

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Denise Jolly
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is privately operated. The home is registered for three young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

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 **adequate**.

The children's home is making a positive difference young people's lives. Young people receive care from staff who recognise and respond effectively to their complex range of needs. Although leadership and staffing has been inconsistent, this has now stabilised, and the service has continued to develop the quality of care provided to young people.

Professionals and parents praise the dedication and commitment of staff, who introduce young people to activities and opportunities that provide them with positive experiences to build their confidence and self-esteem. During consultation, one young person said, 'The home is welcoming and comfortable, I am treated with respect and I enjoy living there'. The Registered Manager supports staff, and reviews their performance to ensure that the service improves care practice. Staff encourage children and young people to communicate their views and make choices.

A strong feature of the home is the warm and affectionate relationships between staff and young people. Young people are happy, relaxed and confident during their time at the home, and benefit from continuity of relationships because their families are welcomed in the home. Staff encourage appropriate levels of independence, balanced against risk assessment and individual health and care needs. Parents and professionals say they can see that children and young people do well in safe and secure surroundings.

The new Registered Manager places a clear emphasis on providing a high standard of care for young people. Managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home because of effective monitoring and review of a detailed

development plan. They are keen to address shortfalls and develop the service they provide in partnership with young people, to enable them to reach their full potential. Managers oversee the pace of change and improvement, to ensure each step is embedded into the practice of the home.

A requirement is made, to ensure that appropriate placement agreements are in place, to promote effective planning for young people. A second requirement is made, to ensure there is consistent investigation of all aspects of pre-employment checks, to better protect young people from unsuitable staff working in the home. Additionally, two recommendations are made, to improve the detail in some records about young people, and to review decision making practice for internal staff appointments.

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
26 (2001)	ensure that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to all persons employed at the home in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 2, specifically that there is a satisfactory written explanation of any gaps in employment (Regulation 26 (3d), Schedule 2 (6))	06/12/2013
28 (2001)	ensure that there is in respect of each child accommodated a record of all the documents specified in Schedule 3, specifically a copy of any plan of care of the child prepared by his placing authority, and of the placement plan. (Regulation 28 (1a), Schedule 3 (18))	06/12/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that there is careful selection and vetting of staff working with children in the home and monitoring of such people, including all staff who transfer to the home, to help prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children (NMS 16)
- ensure that any information about a child, including any records of sanctions imposed as a result of incidents that have occurred, is recorded clearly and in a way that will be helpful to the child when they access their files. (NMS 22.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Young people overcome difficulties and achieve positive change in their outlook and prospects over time. Placements are stable and all young people respond to staff that have consistently high expectations of them. Young people improve their social behaviour, reduce risk-taking behaviour, participate in cooperative living and plan for their futures. When appropriate, young people progress relationships with family and friends. They benefit from contact that enables their emotional development and improves their sense of identity and belonging.

Some young people say they really enjoy school, and progress in their education throughout their placement. They participate in extracurricular activities, such as playing for the school football team. They enjoy the interest and support that staff provide, to celebrate their efforts. Some young people go to schools they attended before they began their placement. If necessary, staff drive them to school, so that they benefit from continuity of relationships during a period of change. This helps them to sustain progress in their education.

Other young people do not have an identified school place. Staff work very well with them, their families and the courts, to identify the steps necessary to achieve a successful outcome. Young people work with staff on basic literacy and numeracy skills, to develop their confidence when they re-enter school. They work with education professionals to participate in assessments of their skills and abilities, to ensure they are placed in appropriate provision. Young people benefit from the persistent efforts of staff who advocate on their behalf, to ensure they receive the educational opportunities they are entitled to, and who nurture their enthusiasm for school. This helps them to be ready to engage with their education, to improve their future prospects.

Most young people make good progress to develop a positive self-view. They develop an understanding of their emotional response to a variety of stressful situations. They acquire a range of skills that help them to manage past difficulties and improve self-control. They attribute their progress to the efforts of staff. For example, one young person said, 'Staff have helped me to think about what I need to do, to manage my behaviour better.' Consequently, most young people have significantly reduced involvement in risk taking behaviours, such as being missing or being involved in antisocial or violent behaviour. Young people identify future goals as they begin to understand how their current behaviour affects their future prospects. They work hard to gain appropriate interests and life skills, and contribute to keeping the home clean or shopping and cooking meals.

Young people say they feel very happy and safe in the home and that they benefit from staff who are interested in them and their individual wishes and views. They confirm that staff intervene quickly to ensure their wellbeing. They are confident that staff listen to them, and share their hopes and aspirations with other professionals.

