

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 service is a private children's home, registered to care for up to three children 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 **outstanding**.

The children's home is making an outstanding contribution to the progress young people make and their prospects for leading positive and fulfilling lives. Staff offer exceptional care and commitment to complex and vulnerable young people. They work tirelessly to provide a safe and accepting environment that supports young people through periods of distress and anxiety and helps them to explore the impact of past trauma and other experiences in their lives.

Young people build relationships with staff that are based on consistency and this helps them to develop trust and affection for the adults that care for them. Parents, professionals and young people all recognise the importance of such dedication to continually improving outcomes. One social worker said, 'the young people feel accepted, it is their home, the place is more like a home.'

Staff promote positive relationships with safeguarding professionals and use their extensive knowledge and understanding of safe practise to intervene effectively when young people encounter unsafe situations. Young people say they feel very safe in the home.

A minor issue regarding the consistency of some records is identified as a recommendation for improvement. However, due to effective systems for monitoring the home, the independent visitor and the Registered Manager had identified and begun to implement the improvements necessary. This has not impacted on the care offered to young people due to the comprehensive systems of information handover between staff.

Dynamic and knowledgeable leaders and managers successfully communicate their vision for an exceptional service. They enthusiastically involve all stakeholders in development plans for the home. Staff and young people are fully engaged in identifying and supporting ideas that further improve the outstanding quality of service provided.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that information about the child is recorded in a way that will be helpful to them in the future, particularly with regard to the recording of all keyworker sessions that are conducted, and the completion of accurate audits for all transfer of medication. (NMS 22.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Young people say that the best thing about the home is the way staff provide a homely and relaxed place to live that helps them to feel safe and happy there. They talk about staff with affection and say that their key workers are important people in their lives. Young people confidently participate in planning for their futures and are instrumental in the creation of their placement plans. Professionals and young people recognise how important this step is in creating confident young adults who can work with others to achieve their goals.

Young people spend time with their families when appropriate and this enables them to enjoy continuity of relationships and understand their history and culture. Some young people spend increasing time with their families to prepare them for a return to a parent or relative. During these transition periods, young people say how important it is to their happiness that staff offer continuing support and encouragement as this gives them the confidence to keep moving towards their identified goals. They say they can tell staff about the things that are most important to them because the staff care about them and spend time with them.

Young people receive high levels of care and nurture from staff during periods of extreme stress and anxiety. When young people suffer from harmful thoughts or the consequences of poor choices such as drinking alcohol, they gain comfort, support and redirection from staff. This helps them to think about the future and recognise the steps they can take to improved emotional well-being and increased self-esteem. One young person said, 'staff are really good at listening to me and diverting me when I am having a bad day. They help me to be more positive.'

Young people engage with college courses that improve their prospects. As young

people settle into the home, they respond to staff expectations that they attend education regularly. For some this is a huge achievement because they have avoided education for many years. They say that attending college is important because it is going to help them to achieve the things they want in the future. They grow in self-confidence as their skill base expands and ask others to recognise their efforts. One young person said, 'I am proud of myself. If you knew me years ago you would also be pleased with my achievements since I lived at this home.'

In addition to formal learning, young people enthusiastically complete independence skills programmes with staff and are proud of their achievements. Young people participate in the chores and responsibilities of shared living and learn to balance their wants and wishes with those of others. Where possible they eat together and help to cook meals for each other. They express genuine interest in each other's lives. They keep their own bedrooms clean and tidy and enjoy independent travel when possible. One young person said, 'I am ready to move to independent accommodation. I have all the skills, but it is scary, so I am really glad staff have said they will still help me.' This means that young people can learn about the ups and downs of independent life, supported by trusted adults.

Young people rarely go missing from the home, and this improves their safety and well-being. When young people are tempted to stay out late at night, they know that staff try to locate them and bring them home. Because of the excellent relationships they have with staff they do not want to cause them worry, and so this behaviour is reduced. Young people frequently bring their friends to the home to meet staff and share a meal. This also enhances their personal safety; they get positive reinforcement from staff about fostering appropriate and healthy relationships and staff can advise them when they encounter difficulties in those relationships.

Quality of care

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

Staff say that the most important aspect of the children's home is the development and progress that takes place in the relationships between staff and young people. Staff strive to provide warmth and sincerity in their relationships, as well as offering consistency of care and appropriate boundaries to help young people feel safe and secure. Staff use reflective practice and regular staff meetings to think about the difficulties they face in caring for complex and vulnerable young people. This enables them to consider fresh ways of looking at difficulties they encounter in promoting progress for individuals and helping each young person to improve.

