

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Anne Bannister
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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 five bedded children's home is one of three run by the company. It is registered for five males, aged from 12 years old up to 17 years old with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is in a rural area with access to the facilities in a local city.

Overall effectiveness

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

Young people benefit from a well managed service that delivers high quality care to young people. The outcomes for young people are good in relation to their starting points. Young people's needs are met by enthusiastic and well informed staff who act as good role models, take their responsibilities seriously and provide good, safe care. Young people have developed positive relationships with staff and understand the boundaries. This ensures there is effective support to enable young people to develop socially and emotionally.

Young people are safe and say that they feel safe. There are good systems in place at the home to promote their safety and welfare. Young people live in a homely environment that is accessible to local community facilities. The home has developed positive relationships with parents and placing social workers who comment positively about the care provided. Most parents feel that one of the strengths of the home is that they are consulted about the care of their children. Feedback from social workers about how the home operates and communicates with them is positive.

Young people are happy living at the home and have some understanding of how staff are helping them meet the objectives of their placement. They have a range of opportunities to express their wishes and feelings. Their views are listened to and acted on as appropriate. However, young people feel that sometimes when things have been agreed with managers it takes a long time for the changes to be implemented. Young people enjoy good access to health, educational and leisure facilities. Young people are making good progress.

The provider and manager show a clear commitment to improving the service to benefit outcomes for young people. The need to induct and settle a new manager and a significant number of new staff has been their priority since the last inspection. This has been achieved and ensures that young people are being cared for by an enthusiastic and committed staff team, who are addressing young people's care needs.

The organisation are still to address the changes in the regulations and guidance

which were implemented in April 2011. As a result of this five recommendations have been raised.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure staff receive high quality training, for example in safeguarding. All staff should have either a minimum level 3 National Vocational Qualification, a level 3 Children's and Young People's Workforce Diploma which must include mandatory social care units or be working towards the Diploma within six months of employment (NMS 18)
- include in the children's guide: how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer; the Children's Rights Director and how to secure access to an independent advocate (NMS 13.5)
- ensure that if a child is missing from home and their whereabouts is not known (i.e. the child is missing), the home's procedures are compatible with and have regard to the Runaway and Missing from Home and Care protocols and procedures maintained and managed by the police or by the local authority for the area in which the home is located (NMS 5.6)
- ensure that sanctions for poor behaviour are not punitive but should be restorative in nature, so that children are helped to recognise the impact of their behaviours on others (Children's Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Volume 5:Children's Homes, 2.89)
- ensure that new staff undertake the Children's Workforce Development Council's induction standards, commencing within 7 working days of starting their employment and being completed within 6 months. (NMS 18.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people get good help to maintain and develop contact with their families and friends. Contact arrangements are clearly described in residential placement plans. Parental feedback is generally positive with one parent indicating, 'the staff are very friendly and good at what they do. They keep me well informed. This is a strength of the service'.

Young people have good health support from staff. They receive regular check-ups with health professionals and have access to support and guidance from a nurse employed by the company to provide support and guidance to all their services. Health plans are clear and comprehensive and young people can access useful written guidance about physical and emotional health. When young people have complex health needs there is evidence that staff act as advocates to ensure they get the health care support they are entitled to.

Young people positively engage in education. The staff are also good at promoting educational outcomes for young people who attend the company's education facility or the local college. The ethos of the home is that all young people participate in education. Young people are supported to attend and achieve in education including taking part in GCSE examinations. Care staff support young people's learning needs through close liaison with teaching staff. All young people are making significant progress when taking into account their starting point at the time the placement commenced.

A clear and comprehensive leaving care and independence package is in place. This helps to ensure young people have the necessary skills and knowledge to help them adapt to independent life when they are older and leave the children's home. There are strong and effective links with the local authority leaving care team. One social worker advised the inspector, 'the staff are good at independence planning. They are clear about what they are able to contribute to pathway plans. They work creatively in meeting the individual needs of young people in their care'.

Quality of care

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

Each young person admitted to the home is encouraged to participate in the development of an individual care plan which details how their social, educational and health needs will be met. They are each allocated a key worker, who liaises with placing authorities, young people's families and other professionals in order to ensure their care plan addresses young people's assessed needs. Staff understand young people's needs and care plans are used to demonstrate the positive outcomes which the home are working towards with young people. Care plans are regularly reviewed to ensure they are consistently being implemented and to review targets which have been set for young people. This enables young people to recognise the progress they are making and has a positive impact on their self confidence and self esteem. Four social workers commented positively about the level of communication they have with the staff team. Young people are supported by staff to contribute to discussions in statutory reviews and to influence decisions about their lives. When young people feel unable to fully participate in the review processes, key workers ensure that their views are fully taken into account.

Staff take young people's concerns and complaints seriously. Young people say they know what to do if they are unhappy and how to make a formal complaint. Young people confirm that staff are supportive in raising issues with agencies and organisations outside of the home. They also expressed a confidence that when issues arise within the home their concerns are listened to and are generally sorted out informally, though they sometimes see a delay in getting a response about suggestions.

