

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Gillian Walters
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This home is operated by a private provider, who has a small number of other children's homes in the locality. It provides a service to five young males, between the ages of 12 and 17 years. The home cares for young people with learning disabilities as well as those who experience emotional and behavioural difficulties. The organisation also operates a school, registered with the Department for Education, providing fully-integrated programmes of care and education.

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 **good**.

The home provides well-planned care to address young people's diverse and complex needs. Staff are committed to improving outcomes for young people and have a sound knowledge and understanding of their needs. Staff work in close partnership with a range of professionals to ensure that young people can successfully access the services and support they require.

Young people benefit from living in a comfortable and homely environment that provides consistent care and clear boundaries that enable them to settle and make good progress in their placement. Social workers acknowledge the effectiveness of this approach and have described staff as 'firm but fair'.

Young people share trusting relationships with staff and feel well supported by them. They are reassured that staff understand their needs and wishes and know that they hold high aspirations for them. Young people understand that their views are important and that they are taken into account, influencing the care they receive. Young people feel safe and protected in their home environment and know that staff consistently strive to ensure their safety.

The home engages well with families, promoting contact as is consistent with young people's care plans. Staff ensure that families stay well informed of progress and any events that may occur. Placing authorities identify communication as a clear

strength, describing it as 'excellent'.

As a result of this inspection two requirements and two recommendations have been made. These comprise: a minor update in the home's Statement of Purpose; recording practices and arrangements in relation to physical interventions; staff meetings; and individual sessions with young people.

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
5 (2001)	update and revise the statement of purpose; specifically to include detail of staff qualifications and experience (Regulation 5)	25/11/2012
17B (2001)	ensure that following the use of any measure of control, discipline or restraint a written record is made in a volume kept for the purpose. In particular ensure that all records are bound within the volume and contain sufficient detail concerning staff de-briefing. (Regulation 17(B)(3))	25/11/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that all children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. This relates specifically to ensuring that they have the benefit of regular one-to-one sessions with identified staff and during this time have sufficient opportunity to discuss all key aspects of their care (NMS 1.3)
- ensure that the registered person takes action to address any issues of concern that they identify or which is raised with them. This relates specifically to the arrangements for regular team meetings, their documentation and the distribution of such records to staff. (NMS 21.9)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are making good progress in this home, benefiting from the consistent care and support provided by a dedicated staff team. Young people share positive

and trusting relationships with staff, enabling them good opportunity to explore their feelings and make sense of their histories. Most young people are happy and settled in the home environment which is conducive to helping them achieve good outcomes. Young people benefit from the home's success in maintaining good communication with family and social workers. One social worker commented of a parent having said 'our relationship is the best it has ever been for some time'. For young people this means that they are able to sustain and build on those family relationships that are most important to them.

All young people have experienced excellent attendance at the school operated by the provider and some have continued this in moving on to further education and training at a local college. Young people's achievements are good in relation to their starting points and they continue to develop their independence skills in both the education and care settings. This means that they are developing good awareness of the skills that they will require, developing confidence in achievements and becoming appropriately prepared for their move into adulthood.

Young people enjoy the stability that the home provides. They benefit from the familiarity of an established staff group and understand the expectations placed upon them. Young people are clear that they are fully involved with their care planning and encouraged to express choices about their future. As a result young people know that their views are valued and respected, enabling them to develop a good sense of self-worth. They are able to contribute their ideas to developing the home and how it is run, and in many instances they see positive change as a result.

Young people benefit from living in a home that promotes healthy lifestyles. Staff lead by example, encouraging young people to choose from a healthy balanced diet and to participate in activities that will ensure that they have good opportunity to exercise. Young people regularly contribute to menu planning and take part in a variety of sporting activities. The school nurse maintains regular weekly contact with the home ensuring that there is good oversight and advice for both staff and young people concerning healthcare matters. Young people benefit from early assessment and identification of their health care needs. Additionally, close liaison between the school nurse, staff and other health care professionals ensures that timely and effective intervention is planned and provided, resulting in good health outcomes for young people.

