

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Kenneth Smith
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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 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.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

This home is operated by a private company which has several similar homes in this area of the country. Care and accommodation for up to two young people is provided. The company has its own school for children not attending mainstream and also offers (if a child wishes) weekly therapy as part of the ongoing care.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

This is a good home with many outstanding features. Children enjoy living here, specifically the warm relationships with staff and the varied and bespoke activities arranged and consistently followed through. It is a home in which children feel and are kept safe. Children are listened to and daily life is truly child centred.

Children make real progress in the home, particularly notable has been the reintegration into mainstream education and the participation by children in community based activity with their peers.

Behaviour management has been the single weakest area; there is an over-reliance upon the use of restraint and little reflection or challenge to staff who have used this, even though others have not had to. This is against a background of genuinely individualised care: young people were exceptionally positive about the good home and their close involvement in all aspects of it.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure children have an opportunity to discuss and record their views following a sanction or restraint (NMS 3.17 and NMS 3.18)
- gather children's views in monitoring (regulation 33 visits) the operation of the home (NMS 21.1)
- ensure that the managers monitoring of records in the home identifies and addresses patterns and trends; in particular evidence strategic action to reduce the high number of restraints occurring. (NMS 21.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children make significant advances in their social functioning through the determined and well-planned support given by staff. Young people enjoy increased social confidence including taking part in an active way in valued activities, for example dance shows seen by a wide audience. This increases children's self esteem; the confidence shown in social situations is an excellent basis on which to grow.

Children are supported in making real progress in education. For example returning to mainstream education after a prolonged period in a specialist setting. Lessons learned in school are reinforced in the home and the attention to homework and the purposeful communication between school and the home ensure progress in the classroom. Attendance at school is very good despite occasional challenges; staff make expectations crystal clear and achieve the cooperation of young people.

Children enjoy good health promoted very clearly through enjoyable energetic activity. The healthy lifestyles enjoyed are integral to having good, age-appropriate fun and managed through harnessing children's interests by an enthusiastic staff team who also role model active lifestyles.

Children enjoy and sustain family relationships of high quality through the non-judgemental support of staff. This has included constant supervision of some contacts and a willingness to make imaginative arrangements in the best interest of children. An example of altering some contact arrangements to make them run more smoothly was given by a placing social worker. Children understand that their identity is treasured by the home and benefit enormously from the meaningful relationships retained.

Children also enjoy contact with a wide range of peers outside of the care system, in youth clubs, schools and other shared activities. This builds the self esteem and positive social identity of children.

Quality of care

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

Children enjoy really good relationships with staff. Children are able to talk freely about their feelings towards different staff, enjoying relatively uncomplicated relationships underpinned by positive regard from all staff. Staff consistently act as positive role models giving coherent messages to children of the expectations upon them.

Children do feel that they contribute positively to the life of the home. Planning of activities and menus are child led. Children confirm that staff seek their views and listen to them in considering any changes to be implemented in the home. Where they cannot act upon the wishes of a child explanations are given. Children know how to make a complaint, but no complaints have been recorded during this

inspection period.

Placement plans demonstrate thoughtful planning for children and that their involvement is central in the process. Planning is integral to the admission process and plans are based upon careful assessment and a realistic appraisal of what the home is able to deliver.

Children enjoy a wide range of activities; the views and interests of children are used to drive this. It is notable that children have consistently enjoyed social and leisure activities with peers, sustaining excellent attendance, for example at dance clubs. The activities are not just tasters but reflect the homes deliberate support for children to pursue and develop expertise in their hobbies. This gives children genuine feelings of accomplishment within a normal childhood.

The daily life of children in the home is marked by a structure that they understand, staff deliver and which gives security and promotes achievement for children.