Young people are optimistic about their futures, and believe that staff want the very best for them.

Young people participate in many of the activities arranged by staff, including simple domestic sessions. They say they enjoy having the opportunity to share everyday activities with adults who appreciate their company. They demonstrate warmth and humour in their relationships with staff. They confidently negotiate their choices and preferences for a wide range of activities, such as going to the cinema or having a full day out during school holidays. Young people say they especially like the home because of the staff and the activities they do together. This provides them with positive alternatives to previous associations, for example, they distance themselves from the influences of gang culture because they understand how their lives have improved.

Quality of care

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

Young people benefit from committed and enthusiastic staff dedicated to understanding their individual needs and wishes. Staff use informal meetings and activities such as art and cooking sessions, or more adventurous outdoor activities, to encourage them to reflect on their feelings and behaviour. Staff ensure the views of young people are accurately and clearly presented in regularly reviewed plans of care developed in partnership with them and their families. Staff get to know the young people very well, and are fully committed to enabling them to understand and overcome their difficulties, and achieve positive outcomes. Young people say that staff help them to think realistically about their futures, and what they need to achieve in order to realise their hopes and wishes. Staff promote and achieve open communication with families, while maintaining the agreed goals and programmes for young people. This provides young people with a consistency of approach that enables their lives to improve.

Social workers confirm that staff respect and value young people. They say, 'This placement has offered a stable, nurturing and active home environment. Staff, working in partnership with young people, present clear and detailed information about their behaviour, thoughts and feelings. Parents say, 'This home is really good. Staff know (my child) well, and are helping (my child) to see there is more to life. Staff see them as a person, not just the bad stuff.'

Managers and keyworkers spend time with young people, to ensure they communicate directly about matters of importance to them, such as family contact or emotional upset. In this way, most issues are aired and resolved informally. When young people raise concerns, or make complaints about the conduct of the home, the Registered Manager ensures their views are listened to, and works to achieve a suitable solution. Additionally, when young people are upset by the behaviour of others, staff listen to their concerns, and help them to find solutions to their difficulties. This ensures young people are confident that adults listen to them, and they can receive independent feedback about any complaints they may wish to

make. Young people are enthusiastic about their relationships with staff, especially in respect of their keyworkers. All young people identify staff whose company they enjoy.

Young people live in a healthy environment that actively promotes their physical and emotional wellbeing. They have good access to community health services and are registered with a local doctor, dentist, and optician. Staff closely monitor young people's health, to ensure they are aware of and able to respond to any issues or concerns. Staff support young people when they undergo medical investigations, and help them to adjust to changing medication regimes. Staff operate safe and effective procedures for administering medication. Young people receive any treatment necessary to remain physically and psychologically healthy, and this underpins the progress they make.

Staff ensure the daily routine supports young people's participation in education. They work collaboratively with schools to ensure young people have the opportunity to achieve their academic potential. When young people do not have an identified education place, staff offer them some home based learning, to maintain the importance of continued development. Staff work with the courts and with placing authorities to progress education plans for young people, and encourage young people to participate in psychological assessments. Outcomes from assessments inform the choice of school, in order to meet any identified educational need. One parent said, 'The home has helped my child to think about being part of school again, and this means (my child) is one step closer to coming home'.

Staff encourage young people to plan their recreation time positively, and participate in activities, such as air cadets, boxing, or school holiday trips to theme parks, as well as spending constructive time alone listening to music or playing electronic games. Staff and young people say they enjoy spending time together. This improves young people's confidence and self-esteem as they develop a range of skills, interests and experiences. Young people value the increasing range of activity. They say that attending clubs and sports activities helps them to make new friends, and helps them understand that rules and boundaries can be a good thing as they help people to work together to get good results.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people feel safe, and live in a home where staff do their best to keep them safe. They help young people to improve their personal safety, for example, by developing self-esteem and social confidence. They help young people to identify and explore past episodes of unsafe behaviour, and to avoid repeating harmful patterns. They help young people to engage in age-appropriate and positive activities and development, which reduce their exposure and vulnerability to unsuitable relationships and activities.

Staff use their knowledge and understanding of how to protect young people from

abuse. When young people make allegations against staff, the home acts immediately to secure the safety and wellbeing of all concerned, and ensure appropriate reporting procedures are followed. Local safeguarding professionals and social workers say that the manager fosters open and transparent communication about the conduct of staff. They assess the impact of staff actions on the welfare of young people, and identify strategies to promote their safety and wellbeing.

