

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Coulter
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This home is an independent residential home that meets the needs of young people who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. It provides accommodation for young people who attend the local associated residential special school.

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 home has only been fully operational for a number of months following a closure during which a full refurbishment was undertaken. The home provides care and accommodation for young people attending Coxlease School. The current group contains young people who reside on both a full-time and weekly basis. The majority of young people have experienced insecurity and uncertainty in their lives that has impacted negatively on their education and social development. Each young person is treated as an individual with their own specific physical, social and emotional needs. The home provides opportunities for young people to engage in an extensive range of educational, social and recreational activities. Staff have aspirations for the young people in their care and there is an expectation they will grow and develop during their placements by living full and active lives.

The new staff team has had to adapt quickly to changing circumstances as the home has reached its full capacity within a short period of time. It is evident that the home is still experiencing 'growing pains' and staff are still striving to achieve more consistency in the delivery of care. The current resident group contains a number of vulnerable young people with complex needs who require a lot of supervision to keep them safe. Although this has been clearly recognised by senior staff within the organisation the current staff team is still operating with a number of vacancies. While members of the existing team and a number of bank staff are providing additional support, the current situation is not sustainable in the long term and there is a danger staff could 'burn out'.

Young people are responding positively to the care and support they are receiving

and are making significant progress in many aspects of their lives. School attendance is extremely good and young people are engaging in a wide range of activities both within the home and local community. Although young people do not always comply with the homes behavioural boundaries staff have been successful in breaking patterns of anti-social and self-destructive behaviours. Staff have, within a short period of time, created a safe and nurturing environment in which young people can feel safe and address the often complex emotional difficulties they experience. Staff reinforce positive behaviour and success is recognised and celebrated. Young people made positive comments about their accommodation, the quantity and quality of the food and the support they receive from staff.

As the home has only been fully operational for a number of months there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate consistency in all areas. However, it is clear that the well- motivated staff team have the capacity to provide a quality service that will enable young people to grow and develop. The five recommendations arising from the inspection are aimed at assisting further progress.

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 records are regularly monitored to ensure compliance with the homes policies and to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring (NMS 21.2).
- review the existing sanctions and rewards policy to ensure it is fair and clearly understood by staff and young people (NMS 3.8).
- ensure the home operates with an appropriate number of staff so that it can consistently fulfil its Statement of Purpose and meet the individual needs of all children resident in the home (NMS 17.1).
- ensure all staff are fully aware of how young people's previous experiences can manifest in challenging and self-destructive behaviours (NMS 3.10).
- ensure all staff are trained to recognise the many forms bullying can take and are pro-active in intervening positively by engaging with those who bully as well as those who are bullied (NMS 3.12)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Young people are responding positively to the safety and stability the home offers and are making significant progress in many aspects of their lives. Education is given a high priority within the home. All the young people attend Coxlease School and

attendance levels are extremely good. A number of young people have joined local sports clubs and this has allowed them to meet new people and extend their social horizons beyond the home and school. By participating in a range of recreational activities in the local community young people are helped to master new social situations and increase their self-confidence.

Although a number of young people still engage in self-destructive and challenging behaviours, their frequency and severity is decreasing. Young people are forming meaningful relationships with staff and are beginning to open up and discuss personal issues with them. The views of young people are sought by staff on all aspects of their lives and they are encouraged to assert their independence within the home by exercising choice over such things as the decoration of their rooms, food and participation in leisure activities.

The health and well being of the current residents is carefully monitored and individuals are helped to assume responsibility for monitoring their own health. Staff have undertaken specific training to help one young person manage his health condition. Young people are provided with information on health related issues and those spoken with were clearly aware of the value of eating wisely and taking regular exercise. Young people are positive about the quantity and quality of food on offer and feel the 'favourite food survey' is a good way of identifying individual tastes and preferences so they can be incorporated into the menu planning process. Young people with established smoking habits are encouraged to give up and all are made aware of the potential dangers associated with illicit substances.

Young people are helped to maintain contact with members of their families. When required staff will provide transport to and from their homes. The progress of each young person is conveyed to their parents/guardians on a regular basis via phone calls, e-mails and written reports. A number of parents and family members regularly visit the home. By having regular contact with people who are important to them, young people are helped to maintain existing networks that can support them when they leave.

Quality of care

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

The home has established an effective placement planning process that identifies young people's physical, educational, social and cultural needs and provides guidance for staff on how they can be effectively met. However, currently the long-term goals of each young person are not clearly identified. For example, it is not clear if the current residents are working toward returning home in the near future or whether they will be residing in the home and attending Coxlease School for the foreseeable future. Risk assessments are effectively used to identify the vulnerabilities associated with each young person's behaviour. Placement plans are well organised, written in clear accessible language and updated in the light of new information and changing circumstances.

