

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Robin Whistlecraft
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is privately owned. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for five children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

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**.

Many aspects of this home are adequate and some are good. For example, some young people gain in self-confidence, do well with their education, regain family relationships and are positively involved with the wider community. Some learn skills to manage frustration and anger and are able to return to live with their families. On the other hand, some young people do not make progress in relation to managing conflict and frustration, and do not attend or achieve in their education.

The quality of the care young people receive is adequate but has not been effective in engaging sufficiently with some young people. Some young people have, in response to an Ofsted survey, reported positively about the support that staff give them. For example, when they feel unwell, if there is bullying, involvement in leisure activities, help with school work, feeling safe and learning to look after themselves.

Managers have good systems to review and monitor the quality of care provided in the home. However, that monitoring has failed to recognise that the provider has not properly applied the home's admission criteria. The provider has admitted several young people to the home who did not meet the home's admission criteria. Instead of being behaviourally stable, some presented, and continue to present, emotional and behavioural difficulties including aggression. This is despite staff applying clear boundaries and encouraging positive behaviour through reward systems. Their behaviour has led to damage to the home and upset neighbours. Young people have said they feel safe but they have also had to experience outbursts of aggression and disruption.

This report contains three requirements and four recommendations for areas for

improvement. The requirements relate to: admission decisions, promotion of educational achievement and staff training. The recommendations relate to having an emergency contingency plan, young people's access to a computer, analysing certain records and systematically preparing young people for adulthood.

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
4 (2001)	ensure that the children's home is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. This relates to only accommodating young people who meet the admission criteria set out in the statement of purpose (Regulation 4(6))	03/09/2013
18 (2001)	promote the educational achievement of children accommodated in a children's home, in particular by ensuring that the children make use of educational facilities appropriate to their age, aptitude, needs, interests and potential (Regulation 18(1)(a))	03/09/2013
27 (2001)	ensure that all persons employed by him receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. This relates to staff knowing the roles and responsibilities of external agencies for carrying out investigations of suspected or alleged abuse of young people accommodated in the home. (Regulation 27(4)(a))	03/09/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure there is an emergency escape plan that all staff and children are familiar with and have practiced so they know what to do in an emergency. This is in relation to staff knowing the contingency plan in the event that an emergency makes the home uninhabitable (NMS 10.9)
- ensure that young people are supported to develop practical skills, financial capability and know about entitlements to financial and other support after leaving care. This is in relation to systematically assessing and coaching young people in the skills and knowledge needed for adulthood (NMS 12.1)
- ensure that young people have easy and regular access to a computer to support

their education (Volume 5, statutory guidance, paragraph 2.12)

- ensure that the system to monitor the matters set out in Schedule 6 will enable the registered person to identify any trends and issues of concern. (Volume 5, statutory guidance, paragraph 3.14)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Some young people make good progress in this home. They learn new skills, improve their self-confidence, re-build relationships with their families and become more relaxed. However, some young people make only limited progress, for example, taking a pride in their appearance or returning from home visits without any problem. Otherwise, they continue to take risks and do not make reasonable progress in establishing alternative strategies to violence. Other young people do not learn skills to manage frustration, despite staff intervention and individual rewards systems, and so cause damage and disruption to the home. This means that for some young people, in some respects, the home has been unsuccessful in helping them learn better self-awareness and self-management skills.

Young people enjoy good health and benefit from access to various health professionals. Some young people smoke, and continue to do so, despite encouragement from staff, and specialist advice and services to help them cease. Young people also benefit from access to advice and literature about healthy eating

Most of the young people in this home are beyond statutory school leaving age. Therefore, the education that is in place is further education or work-based learning. Some young people have good attendance at their educational placements. However, some young people's attendance has deteriorated. Some refuse to engage with their education. Similarly, young people's achievement is mixed. Some young people are achieving well, but others, because they are not engaging with their education, are not achieving. This means that some young people are not benefitting from education and training to prepare them for the world of work.

Young people contribute to the running of the home by influencing menus and the choice of leisure activities. However, some young people have also caused damage to the home, such as holes in plasterwork on walls, and breaking a doorframe and windows. Some young people, who caused the damage, started to fill some of the holes in plasterwork before leaving for a summer break. However, the damage means that, overall, those young people are not making a positive contribution. It also means that other young people have to live in a home with a generally deteriorating environment.

Some young people positively engage with the wider community, such as working in a charity shop or working on a local farm. However, some young people have had an adverse impact, including causing disruption and fright, on the local neighbours because of noise, bad language, aggressive shouting and the sounds of things being

broken. This means that some young people have not learned the responsibility and respect needed to be good neighbours in adulthood.

