

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Stella Henderson
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Date of last inspection	13 January 2010
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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 purpose built and provides accommodation for up to six young people of either sex from 10 years old up to 17 years old at any one time. The home is detached and is suitably adapted to meet the needs, if these arise, of young people with a disability.

The ground floor has a lounge, a computer room with internet access, a dining room and a kitchen. The first floor consists of young people's bedrooms and a staff sleep-in room. Bathrooms and toilets are located on both floors. Off road parking is available for up to six vehicles. The home is close to local transport routes and local amenities.

Two young people contributed their views to this inspection.

Summary

This unannounced inspection looked at all key standards and assessed all outcome areas.

The home is judged to be an inadequate service. It has some areas of strength but presents a very mixed picture of performance. Young people experience reasonably positive outcomes where education and health are concerned. They enjoy stability because there are few changes to the staff team, and there is some evidence of good individual work with young people.

The well-being and safety of young people is put at risk in a number of ways. Bullying is a serious issue that has not been adequately addressed by management. Risk assessments are not routinely updated in response to changing circumstances. There is inconsistency in the recording of the administration of medication and other documents such as key working. Young people do not have fully completed pathway plans.

Management of the home is not effective in ensuring young people are safeguarded. There is insufficient management overview to monitor staff interventions with young people. Systems to improve the quality of care enjoyed by young people and identify shortfalls are not robust. Where areas are identified for intervention or action by staff, it is not clear that this work is carried through.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

No actions or recommendations were made at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is inadequate.

Staff are trained in safe food handling and hygiene, which means food is prepared in a way that helps protect young people's health and welfare. The menu of food, both planned and as served, demonstrates a satisfactorily balanced diet that meets the needs of young people. It is not always clear from records what alternatives are offered if young people decline what has been prepared. This makes it difficult to assess whether young people are receiving regular meals.

Young people are provided with the necessary support and guidance to ensure their good health and well-being is maintained. Individual health plans, written from the point of view of young people's experience, clearly focus on their emotional well-being and health needs. Young people have access to medical professionals who regularly assist with issues such as smoking, self-harming, sexual health and psychological health needs.

One young person commented that their key worker had been 'really good' in helping with a particular health issue. Staff liaise closely with all health professionals involved with the young people and will advocate on behalf of young people to ensure that their needs are met. Young people receive good support with their personal care needs and any personal hygiene matters are managed sensitively.

Young people are inadequately protected where the dispensing of medication is concerned. The designated medicine cabinet is insecure and the central record of the administration of medication is inaccurate. Staff confirm that they have received training on this matter.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

Young people are afforded privacy in that their personal files are securely stored, and there are suitable bathroom arrangements for males and females. Room searches are undertaken for valid reasons but these are not thorough enough to safeguard young people. Telephone discussions about young people, in the presence of other young people and visiting professionals, compromises their right to confidentiality.

There is ineffective implementation of the complaints policy. Young people are clearly aware of the complaints system as they have used it on several occasions, and they know how to access independent complaints procedures. The recording of and response to complaints from management is however inconsistent and in some cases inappropriate. This does not give confidence to young people that their complaints will be taken seriously or that things will change to address the cause of the complaint.

Young people are protected by a range of measures which keep young people safe outside of the home, such as taking prompt action in response to young people missing from home and ensuring that contact arrangements are safely managed. Staff are conversant with child protection procedures and keep their skills and knowledge up to date with regular training.

Safeguarding issues are not always recognised or addressed within the home however. For example, young people are not protected from bullying. The home has a policy to counter bullying but this is not adequately implemented. Bullying is not robustly addressed and is not always recorded in the bullying log. There is no evidence that work is done with perpetrators, and indeed one response to bullying suggests significant changes for the victim rather than the perpetrator. Young people who have been bullied do not think anything has been done to make it stop, and other young people expressed the opinion that bullying is a problem at the home.

Young people are at risk because staff do not recognise when some bullying should be referred promptly to other agencies or managed by other procedures such as safeguarding. The home does not have in place a risk assessment to identify when the risk of bullying is greatest or

measures to reduce or eliminate this. Some staff stated that they have not been trained in strategies to counter bullying which would help them safeguard young people.

On the whole, young people benefit from individual behaviour management planning which helps to promote socially acceptable behaviours. However, these plans do not take into account the issue of bullying. Sanctions are reasonable and restraint is used infrequently. When this does occur it is recorded in accordance with these regulations.

Young people are afforded some protection by the effective management of health and safety processes, such as fire drills and equipment testing. This otherwise good practice is undermined however, as food and freezer temperatures are not routinely carried out and a risk assessment on a water activity was not carried out. This puts young people's health and safety at risk.

Individual risk assessments are generally good in identifying what actions need to be taken to safeguard young people from their own behaviours or difficult situations. On occasion risk assessments have not been carried out in a timely fashion leading to unacceptable delays in implementing actions to safeguard young people.

One new member of staff has been appointed since the last inspection. Records show a robust approach to the vetting of staff which ensures that young people are looked after only by those who are suitable to work with vulnerable groups.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people are given satisfactory individualised support planned with their needs and wishes. There is a key working system designed to address young people's specific needs and to implement the objectives of the placement plan. One young person commented on the valuable help that had been provided by a particular key worker and other members of staff. The recording of key working discussions do not always reflect the positive work achieved or record young people's comments on these interventions. There is no evidence that important issues such as bullying are addressed in key working sessions.