This is a well-maintained children's home which provides a high standard of living accommodation. This includes a magnificent lounge of enormous size and pleasing décor, a practical kitchen-diner, and bedrooms for up to two children with three further rooms available for staff to sleep in. Children are able to personalise their rooms and to exercise a degree of control to parts of the communal space. The home fronts onto a busy road, but has a large, peaceful garden off the quiet lane a few paces away from the rear entrance of the house.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Safeguarding practices are mostly very sound indeed and children living here feel safe and are kept safe. However, the management of behaviour is the one area where the progress noted has been very limited. This is surprising because staff do enjoy honest and explicitly caring relationships with children but have not used these as effectively as they might. Levels of restraint in the home are high, and similar levels have been noted throughout the duration of a child's stay, with little evidence of the staff or child developing strategies to avoid these. Restraint is used very carefully indeed, staff always following company policy and applying only agreed holds. The rationale for all restraints is evident, but strategically managers in the home have not considered all ways to minimise these events. Staff are sometimes becoming embroiled in confrontations over the child potentially leaving the home without permission; this represents anxiety to the staff because of the vulnerability of children, however the actual record of serious absences is zero, suggesting this reason is mistakenly over-valued by staff. Similarly the late evening is the commonest time for confrontation to occur but alternative routines have not been thoroughly explored. The company seeks to manage behaviour thoughtfully, a psychologist contributes to weekly team meetings and an intervention method (therapeutic crisis intervention) is taught to all staff.

Sanctions given are proportionate and well documented. It was noted that children almost never record any views about restraint or sanctions although they do have very positive relationships with staff.

Child protection procedures are understood and followed by all staff. There have been no incidents requiring referral to outside agencies in this inspection period; staff do know how to refer should this occur. The internal reporting of significant incidents is robust. This includes routinely forwarding information (monthly summaries) to placing social workers and to other agencies where required by legislation.

There have been no recorded incidents of children going missing from home in this inspection period; staff have supported children closely including successfully staying near by when attempts to leave have been made. The home has suitable protocols and all staff understand these in the event of an incident occurring.

Staff recruitment processes ensure only properly checked people ever work in the home. The records evidence a high level of scrutiny including Criminal Records Bureau disclosures, references followed up by telephone enquiry, and recorded interviews.

Children enjoy a safe environment and are positively supported to use it to its maximum potential and to enjoy a wide range of risk-assessed activities outside the home. The risk assessment format is complicated, but all are filled in thoroughly and the net result is that children are supported to do activities with control measures taken to reduce risk with no avoidance of the child-centred activities.

Leadership and management

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

The home is systematically and effectively administered. Staff understand their roles including the detail of all predictable procedures. This results in: confident staff who carry out their jobs knowing they are fulfilling the company's expectations; comprehensive recording; the delivery of structured care that gives children security.

There were no requirements or recommendations made at the previous inspection, however the home does strive for continuous improvement through monitoring processes and through regular meetings. The monthly visitor reports (regulation 33) include pointers for improvement and these are systematically acted upon. Recent monthly visits have been conducted exclusively at times when the young person is not in the home, missing the opportunity to get the most important feedback available. The managers quality reviews were noted to be robust quality control but without significant deeper reflection. For example, they note the number of restraints each month and comment that these have been correctly recorded but do not give consideration of the necessity of these events.

The home has a clearly laid out statement of purpose. This is meticulously kept up to

date and includes a good level of detail about methods deployed in the running of the home, the therapeutic model followed and staff training. The company keeps to its commitment on all these matters. Staff are well trained with an extensive five day course on therapeutic crisis intervention in their induction period and regularly followed up. Although the staff team demonstrated reasonable awareness of issues of diversity and had produced their own statement of commitment to promoting equality there is no systematic training or central message given regarding this and the potential for inconsistencies may arise.

The staffing of the home is always commensurate to the needs of children accommodated. The home has, without fail, provided the staffing level stated, always from suitably qualified staff and without any reliance upon agency staffing. Excellent consideration is given to providing a gender balance. The staff are well supported in supervision and appraisal and the systematic operation of the home successfully ensures good quality supervision is always done on time.

The promotion of health and safety is effective with regular servicing of all appliances, gas and electricity installations and the maintenance of risk assessments for all relevant matters.

The quality of recording in the home is very good.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.