As the home has only been fully operational for a number of months the new staff team are still in the process of developing a safe nurturing environment in which young people grow and develop. Staff promote the concept of respect and there is an expectation that young people will learn to tolerate each other and peacefully co-exist. Young people receive good support and guidance from staff. Appropriate staffing levels help provide regular opportunities for staff to work with young people on an individual basis. It is clear the young people enjoy and respond positively to the care and attention they receive from staff. Young people appeared to be at ease in the company of staff and interaction was observed to be spontaneous and laced with much humour.

Although staff have agreed on a set of behavioural boundaries they have, due to forced staff changes, struggled to establish a consistency in approach. Regular meetings are currently being held to iron out differences. Although staff are clearly aware of the propensity of some young people to engage in bullying and discriminatory behaviour, it is not clear if all are conversant with the various forms bullying can take. Staffing levels have been recently increased to provide more effective supervision. Praise and encouragement are used to reinforce positive behaviour and a range of diversionary techniques are deployed to de-escalate challenging situations. Staff work alongside young people to help them make the link between actions and consequences. While sanctions are imposed for serious misdemeanours, physical interventions are only ever used if it is believed a young person is putting themselves or others at significant risk. Some young people felt that sanctions were not applied fairly. Staff closely monitor the behaviours and moods of each young person and identify antecedents and possible triggers surrounding significant incidents. All significant incidents are appropriately recorded and reported. Although young people do not always comply with the home's behavioural boundaries, they are generally responding positively to the home's approach and staff have been successful in breaking negative patterns of behaviour and the number of significant incidents continues to fall. Staff spoken with were able to illustrate areas of progress each young person was making.

Each young person is allocated their own room that is designated as their own personal space. The home is subject to regular maintenance and was found to be structurally sound and in good decorative order.

A number of young people have, in recent times, taken their frustrations out on the home's fixtures and fittings. Staff ensure the home remains safe and that any damage is immediately addressed so the quality of the accommodation is not compromised. There is an expectation that young people will contribute to the day-to-day functioning of the home and among other things keep their rooms tidy. Staff provide regular opportunities for individuals to develop their independent living skills and a number regularly assist in the preparation and cooking of meals. Staff and young people eat together in the home's well-appointed dining room. Mealtimes provide regular opportunities for discussions within a relaxed informal setting.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Sound safeguarding principles underpin the home's policies, procedures and working practices. All the members of the staff team have been appropriately vetted and provided training on safeguarding issues. Staff are aware of their individual responsibilities in regard to the reporting of any safeguarding worries or concerns and aim to ensure that young people stay safe both in the home and in the local community. Staffing levels are good and continuously monitored and adjusted to ensure young people are kept safe.

The home offers a safe environment that is subject to regular health and safety checks and remains free of any unnecessary hazards. On admission young people are made aware of all local hazards, including the nearby road. Staff work alongside young people to develop personal safety strategies. Access to the home is limited and all visitors have to report to staff, provide identity and sign in. The fire alarm system is tested weekly and regular fire evacuations ensure staff and young people remain conversant with procedures.

Staff ensure young people are made aware of the likely consequences of engaging in anti-social, criminal or self-destructive behaviours. Staff work alongside young people and make them aware of the dangers of running off. They have been extremely successful in reducing the frequency of incidents in which young people are reported missing. Staff liaise effectively with placing social workers, teachers and parents to ensure young people do not put themselves at risk when returning home. Recent liaison with the local police has resulted in the development of more effective procedures for reporting any young person who goes missing.

Leadership and management

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

Although the staff team have only been together for a relatively short period of time, they are working effectively to meet the complex physical, social and emotional needs of the young people in their care. However, current vacancies need to be filled as soon as possible to prevent staff, most of whom are undertaking additional hours on a regular basis, from 'burning out'. Good lines of communication have been established between staff operating on different shifts, and regular staff meetings are helping individual's translate the homes policies and procedures into working practices that are consistently applied. Staff have access to a comprehensive range of policies and procedures that are updated in response to regulatory and legislative changes.

The manager has a 'hands on' approach that has been instrumental in establishing working practices that are 'child focused'. The introduction of monthly supervision for all staff, including the manager, is now providing opportunities for individual staff to examine their practice and aid their professional development. All the new staff have completed a comprehensive induction programme and are initially deployed alongside more experienced staff. The manager is developing a culture of

professional development within the home and there is an expectation that staff will access the many training opportunities available to them. New staff commented positively on the guidance and support they receive from the manager and senior staff.

The operation of the home is subject to on-going monitoring by the manager and monthly visits are currently undertaken by a reviewing officer from within the Priory group. The manager and senior staff are currently engaged in developing a range of reviewing tools that will help young people assess their progress. By recognising each young person's successes they are being helped to develop more positive self-images.

The home is appropriately resourced and evidence indicates it operates in the best interests of the current residents. The views of young people are sought formally via residents meetings and informally through regular discussions with staff. On admission all young people are made aware of how to raise concerns and make a complaint. Staff closely monitor the well-being of each young person and attempt to resolve grievances before they develop into complaints. No complaints have been made since the last inspection. The privacy of each young person is respected and all confidential information is handled sensitively. Staff access information from a range of sources to help individuals understand their past and plan for their futures.

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.