Quality of care

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

Young people say that they like staff in this home and enjoy spending time with them. One young person described staff as 'legendary'; another commented on staff saying that 'they offer good support and advice'. Young people are cared for in accordance with their individual care and placement plans. These consistently cover all key aspects of their care and development, including their safeguarding, educational and healthcare needs. This ensures that staff have a comprehensive understanding of their needs and how they may be best met. Young people on the

whole benefit from regular planned one-to-one sessions with staff. However, on occasion this has not occurred with the desired frequency or been sufficient to enable young people to communicate their views on all aspects of their care. Although this has the potential to reduce their opportunity for discussion and reflection on some aspects of their care, in practice other opportunities occur that ensure the quality of their care is not significantly diminished.

Staff effectively manage young people's behaviour using their considerable knowledge and experience of them. Supported by detailed and regularly-updated risk assessments and behaviour management plans, staff are able to anticipate issues and deal with behavioural difficulties and challenges in a calm and appropriate manner. Staff are extremely patient and consistent in their approach and manner towards young people and work hard to create a warm and nurturing environment that ensures that young people feel safe, secure and cared for.

Young people's individual and collective views are routinely obtained during daily after school meetings. Additionally, a planned monthly meeting with staff provides a more formal opportunity for discussion. Young people are aware that on all these occasions they have the opportunity to express their views and ideas for the home and know that they will receive a response in relation to all matters raised. As a result of this activity, young people feel listened to and can clearly recognise when their views, ideas and choices have been acted upon. Young people are familiar with the home's complaints process that is detailed in the young person's guide provided on admission. A complaints box has been provided to ensure that young people have easy access to raise any issues of concern and have them dealt with in a confidential manner. Young people are confident that they know how to complain and can identify staff within the home, and alternatively social workers, they could speak to if they had a concern.

Young people are encouraged to understand the benefit of living a healthy lifestyle. Staff promote healthy eating choices and a range of activities that will both interest and provide excellent opportunities for young people to maintain and improve their fitness and well-being. The home is proactive in providing healthcare information and advice. This ensures that young people are well informed and effectively encouraged to make choices that will promote good health and not pose a significant risk to their health. A clear example of such risk reduction is the home's zero tolerance policy on smoking. All young people are registered with local practitioners on admission to the home and staff are diligent at maintaining both routine and follow-up appointments. All health care matters are co-ordinated and closely supervised by the school nurse responsible for the home. This ensures that all healthcare needs are identified and professionally addressed in a timely manner.

The home demonstrates considerable effort in establishing and developing fruitful relationships with families and professionals, ensuring all relevant parties are suitably engaged and able to contribute to young people's care planning and support needs. Families and professionals identify frequent and consistent communication as a key strength of the home in supporting young people. The home actively promotes and supports family contact for young people as is consistent with their care plan,

ensuring that young people have the opportunity to sustain and develop those relationships with those who are important to them. Commenting of the home, one professional said that 'the quality of care is outstanding without doubt'.

The home is located in a quiet rural village and blends well with local housing. It is well designed to meet the needs of the young people and is maintained to a high standard. The living environment is homely and comfortably furnished, with young people's bedrooms personalised to their own taste. The home has an enclosed garden that provides sufficient space for outdoor play. However, a park is located close by that is regularly used for team games such as football.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people living in this home say they feel safe and protected by staff. Young people acknowledge that there have in the past been some incidents of bullying but that this is not a major issue currently affecting life in the home. Young people are reassured that staff will not tolerate any bullying activity and will intervene quickly if any incident is apparent or reported.

Staff share a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and are familiar with the home's child protection procedures. Procedures are robust and are regularly reviewed to reflect current best practice. The home maintains good practice in documenting individual risk assessments that enable staff to have a clear understanding of young people's individual vulnerabilities and the strategies required to minimise such risks.

Young people rarely go missing from the home. However, when such events have occurred the young people concerned have been returned quickly. Staff are familiar with the local protocol in operation and understand the actions to be taken to promote the young person's well-being and early return to the home.

