a part of the staff recruitment checks to verify the validity of the reference.

The home provides a good physical environment for the young people. Environmental checks required are up-to-date. Following a recommendation from the last inspection, maintenance and decoration work has been carried out to provide a more comfortable and homely environment.

Leadership and management

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

This is a well-managed home. It has a clear, up-to-date Statement of Purpose that has recently been revised following the home's successful application to Ofsted to accommodate both short breaks and permanent placements. The aim and purpose of the home and the facilities and services it provides are clear to staff, placing social workers and young people's parents. There is also a comprehensive young person's guide to the home. Following a recommendation made at the last inspection the guide now includes how a young person can contact recommended external officers through using a dedicated telephone for young people.

The staffing numbers, the level of experience of staff and the support provided to them are sufficient to meet the needs of the young people. The details of the staff team and the arrangements for their supervision, training and development are included in the home's Statement of Purpose.

Since the last inspection, staff have participated in training to be able to continue to meet young people's needs, for example, in terms of their health and safeguarding. Staff have either attained or are undertaking the professional qualification at level three that is relevant to their role. Regular supervision, extended handovers and staff team meetings also support staff to provide a good quality service to the young people.

The home's Registered Manager post has just become vacant. The company has notified Ofsted of this and is taking urgent action to recruit to it. In the meantime, the home's acting manager and acting assistant manager are exercising effective leadership of the home's staff and operation. They ensure the delivery of good quality care that meets the individual needs of each young person at the home.

To secure future improvement, the home has acted on the two recommendations from its last inspection and has a recently updated development plan.

Regular monitoring of the operation of the home effectively contributes to maintaining good quality care and promotes the welfare of the young people. Each week the acting manager reports on the matters they are required to monitor. In addition, the company's head of care carries out monthly visits to the home. These visits focus on the national minimum standards for children's homes, and whether or not action is needed in relation to them; they also provide an opportunity for any child, member of staff or parent to meet with the visitor.

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.