

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 privately run children's home. The home provides long-term care and accommodation for three children with emotional or 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 **inadequate**.

The home provides an adequate quality of care, with individual plans for each child or young person. Plans recognise the skills and development needs of individuals. Through partnership and consultation between young people, the placing authority and relevant professionals, staff devise and implement programmes of care that help children and young people to grow and develop knowledge of their identity and increase their capacity to improve. Children and young people say they like living at the home, and value the efforts staff make to provide a homely and nurturing experience.

However, due to inconsistent management arrangements, serious shortfalls in the conduct and oversight of the home have negatively affected outcomes for children and young people. Managers fail to respond effectively to complaints made by young people. Staff and young people are not debriefed following incidents of physical intervention. In the main, outcomes are adequate. However, the home's provision for safeguarding the emotional and physical well-being of some children and young people within the home is inadequate. This has adversely affected their feelings of safety and security.

Leaders and managers have failed to identify and address the oversight and development needs of the home, due to an incomplete picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. Visitors on behalf of the provider do not speak to young people about their complaints, and managers at the home do not identify trends and patterns emerging from behaviour management records. In addition, the development plan for the home does not identify or adequately address the shortfalls

found during the inspection. This has limited the ability of managers to maintain or improve the quality of childcare being provided.

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
17B (2001)	ensure that a written record of any measure of control, restraint or discipline is made in a volume kept for the purpose, to include all information required by this regulation, in particular a clear description of the measure used, and confirmation that the manager has spoken to the child concerned and the person using the measure about the use of the measure (Regulation 17B(3)(4))	28/09/2012
34 (2001)	establish and maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 of the regulation, and improving the quality of care provided in the children's home, including consultation with children living there (Regulation 34(1)(3))	28/09/2012
24 (2001)	ensure a written record is made of any complaint, the action taken in response, and the outcome of the investigation (Regulation 24(5))	28/09/2012
29 (2001)	maintain in the home the records specified in Schedule 4 and ensure they are kept up to date, in particular the details of all admissions and discharges of children (Regulation 29(1) (Schedule 4 (1))	28/09/2012
20 (2001)	provide at least one person on duty at all times, that has a suitable first aid qualification (Regulation 20(2)(d))	28/09/2012
16 (2001)	ensure staff implement the organisation's procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect (Regulation 16(1)(b))	28/09/2012
30 (2001)	ensure any serious complaint about persons working at the home is notified to Ofsted without delay (Regulation 30 (Schedule 5))	28/09/2012
33 (2001)	ensure that Regulation 33 visit reports include that young people are being interviewed to form an opinion of the standard of care provided in the home and that they reflect that complaints are being monitored in every report. (Regulation 33(4) (a)(b))	28/09/2012

Recommendations

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

- enable children to take up issues and concerns in the most appropriate way with support and without fear that this will result in adverse consequences. Ensure children receive prompt feedback on any concerns and complaints raised and are kept informed of progress (NMS 1.6)
- ensure each child's Placement Plan is monitored by a key worker who ensures that the requirements of the plan are up to date, and are implemented in the day-to-day care of that child (NMS 25.2)
- review incidents of challenging behaviour, to examine trends or issues emerging from this, to enable staff to reflect and learn to inform future practice (NMS 3.21)
- ensure all staff understand, share and implement the home's ethos, philosophy and approach to caring for children (NMS 3.4)
- ensure that, following physical restraint, children are always given the opportunity to be examined by a health professional (NMS 3.16)
- ensure clear arrangements are in place to provide appropriate management of the home when the registered manager is absent (NMS 21.5)
- monitor, in line with regulations, all records kept by the home to ensure compliance with the home's policies, to identify concerns about specific incidents. Ensure immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (NMS 21.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

All children and young people confirm they experience improved outcomes in many aspects of their lives, and that staff in the home offer significant support in all areas of need. Over time, they make progress to understand their backgrounds and experiences. This helps them to plan for their futures, and identify strategies that enable them to overcome hurdles to a positive self-view. They say staff help them to enjoy contact with families when appropriate, and are supported to maintain contact with friends, when this is of benefit to them.

Children and young people enjoy improved physical and emotional health, and attend all routine medical appointments. In addition, they benefit from access to services specifically identified as helpful to them, such as mental health professionals. They can meet health professionals in the home. This reduces their anxiety, due to familiar surroundings, and because they can access staff for additional support. Children and young people make significant progress in managing the impact of past trauma on their ability to achieve successful development. They describe the home as facilitating, 'a fresh start', or as enabling them to, 'join in with the world'.