Young people receive good support from staff to help them with their education. Education is viewed positively and staff know what they need to do for each young person to ensure the right help is provided. Supportive routines help young people with consistent engagement in work or education. Where young people are excluded from school, resources are provided for in-house education and staff ensure that young people are able to access relevant learning experiences such as developing skills for independence.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people enjoy stable placements which indicates that placement planning is on the whole effective. Placement plans are written as far as possible from the young person's view of what they think they need, and this is supplemented by a useful individual risk assessment. These plans are written in the first person, with headings such as 'how I enjoy and achieve' 'how I keep myself safe'. The needs of some young people are not fully addressed however particularly those of the perpetrators and victims of bullying.

One young person gave a full account of how staff have discussed issues of equality and diversity, covering things such as disability, racism, and sexuality and the impact of this on their views and understanding. This is good practice but plans and other records do not fully identify any equality or diversity needs or work that has been undertaken as part of key working and more general informal group discussions.

Young people's reviews are effectively managed. They are encouraged where possible to participate in their review meetings and staff provide a valuable contribution to this process. Note is taken of the decisions made at reviews so that no delay is experienced in implementing any changes to the care plan. Young people are confident about expressing their views to staff, through young people's meetings and more informal exchanges. In addition there are a range of visiting professionals with whom young people can share their views about living at the home.

Contact is managed in a way that enables young people to remain safe and exercise some control over such arrangements. Any admissions to the home are processed in a way that is sensitive to the young people's situation. Young people are helped to plan for the time they leave the home, although this good practice is undermined by the absence of meaningful pathway plans.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

All young people are encouraged to develop practical skills which assist them into independence. Pathway plans have been provided for young people by an independent agency, but these lack any meaningful information and do not include young people's contribution. Staff work hard to ensure that young people about to leave care are as fully equipped as possible with the skills and information they need at this point of transition. However, this good work is undermined by the lack of statutory pathway planning.

Young people are provided with a safe and comfortable home which is domestic in style and layout. The accommodation is maintained to a reasonably good standard and it is kept clean and tidy. Young people's individual bedrooms are suitably maintained and personalised to their own tastes.

The home is large enough for private meetings and for young people to share communal space which gives them choices regarding their recreational and leisure time. The home provides young people with sufficient bath, shower and toilet facilities with appropriate locks to ensure their privacy is maintained. Suitable laundry facilities are also provided to meet the needs of the home.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

The home's Statement of Purpose provides an accurate description of the home's function. A young people's guide is provided for young people that contains useful information so they know what services they will receive from the home.

Young people are looked after by staff who are generally conversant with their needs and who are experienced, skilled practitioners. Young people confirm they get on well with most staff

and indicated that there are particular members of staff who are especially helpful. Staff are on the whole nurturing in their approach to young people, and one young person introduced a carer as 'my adopted mum!'.

Staff are sufficient in number to meet young people's needs and any additional staff are drawn from a pool of workers who are well known to young people. This provides young people with stability and consistency and the chance to experience positive attachments.

Team meetings are held regularly and reflect good practice as well as areas for development. The majority of staff hold qualifications relating to the task of looking after young people. There are a range of relevant training opportunities which enables staff to keep up to date with developments in practice.

Basic training on bullying, room searches, risk assessments, recording, complaints and medication needs re-visiting however in order to meet the areas of concern identified from this inspection. New staff do not receive supervision within recommended timescales, and some supervision sessions do not address the agenda necessary to ensure young people's needs are safeguarded and that work is being completed as requested.

Shortfalls in management of the home compromises the well-being and safety of young people. There is inadequate management recognition of and response to the emerging pattern of bullying in the home, as well as to the management of complaints. A lack of robust leadership means that management instructions to undertake tasks or interventions with young people are not completed in a timely fashion and there is no follow up to see whether such work has been completed.

Management overview, through formal monitoring mechanisms or information gleaned from supervisions, team meetings or general communication with staff is not rigorous enough to identify concerns, patterns or trends and areas for improvement. Regulation 34 checks do not sufficiently review the quality of care and do not provide for consultation with young people, their families or other stakeholders.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The home has assessed the individual needs of young people in all outcome areas, however it is not always apparent that issues of diversity are addressed. Young people confirm that staff discuss with them the importance of acknowledging people's differences such as those relating to ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender, disability and age. The team is well-balanced in terms of age, ethnicity and gender which provides a range of positive role models for young people and reflects the community in which they live.

Young people's case files are kept securely and contain an appropriate range of information about their history and progress. This meets the requirements set out in Schedule 3 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001.

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
6	ensure there is a comprehensive plan for young people preparing to leave care (Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000)	25 June 2010
13	keep a written record of the administration of any medicine to any child (Regulation 21 (2)(c))	25 June 2010
16	implement the written procedure for considering complaints made by or on behalf of children accommodated at the home (Regulation 24)(1)	25 June 2010
18	implement the written policy for the prevention of bullying in the children's home (Regulation 16 (4)(a))	25 June 2010
26	ensure that unnecessary risks to the health or safety of children accommodated at the home are identified and so far as possible eliminated (Regulation 23)(c)	25 June 2010
30	ensure that staff receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal (Regulation 27 (4)(a))	25 June 2010
34	establish and maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 and improve the quality of care provided at the children's home. (Regulation 34)	25 June 2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure young people's right to privacy and confidentiality is maintained (NMS 9.1)
- provide clear guidance for staff on undertaking room searches (NMS 9.8)
- regularly review the records of complaints by children or concerning the welfare of children, to check satisfactory operation of the complaints procedure and to identify both patterns of complaints and action taken on individual complaints (NMS 16.7)
- carry out recorded risk assessments of the times, places and circumstances in which the risk of bullying (including bullying amounting to abuse by other children) is greatest and take action to reduce or counteract the risk of bullying (NMS 18.5)
- exercise effective leadership of the home's staff and operation, such that the home is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible child care. (NMS 34.6)