

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Janet Manders
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Date of last inspection

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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 one of a number of children's homes operated by the local authority. The home provides care for up to two young people aged between 10 to 18 years, who have social and emotional difficulties. There must be no more than a four year age gap between the young people living at the home. Admissions to the home are usually planned.

The home is a three bedroom semi-detached house, situated in a housing estate in a quiet cul-de-sac, within easy reach of bus routes to the town centre. It has a garden to the front and rear of the property. However, plans are in place to provide a parking area in the front garden so that staff cars do not block the movement of other cars in the neighbourhood.

Summary

This was an unannounced full inspection, which looked at key standards of the Children's Homes National Minimum Standards (NMS). The inspection focused on areas related to health needs, keeping young people safe, education and how individual support is provided. The inspection also concentrated on how the home consults with young people, plans for their care and how staffing and management arrangements support the operation of the service.

Overall, the home provides a good standard of care for young people. The physical and emotional health needs of the young people are effectively met and young people's education is valued. Staff work hard to keep young people safe. However, one action and one recommendation is made in relation to physical intervention as shortfalls were identified in the use and recording of a restraint. A further recommendation is made regarding a lack of planning as to how the home can help young people develop their individual identity in relation to gender, religious, racial and cultural background.

Staff are supported well by the manager, who has a strong commitment and focus on improvement, although staff do not receive adequate supervision to fully enable them to reflect on the care they provide to young people.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the home since it was registered.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people are receiving a good service that is focused on their emotional wellbeing and health needs. Staff actively encourage young people to lead a healthy life. Young people's health needs are effectively met because staff are fully aware of all relevant issues relating to the young people.

Staff promote healthy eating. Young people have opportunities to plan, shop for and assist with the preparation of meals. Meals are generally well balanced and are planned to ensure

that they meet young people's dietary, ethnic and religious needs. Meal times are usually social occasions where young people and staff sit together.

The health and care needs of young people are identified and regularly reviewed. A health plan for each young person details how their specific and general health issues are to be addressed. All young people are registered with the required health professionals when they are admitted to the home. Staff record and monitor young people's health appointments, accidents and illnesses and where appropriate take action, to ensure that their health needs are met. Staff work closely with the Looked After Children's (LAC) Nurse, the authority's psychological services and other health professionals to ensure that all identified health needs are addressed. Young people are discouraged from smoking, alcohol abuse and illicit drug misuse.

Medication is handled well. The files for the young people contain signed medical consent forms, a record of all prescribed and non-prescribed medication and whether it has been taken. The home has procedures in place to ensure that medicines are appropriately handled and stored to safeguard young people's welfare. Young people are allowed to self-medicate, once a risk assessment has been undertaken to ensure that they are sufficiently responsible to do so. Young people's medication is safely stored in a wall-mounted lockable cabinet in a secured room which is also locked when not occupied.

Staff receive training in the administration of medication and first aid. This ensures that young people's health needs are appropriately addressed and promoted.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people live in a home where staff understand their role and responsibilities for keeping young people safe. Safeguarding procedures are in place; staff have been trained and are aware of what to do if they are concerned about a young person's safety or protection.

Young people's privacy is respected, as the home has clear guidelines on privacy and confidentiality, which is known and followed by staff. Staff do not enter young people's rooms without permission, except when young people are considered at risk. Information held in respect of young people is stored in lockable facilities which are only accessible to staff. There is guidance regarding the circumstances under which room searches can be carried out and a log of room searches is maintained. Young people have access to a telephone, which allows private conversation, when this is an agreed part of their placement plan.

The home has good systems in place for managing complaints. Young people know how to complain and feel that they are listened to and taken seriously. Each young person's right to complain is supported by the staff team. In addition, young people now have access to an independent advocate. This is an excellent example of the authority's overall policy to promote young people's rights and entitlements.

Young people's welfare is protected by good staff awareness of safeguarding, anti-bullying and unauthorised absence procedures. The home has clear procedures for responding to child protection concerns and the majority of staff have initial training in child protection, which is regularly updated. Young people are protected from bullying. The home has an anti-bullying policy and information is contained in the home's Children's Guide, which makes it very clear

that bullying will not be tolerated and encourages young people to raise any concerns they have about bullying, with a member of staff.

