

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Sophie Wood
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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 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.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

This private children's home provides for two young people aged between 5 years and 17 years.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **satisfactory**.

This is a satisfactory home which is currently benefitting from the recent appointment of a new manager. The staff team is effectively led and supported and this impacts positively upon the quality of care being provided to the young people in placement.

Current care planning systems recognise the immediate presenting needs of individuals but an overview of the holistic needs of young people is being lost. Health plans contain clear gaps, risk assessments are variable in terms of their quality and purpose, and there is an absence of clarity with regards to the overall purpose of the placement.

Young people readily settle into the home. The staff team is consistent and this factor encourages feelings of safety. Young people benefit by being treated with dignity and respect. Equality and diversity is valued throughout the home and wider organisation.

Placing social workers provide complimentary feedback about the service and its ability to effectively support and safeguard young people. The level and detail of communication from the manager and staff team is particularly valued. This ensures effective partnership working in young people's best interests.

The manager is aware of the current shortfalls with regards to clear care planning processes. Young people receive good support in certain aspects but less in others. The historic lack of clear processes, systems and procedural guidance for the staff team is largely responsible for this. This is further exacerbated by quality assurance processes which lack rigour.

Areas for improvementStatutory 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
4 (2001)	ensure the registered person compiles in relation to the children's home a written statement (in these Regulations referred to as the Statement of Purpose) which shall consist of a statement as to the matters listed in Schedule 1 (4.1, Schedule 1)	23/09/2011
20 (2001)	ensure the registered person promotes and protects the physical, emotional and mental health needs of the children accommodated in a children's home. This requirement is made within the context of ensuring that complete medical and health histories are obtained to assist with effective health care planning (20 (1))	23/09/2011
28 (2001)	ensure that, in respect of each child, a record in permanent form includes the information, documents and records specified in Schedule 3 (28(1), Schedule 3)	23/09/2011
29 (2001)	ensure the records specified in Schedule 4 are maintained and kept up to date (29(1), Schedule 4)	23/09/2011
32 (2001)	ensure the home takes adequate precautions against the risk of fire (32(1)(a))	23/09/2011
33 (2001)	ensure the visits undertaken on behalf of the provider robustly include interviewing, with consent and in private, such of the children accommodated there, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as appears necessary in order to form an opinion of the standard of care provided in the home (33(4)(a))	23/09/2011
34 (2001)	implement a robust system to monitor the matters as set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals. (34(1)(a))	23/09/2011

Recommendations

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

- ensure the home implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment (NMS 4.5)
- ensure the home supports the young person's transition to adult services, when required by the care plan (NMS 12.4)
- ensure there is a good quality learning and development programme which staff are supported to undertake (NMS 18.1)
- ensure written policies are supported by clear procedural guidance for staff to follow (NMS 19)
- implement a clear development plan to address the shortfalls raised through internal monitoring. (NMS 21.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are actively encouraged to develop a positive self-image. Staff encourage young people to take a pride in their appearance from day one of moving into the home. They look for naturally occurring ways to provide positive feedback, such as praise for helping around the house and attending school or work placements. A sensitive approach encourages young people to make sense of their past experiences and to have positive aspirations about their own futures.

Young people receive sound advice about their presenting health needs. Immediate processes include becoming registered with core health services, such as GPs, dentists and opticians and the home is quick to seek advice from professional health agencies, when necessary. Written health plans detail such appointments but the content is not always clear and such documents hold scant information with regards to immunisations and health histories. Effective holistic health planning for young people is hindered as a result.

Young people say, 'I really enjoy my work experience' and 'I'm thinking about what I want to do with my future.' The home recognises that young people may struggle with negative historical experiences about educational provision. The service has its own separate school and uses this, as well as local mainstream schools and colleges. Attendance is actively encouraged by way of staff members providing additional support when this is necessary. During school breaks young people are actively supported to make full use of local community facilities and resources. Staff say, 'six weeks is a long time to be without structure and purpose' and 'we've got some great clubs and activities locally.' Young people are encouraged to explore such facilities. They say, 'I'm trying loads of different things to see what I like' and 'the staff take you to lots of different activities.'

Young people ordinarily enjoy positive contact with their family members and friends in a variety of ways. Staff provide appropriate support and work hard to establish positive relationships with family members. Complex contact arrangements, including restrictions are appropriately managed and young people are sensitively supported. They say, 'I don't like the restrictions but the staff do explain.' Staff take into consideration the very different backgrounds and circumstances of the young people and their families. This aspect is further developing because of a current equality and diversity training initiative.

Young people receive some good aspects of support with regards to developing their independence skills, such as cookery, budgeting and learning specific tasks. However, this is impeded by a lack of clarity in terms of transitional planning. Limited written guidance for staff combined with a lack of information from placing authorities, limits progress in this key area.

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy positive, appropriate relationships with the staff team. They feel well cared for and understand that rules and boundaries are in place to maintain their welfare.

Young people benefit from a very good introduction into the home. Informative written literature is underpinned by clear verbal explanations from the staff team. Young people are given the individual time they need to ask questions and seek clarity. Staff demonstrate an empathic approach which helps young people to readily settle.

The manager is currently reviewing the home's placement plan format and is piloting a number of changes. The information currently held is confusing and in some cases, over duplicated or under represented. However, staff are aware of the immediate presenting needs of the young people and use key worker time to the best of their ability. Young people engage with meaningful and appropriate activities.

Planning with regards to approaching adulthood and independent living is less obvious currently and the new manager is aware of the need to develop placement plans further so as to adequately reflect this area.

Young people appreciate the good quality of their immediate physical environment. The home is well maintained; it is decorated and furnished to a good standard and young people enjoy freedom of movement within the home and gardens.