All staff are trained in behaviour management and physical intervention techniques that are consistent with current legislation and guidance. This means that they know how to safely intervene and when it is appropriate to do so. Young people have a clear understanding of the behaviours that are not acceptable in the home and the ways in which staff can respond, including physical intervention when required. Young people acknowledge that this is necessary at times 'when staff think you are unsafe' and note that 'staff are always fair'. The home's documentation is mostly well recorded and maintained. However, during this inspection, some minor omissions in recent recordings and maintenance of the volume were identified. Although this did not have a significant impact on the safeguarding of young people concerned, the documentation did fall short of the required standard.

The home ensures that young people continue to live in a safe and secure environment. Risk assessments covering all areas of the home are completed and updated regularly to take account of any changes. Fire fighting equipment and fire

safety measures are regularly checked and serviced to ensure all are maintained in good working order. Fire drills are practiced regularly to ensure that young people and staff are familiar with how to evacuate the home in the event of any emergency.

The home has good arrangements in place to ensure safe recruitment and selection practice. It does not allow new staff to commence work within the home without first ensuring all pre-employment vetting checks are complete. This ensures that young people are not made more vulnerable by being exposed to unsuitable persons who may do them harm.

Social workers confirm their confidence in the home's safeguarding practices, one commented on being 'absolutely satisfied with safeguarding arrangements'.

Leadership and management

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

The home is effectively managed. The permanent Registered Manager has considerable experience in working with vulnerable young people with complex needs. He is well regarded by his staff team as being 'consistently supportive' and 'particularly child-focused', ensuring that partnership working with families and professionals is beneficial to the young people placed in the home.

The staff are well motivated and have consistently high aspirations for the young people in their care. All are either qualified or are working towards a professional qualification relevant to working with children. The home ensures that all staff have good opportunities to access regular training, supervision and an annual appraisal process, which all supports their personal development and equips them for their role.

The staff team is well established, morale within the home is good and staff confirm that they enjoy working there. Staff rotas demonstrate that staffing levels are appropriately and safely maintained. Professionals have confirmed this noting that 'good consistent staffing levels' exist within the home. As a result, young people enjoy stability within their placements and care from a stable staff team that have appropriate mix of skills, experience and knowledge.

The home responds to complaints seriously and deals with these effectively and in a timely manner when they do occur. This ensures that any concerns raised by young people or their families are appropriately addressed and resolved without delay.

Staff have access to a comprehensive range of written guidance, policies and procedures which exist to support and promote good practice within the home. Arrangements are in place for regular review of documentation to ensure that they remain consistent with current legislation and practice. The home has recently reviewed its statement of purpose and although its content largely reflects current requirements there was a minor omission of information pertaining to staff qualifications and experience which will require further update to ensure compliance

with the requirement.

The home is well resourced and there are robust quality assurance systems in place to successfully monitor the care received by young people in the home. The Registered Manager maintains a good routine of regular monthly monitoring of his service in accordance with the schedule, and this is supported by the provider's arrangements for regulation 33 visits. The manager has also successfully completed and provided Ofsted with a report, summarising and reflecting on a period of monitoring as required by regulation 34. This work ensures that the provider has got a firm grasp of the home's strengths and weaknesses.

The attendance and frequency of staff team meetings has been identified within the home as an area for improvement. During this inspection documentation concerning recently planned staff meetings was found to be incomplete and did not adequately reflect either the content or frequency of such meetings. This had already been highlighted as a result of monitoring as an issue for action. However, on inspection it was the view that this had not been prioritised and as yet successfully addressed. This means that confidence cannot be assured that all staff are routinely receiving pertinent information in a regular and consistent manner.

The home has effective systems in place to notify Ofsted and other relevant bodies of any significant events that may occur within the home or with young people. Communications are sufficiently detailed to ensure the recipient has good understanding of the event. Young people's individual records are comprehensive, documenting all essential information concerning their placement and progress. Records are well organised and maintained and stored securely within the home ensuring privacy and confidentiality.

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.