There is a written policy and staff guidance on the actions that should be taken if a young person is absent from the home without consent. The procedures and guidance follow a regional joint protocol, which has been developed to ensure young people's safety is promoted. The protocol also ensures that reporting processes are followed according to individual risks and circumstances. The home responds appropriately to instances of young people going absent without authority and work closely with other agencies to minimise any risk to young people. Patterns of absence are monitored and action plans are based on this evidence; risk assessments are updated accordingly. Records of unauthorised absences are kept and staff notify relevant agencies in the event of a young person going missing. The home recognises that absent young people may put themselves at risk and make all efforts to help young people to find ways to keep themselves safe.

Young people are clearly informed of the home's expectations of them and any action that will be taken if behaviour is unacceptable. Discussion of the house rules takes place at the time of a young person's admission and are contained in the Children's Guide. Detailed risk assessments and behaviour management plans are used by staff and are regularly evaluated during staff meetings. Support regarding behaviour management is provided by staff from the authority's psychological services, so that staff use the most appropriate approach for each young person. This promotes young people's welfare as they are encouraged to behave appropriately and they receive consistent messages from staff as to how to behave.

The emphasis of the home is to consistently promote improving behaviour that is praised and rewarded. Young people regard sanctions as fair and sanctions are appropriately recorded by staff. Staff receive training in respect of managing young people's challenging behaviour and are able to diffuse difficult situations where necessary. However, on occasions restraints have been used by staff that are not allowed by the home's behaviour management policy. Additionally, records do not fully evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. The manager is aware of this and has spoken to staff, stressing the importance of only using approved techniques of restraint. However, such incidents have the potential for young people to be dealt with in an inconsistent manner and young people and staff may have their safety compromised.

Staff are proactive in taking steps to ensure that young people, staff and visitors are safe from fire and other hazards in the home. Frequent checks are undertaken on fire equipment, emergency lighting and fire drills are regularly undertaken. The home undertakes comprehensive risk assessments in relation to all aspects of the safety of the premises and grounds, including a fire risk assessment. Risk assessments are also undertaken regarding the potential behaviour of young people and their activities.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people are supported by a well-informed team who work together to identify and meet young people's needs. Staff encourage young people to achieve their potential and to develop their self-esteem.

Young people in the home receive a range of individual support and guidance in relation to their identified needs. The home does not operate a key worker system as all staff are aware of each young person's placement plan and offer appropriate support when necessary. This enables a young person to approach any member of staff they wish to discuss a particular issue, having confidence that the member of staff is fully aware of all relevant information. Young people receive appropriate external support as the home has a proactive approach to working with other professionals. Staff respect and value diversity. However, the home does not always record detailed information as to how young people's identity needs are to be met. This potentially results in young people's needs not being fully identified or met.

Staff are clear regarding their responsibilities in encouraging young people's educational achievement and are supported in this by clear policies and procedures. Staff work hard to support young people to achieve full-time attendance in mainstream community schools. On occasions there are difficulties in identifying appropriate full-time education for some young people. In such circumstances the manager and staff strongly advocate for the young people with the authority to obtain a place for all young people at a suitable school. Young people who are not in education are encouraged and supported to return to education.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people are encouraged to be actively involved in the planning of their care and the running of the home. Staff are well informed about young people's needs so that they are able to provide appropriate individualised care.

Young people's needs are assessed and recorded in individual placement plans. The plans provide key information to staff about important areas of need as well as guidance on how to meet the requirements identified in the plan. All staff are aware of the young people's needs so that they can assist in meeting them. The home completes monthly reports with regard to each young person, identifying progress made and areas where further work is required. These are sent to the placing social worker and where appropriate to the parents of the young person. Staff from the home prepare detailed reports for each statutory review so that informed decisions can be made. Young people are encouraged to attend and fully participate in reviews. This enables young people to influence plans for their future.

Young people are able to maintain good relationships with family and friends because staff support and help facilitate visits. Young people's contact arrangements are consistent with their agreed plans and young people confirmed that staff support them to stay in touch with significant people in a way that is agreed and with which they are happy.

Young people are well supported by staff at the time of their admission to the home. Staff endeavour to gather all appropriate information before a young person is admitted to the home and this is used to undertake an impact assessment of the admission to the home on the young person, other residents and staff. This is a detailed document and enables any risks to young people, staff and the community to be minimised. Young people receiving clear guidance regarding the routines of the home, the home's expectation of them and what they can expect from staff. Where possible, young people have the opportunity to visit the home prior to their admission, so that they can meet staff and the other young person resident at the home. Staff carefully plan for young people leaving the home to ensure that they are appropriately placed and supported.