Young people respond well to staff and develop affectionate and trusting relationships with them. Staff develop good relationships with the young people's families and professionals say they work very hard to support contact arrangements, such as taking young people on long journeys enabling them to visit relatives. Equally they remain alert to potential risks involved in contact, and ensure the well-being of young people is their main concern. Staff cooperate with all professionals to ensure all care plans for young people reflect the views and wishes of young people.

and their families.

Staff work together in responding effectively to young people whose behaviour challenges their safety and security, such as severe self-harm. Some young people demonstrate very high levels of challenge at the start of their placement, and staff work tirelessly to understand and modify their behaviour. They work very well with mental health professionals to create planned approaches to concerns, such as poor self-esteem or high risk-taking behaviour in ways that support young people's progressive placement plans.

The Registered Manager ensures the home seeks and supports joint working between all professionals who support young people. Social workers, independent placement reviewing officers and the police, for example, praise the efforts of the team to identify need and plan a child-centred response to emerging difficulties, such as self-harm or being missing from home. Professionals are unanimous in their admiration for the staff at the home, and recognise that staff maintain very high standards of care, despite the difficulties young people bring. A social worker said, 'the care that has been given to (X) has been of the highest standard. (X) has been very happy at this home and the care they have received has helped them for the future.'

Staff help young people to consider a range of information before making choices. This is evident in the careful accounts of key worker sessions that they regularly hold with young people. They cover a wide range of developmental topics, such as plans for work and education and the content of individual placement plans. They also respond to immediately presenting issues such as emotional trauma, or difficulties in relationships. Young people's views come through loud and clear, as staff promote self-awareness and problem solving skills. Key workers carefully circulate to staff any actions that arise, so that individual support is offered in a consistent and sensitive manner. Young people appear confident in staff and say that they are helped to progress because staff support them through difficult times.

Staff provide routines that support young people to understand the importance of education in improving their prospects. They have an expectation that all young people participate in school or college, and are skilled in liaising with education professionals to ensure young people have access to developmental opportunity. Staff confidently explore solutions to help young people who need additional support to be successful in their studies. As a result all young people gain accredited awards for their progress. This enhances the skills and qualifications young people acquire to prepare them to be successful young adults.

Staff model an open and accepting approach to diversity. This means young people can grow and develop their individual identities and unique personalities within a positive and nurturing environment. They address any needs arising from sexual development or lifestyle choices by open discussion and celebration of individuality. Staff help young people to pursue honest reflection of their lives and encourage them to express themselves by choosing unique wallpaper in their bedrooms or having an individual style of dress. This provides young people with opportunities to

experience praise and success that build their confidence and self-esteem. In turn, this helps young people to appreciate the efforts of others. Overall, young people are learning important lessons about how relationships can be successful, to enhance their future prospects.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say they feel very safe in the home and that staff do their utmost to help them to stay safe outside of the home. Staff work with young people to help them to understand the risks they face when out in the community, or because of previous relationships and behaviours. Staff confidently and professionally express opinions about a range of subjects, from sexual relationships to alcohol misuse. Young people seek advice and guidance from them because they value their opinions.

Staff use external professionals, such as a specialist children's nurse, or sexual health workers, to bring fresh and relevant information and education into the home. They encourage young people to participate in workshops and individual sessions that relate to risks they may encounter. Keyworkers provide opportunity for reflection and guidance that best meets individual preference and need. They make good use of one-to-one activities with young people, enabling discussion to occur in relaxed and sociable situations. This maximises the engagement of young people with difficult and sometimes embarrassing subjects such as intimate care or sexual safety.

Staff know and operate a system of behaviour support that enables young people to think about the impact of their behaviour on themselves and others and to identify ways to improve. Staff use a highly consistent and non-judgemental approach to redirect negative behaviour. In consultation with mental health workers, they effectively address the anxieties and stresses that underlay destructive and damaging outbursts. This helps young people to identify less harmful ways of expressing their difficulties. Professionals say that due to the efforts of staff, young people show very great progress in self-management of reduction in potentially life-threatening behaviour. Young people say that, 'it is because staff care about me that I have learned to care about myself.' Staff do not use physical management of young people, but are trained to do so when necessary, to ensure the safety of others.