Regular reviews of risk mean staff consider the strengths and needs of individual young people, and set realistic and challenging targets for change. For example, staff identified that young people used bullying and intimidation in their relationships with each other and with staff. Staff and young people worked together, to think about the harmful impact of bullying on the emotional wellbeing of others. They encouraged young people to understand the needs of others, and offer help. They promoted cooperation in simple activities and projects, to help young people explore how they could build up positive relationships and increase tolerance. Where necessary, managers increased staffing ratios, to ensure the safety of all. Young people say that bullying is now not a feature of the home. Staff say that although they need to be redirected sometimes, young people have made excellent progress in acquiring the skills necessary to achieve positive relationships.

Young people do not go missing from the home. Young people recognise the home as a safe and supportive haven, and are confident that staff welcome any opportunity to work with their families. They begin to recognise the dangers of inappropriate friendships, such as gang membership, and say they want to make safer choices in the future. One young person said, 'Staff have helped me to make the most of being away from my bad friendships. I have worked with staff, to understand how my past behaviour has hurt and frightened others. I think I am making better choices now.'

Staff are trained in positive behaviour management, and present good role models in positive problem-solving. They make good use of de-escalation approaches to deal with challenging behaviour, and mostly avoid the need for physical restraint, except to ensure the safety of young people. Similarly, young people work with key workers to identify incentives to sustain improved behaviour, and staff use most sanctions minimally. However, minor inconsistencies in records of sanctions imposed mean that not all records cross-reference effectively to incident reports, or to actions taken to improve behaviour. While this has not affected the welfare of young people, it prevents staff from fully assessing their actions against published guidance and procedures, and inhibits a truly consistent approach to young people.

The organisation recruits and selects new staff by using procedures that help prevent unsuitable people from having access to young people. However, inconsistency in the oversight of applications has led to a failure to explore all gaps in employment records. This limits the capacity of the manager to assess a candidates' suitability to work in the home. Additionally, not all internal transfer appointments are subject to sufficient scrutiny. The Registered Manager does not routinely assess the past conduct of staff when they apply for new positions in the home. This falls short of recommendations for good practice outlined in the National Minimum Standards for

Children's Homes 2011, and limits an opportunity to reassess the suitability of employees for the role to which they have applied. However, new staff are carefully supported into their role, and are assessed to ensure they acquire the skills necessary to safely care for young people.

Leadership and management

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

Since the last inspection, there is a new Registered Manager, who is pursuing an appropriate qualification. Through a detailed and realistic development plan, they have led the home to recover from a period of uncertainty and upheaval, due to changes in staff and young people. Staff say they are optimistic about the future of the home, and are excited about making identified changes to improve the quality of care provided. The two previous recommendations have been addressed; young people moved on to identified semi-independent placements as agreed in their pathway plans, and records of risk management plans have improved. Leaders and managers provide targets for improvement that are realistic and challenging.

Managers have identified staffing development needs, to best support the progress of young people. They are building a team that reflects appropriate levels of experience, qualifications and training. By reducing occupancy, managers have enabled staff to focus on meeting the needs of young people through high levels of supervision, training, and appraisal that measures the effectiveness of staff intervention. Following a requirement at the last inspection, staff have attended a range of courses to learn about the support needs of children in the home. This improves staff knowledge and understanding of autism, attachment, and behaviour management, as well as helping them identify effective strategies to counter bullying, or administer medication safely.

Managers respond appropriately to any concerns or complaints made about the home. They pass details to all appropriate professionals, to ensure that they can independently assess and monitor children's safety and well-being. Although not all parents have been satisfied with the quality of service provided, managers have conducted thorough investigations and provided action plans to improve upon identified shortfalls. Presently, parents say that staff are committed to helping their children achieve their goals, and that their lives are safer and happier as a result of their placement.

Staff do their best to ensure young people benefit from joint planning and review, to consistently meet their needs. Managers and key workers attend meetings for parents and all professionals who support the child. When plans are delayed, such as when young people do not have an identified education placement, staff remind others of the importance of meeting goals, and persist in seeking progress. However, when delays are due to transfer of responsibility from one placing authority to another, managers have been unable to secure approval for existing plans for young people. While staff continue to work with existing plans, and seek to meet with professionals to review arrangements and identify future plans, young people are not

receiving care that protects their rights and is compliant with the Children's Homes Regulations 2001.

The manager further promotes development of the home and the quality of care offered to young people in regular staff meetings, where staff review the progress made by young people. They have reviewed the home's development plan to include actions directly relevant to young people, such as improvements to family contact arrangements, or reflecting on the results of consultation with young people about what they think makes a good member of staff. In this way, the manager ensures any improvement to the home benefits young people, and supports their wishes where possible.

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* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.