Children and young people achieve excellent attendance at school, both within local

community schools, or at the organisation's own education resource. All children and young people recognise the importance of regular attendance, and are proud of their achievements. For some young people, progress made is significant. They enjoy the benefits of improved academic success, and develop a peer group with whom they can share leisure time. Young people welcome their friends at the home, and when appropriate, organise overnight visits. They value the family-orientated operation of the home, and say this has helped them to develop positive social relationships with peers and adults alike. This has resulted in remarkable reductions in behaviour that places young people at risk; for instance, young people do not go missing from the home, or engage in anti-social behaviour. Social workers say, 'the placement meets need, and has supported a big turnaround in behaviour.'

Young people recognise significant improvements to outcomes in most aspects of their lives, and indicate a clear desire to remain living at the home. However, some young people expressed difficulties in relationships with a minority of staff, resulting from their involvement in behavioural incidents. Young people did not contribute their opinions towards any analysis of the incidents, or receive adequate feedback to complaints. As a result, young people experienced a loss of confidence and trust in some staff, and were concerned for the security of their placement.

Generally, children and young people relate well to staff, and enjoy relationships that foster a sense of security and well-being. They benefit from relaxed and positive guidance and direction from staff. Daily decisions about such matters as what activity to pursue, or what shopping is to be done, are taken collaboratively. Children and young people reach agreement with staff after considering all expressed needs and wishes. In this way, they learn about the give and take that is essential in developing healthy relationships. As a result, young people and staff pursue a varied range of leisure and physical activities, such as learning to swim, cycling, accessing community events or going on caravan holidays together.

Quality of care

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

Staff generally work extremely well with children and young people, to encourage them to grow and develop skills and knowledge that support their future development as successful adults. Staff demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the needs of young people. They support learning needs in sensitive ways, such as promoting literacy and numeracy by reading stories or encouraging children to tell the time. Staff have begun to encourage children and young people to complete records of achievement, and activity diaries. These provide very positive and accessible records that young people can share, of their time at the home.

Children and young people live in a home that is equipped and maintained to promote a lifestyle that reflects family life and experiences. Domestic style furnishings create a homely presentation, and staff work well with young people to ensure the home reflects their needs and personalities.

Staff recognise the importance of education for children and young people, and maintain a keen interest in their achievements. Staff liaise well with schools, by attending parent evenings and education planning meetings. Young people say they are encouraged by the staff to discuss problems as they arise, in order to resolve difficulties quickly. Staff support assessment of learning needs of young people by cooperating effectively with professionals. Staff enable young people to develop confidence in their relationships with adults who help them, such as youth offending services or teachers, to encourage their participation and subsequent learning.

Predominantly, children and young people enjoy positive relationships in the home, foster appropriate social networks outside of the home, and relate well with adults who support them. They interact positively with visitors to the home, and express their views and opinions clearly and confidently. Nevertheless, when young people make complaint, staff do not fully consider the nature of their concern, and do not involve them in resolving the issue. As a result, managers have not fully taken into account the viewpoint of young people, and have not addressed significant shortfalls in staff performance and quality of care. This has led to increased anxiety, and has impacted negatively on the emotional well-being of some young people.

Young people demonstrate a good understanding of boundaries staff put in place, and say they like the rules in the home, as they are necessary to keep them safe. Most staff provide good role models for young people to follow, and as a result younger children in the home are also cared for and nurtured by other young people living there. This helps young people to develop skills in social interaction and caring for others that will enhance their ability to succeed in future independence.

Staff and young people say they enjoy participating in activities together. They discuss new ideas, such as going to the gym, and old favourites, such as going to the park, or attending church. They put together a weekly plan that reflects household responsibilities such as washing up, appointments young people plan to attend, and leisure activities they have chosen.

Children and young people all describe the home as like, 'living in a family', and say they appreciate the efforts staff make to look after them well. In addition, staff complete individual placement plans in consultation with professionals who support young people. This enables young people to tackle identified needs such as anger management issues, explore identity and family relationships, or reduce behaviour and associations that place them at risk, to improve life opportunities.

However, due to inconsistent management oversight, there are shortfalls in placement plans, in particular that staff do not update them regularly. For example, staff do not record or formally evaluate changing family contact arrangements. Risk assessments do not always record progress young people make. Young people recently admitted to the home do not consistently benefit from personalised plans that fully reflect their individual need. However, staff retain good working knowledge of the changing needs of young people, and identify effective strategies for responding proactively to change. As a result, young people continue to make good progress in key areas of their lives.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Most children and young people say they feel safe living in the home, and all children and young people experience improved outcomes in relationships and behaviour outside the home. The home operates careful selection and vetting of staff, to protect young people from those who may pose a risk to them.