Staff work in partnership with young people to identify detailed, relevant and up-to-date risk management plans that young people participate in reviewing and developing. Areas of concern are clearly highlighted, alongside plans and actions identified to reduce the risk. Young people identify what they can do to improve, as well as what they want staff to do to help them to get there. Although young people do not go missing from the home at present, staff take seriously every incident of absence, and collect current intelligence that may help to find young people when they do go missing.

Young people say they have no need to complain about the home, because staff listen to them and treat them as responsible young adults, with their own views and opinions. Young people are confident in being able to express their views, and say that staff are very good at helping them to negotiate for the things they would like. Young people also say that they understand the procedures for reporting any serious concerns they might have about the home. In addition young people say that staff have helped them to talk about fears and worries they encounter in their daily lives, and this helps them to make safe choices.

Staff meet regularly with representatives from the police and other protection professionals to share important information about relationships young people have made and to discuss strategies for keeping them safe. Professionals say they cannot speak highly enough of the commitment of staff and the energy they demonstrate, promoting the safety of young people. Most young people respond positively to plans that are well organised and consistently communicated between all professionals who support them. They develop safer patterns of behaviour such as joining in activities with staff, visiting friends and family, and spending time in the home with their friends.

The home follows clear procedures for the employment of staff that include all the necessary checks and references to help prevent unsuitable people having access to children. Although rarely required, staff from the home cover any gaps in the rota because they say it is important that young people receive care from people who know them well. This enhances young people's safety and well-being.

Leadership and management

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

A highly skilled, experienced and nurturing Registered Manager provides enabling leadership to a stable, committed, qualified and competent staff team. Staff respond enthusiastically to her expectation that they will deliver outstanding care to complex and vulnerable young people. Young people benefit from a placement that fully supports their emotional and developmental needs and helps them to progress in leaps and bounds. Staff recognise and celebrate the efforts of young people to improve their knowledge and understanding of how to become an independent and successful young adult. Staff respond well to the challenges they face in supporting young people to improve.

The home demonstrates outstanding capacity for continuing improvement based on its track record of providing stable and progressive placements for young people with diverse needs and complex histories. Clear and careful data collection supports the knowledge of staff about the progress young people make. Young people share this knowledge and justifiably thrive in the praise they receive from staff. One professional said, 'the manager and her team have provided excellent and consistent support', while another said, 'staff are positive, and provide positive services to young people'. The impact of this approach is evident in the progress young people make.

The manager carefully analyses: staff performance, daily records, incident reports, care plans and keyworker sessions, alongside talking to young people, their families and the professional supporting them to gather evidence on a regular basis about the changes experienced by young people. Key workers record and share information with young people and the adults who support their placement, so that everyone is aware of the great strides young people make. However, not all records were clear and up to date. Some reports of key worker sessions were missing. Some medication transfer records did not provide a sufficiently clear audit trail, although all young people receive the medication they need. While these have not affected the progress young people make and they were in the process of being addressed it prevents a complete record of their time at the home.

Feedback from social workers, the police, independent placement review officers and families is universally complimentary about the impact the home has on the lives of young people. They say that despite setback caused by periods of low mood, or poor choices in some relationships, all young people make good progress in many aspects of their lives that exceed their expectations. In particular they benefit from the development of safe and sound relationships that underpin their recovery from such setbacks.

Staff work very hard to provide transparency in the management of any difficulties that arise in the conduct of the home. A recent complaint from a neighbour has been progressed within the home and to more senior external managers in their efforts to secure a satisfactory solution.

Staff speak with enthusiasm and understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They confirm that their supervision is a valuable resource in helping them to meet the changing and diverse needs of young people. Equally important is their attendance at staff meetings to evaluate their own performance and the impact they have on young people. Staff say they really enjoy working with young people, and are proud of their progress. They continue to drive improvement for young people by high aspirations, professional resilience, and skilful support.

The home meets the aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose. Families, social workers and other professionals are clear about the services and support the home provides. The Registered Manager works with independent visitors who visit on behalf of the provider. Together, they assess the quality of care provided and identify any development need required for the home to continue to progress. Dynamic and effective monitoring captures the views of all stakeholders but especially those of young people. The development plan for the home clearly identifies how the service will continue to provide enabling, empowering and improving childcare services.

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.