The home is a large detached house with extensive gardens. It is furnished and decorated to a high standard. Young people have the use of a number of communal areas in what is a comfortable and homely environment. Young people are accommodated in single en suite bedrooms that they are encouraged to personalise. An enclosed garden provides ample opportunity for outdoor activities. Young people also have opportunities to pursue purposeful leisure activities that they may not otherwise have had the opportunity to experience. Many of these opportunities are community based and ensure that young people have the opportunity to socialise with other young people outside of the immediate resident group.

The home presents a varied, nutritious diet for young people which helps in the promotion of their physical health and well-being. Special dietary needs and any cultural requirements can be addressed by staff. All staff involved in the preparation of meals have undertaken a qualification in basic food hygiene. This ensures that food storage, preparation and cooking are undertaken in a manner that promotes good health.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Good systems are in place to safeguard and protect young people. They are protected by a range of risk assessments of their behaviours, their participation in activities and on the environment in which they live. Young people participate in regular fire drills and understand evacuation procedures. Young people's care plans and risk assessments take into account their potential to go missing and their vulnerability should they do so. Staff work positively with young people to reduce incidents occurring. There have been few incidents since the last inspection. Staff understand the home's procedures for reporting young people when they are missing. However, the registered manager is yet to establish links with the Police Runaway and Missing from Home and Care Co-ordinator to ensure that the home's practice reflects locally agreed protocols for coordinated responses to protect vulnerable children.

The staff team work hard to develop and sustain positive relationships with young people. They use a range of de-escalation techniques designed to assist young people to regain control of their behaviours and take responsibility for their actions. A young person commented, 'they have helped me learn how to manage my behaviour, when everyone kicks off I used to join in. Now I have learnt to walk away and not get involved.' Staff are trained in the use of safe physical intervention. There is agreed guidance for staff to follow when sanctions are seen to be necessary. Reparation, where young people can make good or pay for any intentional damage to property, is well used in the home. However, staff have not always adequately reviewed the effectiveness of sanctions in promoting positive changes in young people's behaviours. The manager is taking steps to address this deficit.

Young people are effectively safeguarded by a staff team who have a good awareness of the home's safeguarding practice and procedures. The staff team receive safeguarding training which helps them to protect young people from abuse and enables them to keep them safe. Detailed policies and procedures ensure care staff have a full understanding of the action to take if an incident occurs, but not all senior staff had updated their safeguarding training. A plan is in place to implement this.

Verbal bullying has recently become an issue within the home. Young people's views are that staff always take action to deal with bullying. However, sanctions documentation does not evidence that staff response is always restorative in nature, and that young people are helped to recognise the impact of their behaviours on others.

Staff are suitably vetted prior to employment in the home, which means that young people are cared for by suitably cleared adults. All visitors to the home are accompanied and supervised, to keep young people safe. The home's health and safety systems are well maintained, to keep the home's occupants and visitors safe. These systems include clear and well implemented fire risk management systems and regular safety checks on the home's power and heat supplies.

Leadership and management

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

There is a relatively new staff team and manager at the home and they are working hard to team build and ensure they are improving outcomes for young people. The manager, and staff spoken to, have started to look at day to day care practices, and staff meeting minutes reflect that changes have been made to further develop good child care.

The Statement of Purpose gives an overview of what services the home intends to provide. It has been updated to advise of the staffing changes. Social workers feel they are informed of the purpose and function of the home, and copies of the statement are readily available. The children's guide is written in a format that is suitable to the age and understanding of young people living at the home. Young people confirm they are given information about how it is to live at the home, and feel the guide tells them what they need to know. Legislative changes implemented in April 2011 have not been incorporated into the children's guide. The guide does not include information on how young people can contact an advocate and their Independent Reviewing Officer.

There are organised systems in place to monitor the home, but outcomes from this inspection show the systems are not fully picking up changes in the national minimum standards and regulations implemented in April 2011. This deficit was acknowledged by senior managers within the organisation, who indicate their priority over recent months has been to provide a stable staff team who promote high quality child care. Regulation 33 visits are carried out regularly, and reports are supplied to Ofsted in a timely manner. A number of issues have been highlighted by the regulation 33 process, and action plans are in place to address these concerns. Following the last inspection visit one requirement and six recommendations were identified, most of which have been addressed. Systems are in place to notify within 24 hours the persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 30. Improved communication with school ensures that there is a co-ordinated approach to any instances of bullying.

New staff do not undertake the Children's Workforce Development Council's induction training. The organisation has its own comprehensive induction process for each new starter. This gives a general overview of what skills staff need to acquire to fully carry out their roles. It covers all key issues such as behaviour management, safeguarding, first aid, safe medication handling, basic food hygiene and fire safety awareness. A significant number of staff do not hold appropriate childcare qualifications. An action plan has been put in place to address this, with some staff due to commence training, including equality and diversity, in September 2011.

The management team is suitably qualified and provides effective leadership for the staff team to enable them to ensure young people are given the opportunities to succeed in life. The staff team are well supported, receiving regular supervision which enables them to reflect on their practice. The new manager is focusing in staff meetings on improving management of challenging behaviour to ensure a consistent and positive approach. This ensures staff have the knowledge and competencies required to address young people's diverse needs.

Comprehensive placement plans have been developed which set out the assessed needs for each young person and the actions which will be taken to address them. Young people's case files are stored securely and reflect how life has been for each young person living at the home. Young people's care records are appropriately managed and are reflective of the good standard of care and support delivered.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.