Staff recognise the particular vulnerabilities of individuals, such as being at risk from sexual exploitation or being missing from home, and take appropriate action to address them. Staff complete an in-depth risk assessment for each young person, and identify positive strategies that are consistently applied. This robust approach to risk management creates security for young people. They recognise that they improve dramatically because of the support and encouragement from staff, to help them change previously harmful patterns of behaviour.

Children and young people do not go missing from the home, and this significant improvement in their safety means that other behaviours, such as drug and alcohol misuse, sexually exploitative relationships and anti-social behaviour also significantly reduce. Instead, staff encourage children and young people to explore positive experiences in activity and relationships. By investing in new and safe interests, young people learn to make positive choices in their lives, and create appropriate and beneficial friendship groups.

However, recent inconsistent management oversight has led to several serious shortfalls in the safety and well-being of children and young people. The organisation's robust policies and procedures for ensuring children and young people are safeguarded have not been followed, although all staff at the home have been trained in child protection skills.

Staff use restraint and individual sanction minimally, and this has recently reduced considerably. However, they do not record the views of young people about restraint, and managers do not adequately oversee the records. This prevents young people from understanding the importance of fair and proportionate discipline within the home. Records are not evaluated for trends and patterns that are emerging, and do not indicate that staff are individually debriefed for incidents they have been involved with. This limits opportunity to learn from incidents to avoid further occurrence. Some young people say they feel anxious about the behaviour of a minority of staff, and that they have been unable to express their full concerns in the home, as they are worried about losing their place at the home.

When young people make a complaint about staff, managers do not speak directly to young people to gain a complete picture of their concerns. They do not always ensure appropriate child protection professionals have oversight of the incident. When young people are restrained, staff do not monitor their physical well-being

after the incident. They do not record in detail staff actions, or the impact of the restraint on the young person. Furthermore, there are inconsistencies between records kept at the home; for example, incident reports differ in content from the formal record of restraint. This reduces the safety and well-being of young people, and prevents appropriate action being taken to improve relationships and staff performance.

When managers evaluate records of incidents that result in young people being harmed, such as bruising, they do not record their findings, and do not involve external child protection or health professionals in their assessment of the concern. Children and young people are not asked about their view of the incident, and this seriously impacts upon the ability of the home to make adequate arrangements to protect children and young people.

Leadership and management

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

The Registered Manager has been absent from the home for nearly three months. Senior managers have failed to make consistent arrangements to oversee the operation of the home during this time. In the main, outcomes for children and young people have remained good; however, managers have not effectively monitored and addressed the impact of serious shortfalls in safeguarding their welfare.

There are no requirements or recommendations from the last inspection. The service has a good history of compliance, but due to shortfalls in arrangements for management of the home, there is reduced capacity to maintain and improve the quality of the service. During the course of the inspection, however, an experienced and suitably qualified senior manager was identified to take immediate responsibility for the day-to-day running of the home.

Social workers and young people who use the service have a clear understanding of the Statement of Purpose for the home, and say that the home meets its objectives very well. The home is well maintained and comfortably set out; health and safety arrangements are good. Staff foster good relationships with the range of professionals who support children and young people, including the police and youth justice services. An experienced and qualified staff team works sensitively and consistently with children and young people, to ensure they strive to meet their personal development needs, and progress in self-esteem and independence.

However, managers do not demonstrate effective knowledge of the development needs of the service, and have failed to maintain systems that accurately address areas of weakness, to improve the quality of care. Monitoring of records has failed to identify, for example, an incomplete register of admission and discharges to and from the home. Inaccuracies in records of physical restraint have not been sufficiently scrutinised. Managers have failed to respond adequately to young people's complaints and allegations. In addition, not all significant events relating to

the protection of children were notified to the appropriate authorities, including Ofsted. This prevents young people from having an accurate account of their time at the home, and they are not protected from unfair or unsafe treatment.

Managers do not effectively assess the training needs of staff. This means, for example, that not enough staff have an up-to-date first aid qualification to adequately respond to children's emergency health needs. Managers do not always monitor staff performance in line with the home's policies and procedures, or the views of children and young people. This limits the ability of staff to progress in professional development, and maintain safe and effective childcare practice. As a result, some young people feel insecure in the home for some of the time.

Visitors on behalf of the registered provider have failed to monitor effectively the conduct of the home. Although visits have been regular, monitoring has not been robust enough to identify the shortfalls demonstrated during this inspection. For example, visitors did not identify inconsistencies in staff accounts of incidents, nor were young people consulted about the conduct of the home. This resulted in an incomplete picture of the home, and reduced the home's ability to effect positive change in the safety and security of children and young people.

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.