Bedrooms provide good levels of privacy, as does the young people's bathroom. Young people have a sense of ownership with regards to their bedrooms and these are decorated and furnished in accordance with the individual's own choice and taste.

Staff training with regards to health topics includes medication, first aid and healthy eating. Its delivery is underpinned by basic policies which do not always include clear procedural guidance. This omission causes some confusion amongst the staff team and results in a variable quality of service being provided for the young people. Daily opportunities effectively encourage young people to assist with menu planning and the preparation of meals. Staff members give good advice and encouragement about healthy options, while respecting young people's choices.

Staff demonstrate a renewed sense of motivation and purpose; they say the previous culture of chaos is being calmed. The organisation is aware of the shortfalls and understands that senior personnel need to develop improved administrative systems, such as sharper policies and clearer procedural guidance, to allow the manager to focus upon the day-to-day running of the home.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people benefit from living in a safe and secure physical environment. Regular health and safety checks ensure that maintenance and repair works are swiftly undertaken. Furniture and fittings are of good quality and young people appreciate this. Young people know what to do in the event of a fire and drills are regularly practised. Gaps in fire safety documentation carry an element of risk and the home took immediate remedial action with regards to installing a fire door as soon as this omission was raised.

Young people enjoy positive and appropriate relationships with the staff team. This encourages feelings of safety and is strength of the service. The immediate establishment of appropriate boundaries and behavioural expectations encourage young people to readily settle and take responsibility for their own actions. Incidents of unsafe and negative behaviours quickly reduce because young people are positively engaged in meaningful activities and feel they are effectively listened to.

Incidents of bullying are very rare. Current young people report no such present or historic issues and confirm they feel safe and comfortable within the home.

Formal house meetings are further complemented by key worker sessions and impromptu, naturally occurring discussions. Staff members are skilled at obtaining the views and opinions of young people and are equally clear as to why some requests cannot be met. Young people understand that certain rules are about safety. They also know how to complain and can readily describe how they would contact external agencies if they needed to.

Appropriate staffing levels ensure that young people are supervised in accordance with their presenting needs. Individuals say this can be difficult at first, in terms of a perceived lack of freedom. However, staff positively reinforce the reasons why and young people say, 'I know I have to earn trust' and 'it's about keeping me safe'.

Although variable in terms of quality, risk assessments are in place with regards to individual young people, as well as generic activities and the physical environment. Immediate safeguards serve to protect the young people and the new manager currently has all such documentation under review.

The home is able to demonstrate that instances of young people being missing are rare. Historic records also demonstrate significant reductions with regards to individuals who joined the home with a history of such incidents. Staff and young people attribute much of this success to the emphasis placed upon meaningful activities and ongoing encouragement from the staff to deal with problems in safer ways.

Staff receive mandatory training with regards to safeguarding and are able to demonstrate a clear understanding of the home's own procedures. These are congruent with local authority guidance. Written protocols in terms of being missing

are equally clear and are in line with local police procedures. The safety and well-being of young people is being effectively promoted as a direct result.

Young people say that staff implement fair and realistic rules and expectations. Written guidance on the use of sanctions is clear; staff understand this and young people say that formal sanctions are rarely used because staff talk to them before their behaviour warrants the use of such measures.

The use of physical interventions are equally rare and staff receive appropriate external training. The home's own guidance on the use of physical interventions is being reviewed, as are individual risk assessments and recording formats, in line with the Children's Homes Regulations 2011.

Sound recruitment procedures provide effective safeguards for young people. New staff do not commence with their appointments until all of the required checks and references are satisfactorily returned. Visitors to the home are suitably monitored while on the premises but the visitors' book is poorly maintained and monitored.

Leadership and management

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

The new manager has relevant previous experience of holding a senior position and she is continuing to obtain further qualifications. Her drive and energy is having a very positive effect upon the staff team. Comments include, 'it feels like there is clearer direction' and 'we get great support and guidance from her.' Young people are benefitting from her child-centred approach.

The manager remains acutely aware of the need to further improve upon numerous processes and systems in order to raise standards across all areas of the home. Monitoring systems, procedural guidance and various records have shortfalls. Regulation 33 and 34 monitoring processes are in place but these lack rigour and young people are not always encouraged to take an active role when such activity is conducted. This restricts their ability to effectively contribute to the continued development of the home. Such shortfalls also prevent the effective monitoring of the home's Statement of Purpose which lacks sufficient details in some areas.

Requirements from the last visit, made under previous inspection guidance have not all been fully implemented. However, the manager is able to demonstrate some progress. Upon taking up her post she has placed immediate focus upon improving child care practices before prioritising administrative tasks. Limited progress has been made by senior management personnel with regards to the ongoing review of policy and procedural guidance for staff. The team is hindered by this and the absence of clear guidance, risks young people being in receipt of inconsistent practices. There is no clear development plan and this leads to confusion about management roles and responsibilities.

A motivated, enthusiastic staff team is being provided with appropriate mandatory

training. Core subjects are routinely updated and supervision meetings are now being used to plan for additional relevant courses. The organisation is currently focusing upon refreshing all mandatory training; however there is a need to further develop individual training and development plans for each staff member. A recent recruitment drive has proved to be successful in appointing new staff who possess relevant previous experience, as well as the National Vocational Qualification. Young people are benefitting by receiving support from a staff team which is increasingly growing in skills and experience.

Care records contain some shortfalls and this factor presents obstacles for young people in terms of making sense of their past and planning for their future. Current guidance with regards to the key worker role lacks clarity, however young people clearly benefit from the individual time they spend with their key workers and the wider staff team.

The home makes appropriate and timely notifications to Ofsted and other relevant agencies when necessary. Such practice is demonstrative of its desire to work openly and transparently with relevant agencies in the best interests of young people.

Equality and diversity practice is **satisfactory**.