Young people are involved in decisions around the house and with events affecting them personally. This is facilitated by good relationships between the staff and young people. Young people feel that their views are valued by staff and that action is taken in respect of them where appropriate.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are appropriately supported to prepare for leaving the home whether this is to return home, to alternative carers or to move into independent living. Staff provide practical opportunities for young people so they experience routines that relate to being responsible and independent. Young people are provided with a plan agreed by their social worker and other significant individuals, which gives focus to preparing young people to appropriately leave the home.

Young people enjoy homely accommodation which is decorated, furnished and maintained to a satisfactory standard providing adequate facilities for their use. Each young person has their own bedroom which they are encouraged to personalise. A programme of maintenance and repair is ongoing with adequate systems in place to recognise and address maintenance issues that require rectifying as a priority.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The good management of the home effectively underpins the work which is undertaken to care for and support young people.

Young people, parents, staff and placing social workers have access to a Statement of Purpose and Young People's Guide, which outline the principles, practice and the services that they can expect from the home.

Overall, young people are being looked after by an experienced, qualified and enthusiastic group of staff that work positively with them to ensure that their needs are met. The Registered Manager provides clear and effective leadership to the staff team regarding the aims and objectives of the service; because of this, the home continues to maintain a consistent staff team that supports good continuity of care.

Most staff receive supervision from a senior member of staff each month, which supports them to undertake their roles and increase their knowledge and competence. However, some staff do not have the opportunity to have regular supervision and this has the potential for undermining their ability to provide informed support for the young people placed at the home. Regular team meetings are held, which ensures that the staff team understand priorities for working with young people and a consistent approach is delivered. Staff also have the opportunity to meet regularly with the authority's psychological services. This excellent practice enables staff to have a greater understanding of how to meet young people's needs.

There is a clear staffing structure with clear lines of accountability in the home. There are appropriate deputising arrangements in place in the absence of the Registered Manager and there is a formal on-call system if additional support is needed. The home does not use staff from external agencies, stating that achieving continuity of staffing offers the young people

more stability. Therefore, with the assistance of staff from other homes within the authority, the staff group covers any absence or sick leave of their colleagues or any requirement to have extra staff on duty. This ensures consistency of care for young people.

Staffing is sufficient in number and competence to ensure that young people's needs are adequately addressed. There is a good mix of gender and background within the staff team to promote young people's identity and wellbeing. Staff training is effective and well coordinated to ensure that staff acquire necessary skills and maintain statutory competences. Young people are receiving good support because most of the staff team are qualified and suitably experienced. The majority of staff are qualified to National Vocational Qualification Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People.

The manager undertakes robust monthly quality monitoring of all files and records as required. She prepares detailed reports of the operation of the home for the information of senior managers, identifying any shortfalls and including an action plan as to how these will be addressed. Young people's feedback contributes to this process and helps to positively influence the operation of the home. The home's records are of a good standard and evidence the participation of young people. They support the work of the home and provide a comprehensive record of young people's time at the home. This assists with future placement planning. Young people's needs, development and progress are recorded to reflect their individuality.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The young people living at the home receive an individual service, based upon their identified need. All staff display a good knowledge of the young people they are working with, including their cultural background, which helps ensure that holistic needs are being addressed as far as is possible. However, placement plans do not consistently include detailed information regarding how a young person's cultural and religious needs may be met. This has the potential for such needs to be overlooked. The home has developed explicit policies and procedures promoting equality and diversity in all aspects of their service for young people from differing backgrounds and cultures.

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
22	ensure all staff adhere to the home's behaviour management policy, with specific reference to the use of approved restraints. Regulation 17 (2).	7 September 2009

Recommendations

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

- ensure all records of restraint include a full evaluation of their effectiveness. (NMS 22.9)

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- develop detailed plans as to how the home can help young people develop individual identity in relation to gender, disability, religious, racial, cultural or linguistic background or sexual orientation. (NMS 7.6)
 - ensure all staff receive at least one and a half hours of one to one supervision from a senior member of staff each month; and that new staff receive one to one supervision at least fortnightly during the first 6 months of their employment. (NMS 28.2).