Staff work pro-actively with young people's families. Some young people find that staff and family members work together to provide incentives for them to make progress. Generally, young people experience improved relationships with their families, or at least some family members, while living in the home. Some young people returned to live with their families, despite this appearing unlikely in the past. Staff encourage young people to review their relationships, and the way they manage them.

Young people cook, clean and do laundry as part of the home's general regime. Young people who need extra support with learning personal care skills are given personal targets as well as advice by staff. When necessary, some young people receive encouragement to take longer and longer journeys on public transport in order to learn independence and develop self-confidence.

Quality of care

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

Young people generally enjoy stable settled relationships with each other, although staff report that there have been times when this is not the case. Young people indicate that they feel supported and cared for by staff. Staff set clear boundaries for young people and use individualised strategies for managing and promoting positive behaviour. This means that young people are clear about what is expected and have incentives to learn new skills for managing frustration and conflict. For some young people the incentives have been successful. For others, the home is still seeking effective incentives.

Staff seek young people's wishes and views about the running of the home at meetings and on an ad hoc basis. Currently, this is largely limited to getting views and wishes about menus and leisure activities. When young people express discontent about some specific aspect of their care, staff explain the reasons if the young people's wishes cannot be met. Staff provide young people with information about how to complain and raise concerns in a young people's guide to the home. Staff liaise with, and support the provider's education service's negotiations with young people. Staff do this in order to persuade the young people to engage with the home's and education placement's expectations. These factors mean that young people generally have influence over some aspects of the home's routines and the care they receive.

Young people receive care that is generally consistent with the needs described in their placement plans. For example, there is appropriate congruence between plans, risk assessments and behaviour management plans. Staff are aware of the needs that the young people have. Also, staff talk with young people about their plans and the reasons for various strategies. However, the home does not have an assessment and coaching programme that systematically addresses the range of skills and

knowledge necessary for adulthood. This is despite the home's primary function being to support young people to move forward into independence. This means that young people do not have assurance that they are gaining all the necessary skills and knowledge for successful independent living. In response to a survey by Ofsted one young person indicated that they did not know if staff helped them to prepare for when they live in their own house.

Staff ensure that young people are registered with local health services as well as having access to specialist health professionals such as psychologists and therapists. Healthy eating is promoted through information posted on a notice board in the dining room and by staff when menus are being planned. Staff provide incentives for young people to give up smoking, with the incentive increasing as more time elapses since the last cigarette. Staff enable young people to experience a range of leisure activities. These factors mean that young people benefit from care that promotes their health.

Young people experience staff who encourage their education and training. Staff do this by ensuring that during the school day there are no distractions such as televisions or electronic games consoles available to the young people. Also, young people's personal targets include engagement with their education so that they are rewarded for attending and achieving. In addition, staff try to provide learning experiences for young people who are not engaging with their education, for example, trips to historic sites. Young people confirm that staff help them with their education work. The provider's education service awards certificates in recognition of young people who engage and achieve with their education and training. Unfortunately, the home's computer has been broken for some months so young people do not have internet access to support their learning.

Staff have a general understanding of meeting young people's needs in relation to equality and diversity. Examples include: the skin and hair care needs of young people with an African heritage, or how they can get support for issues around sexual orientation. Staff use an ad hoc approach to exploring issues around equality and diversity, such as picking up a news item on the television. This means the home caters for young people's diverse needs.

The home is appropriately located and designed to be conducted in line with its Statement of Purpose. The fabric of the home has been damaged by young people since the last inspection; this detracts from improvements that the provider has carried out. For example, the kitchen has had new cupboards and worktops. As a number of young people return to their families during the summer, managers have plans in place to repair and redecorate where young people have caused damage. These factors mean that while young people experience both improving and deteriorating accommodation, managers are taking steps to address the deterioration.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people have indicated that they feel safe in the home and that staff deal well with bullying, if it happens. The home is kept secure and physically safe.

Young people rarely go missing from the home. The home has a protocol for dealing with young people who go missing, which local police have agreed. Staff are aware of young people's vulnerabilities and search for them when they are missing. Young people's risk assessments and behaviour management plans address young people's vulnerabilities and mitigating actions. These factors mean that staff seek to keep young people safe while they are missing. Staff do not use disciplinary measures very often, and use physical restraint rarely. Appropriately detailed records support young people when staff use a measure of control.

Managers carry out appropriate pre-recruitment vetting checks on prospective staff. While staff recognise when a matter is suspected or alleged abuse, some staff are not sufficiently aware of the role and responsibility of external agencies to investigate potential abuse within the home. Those staff do know to pass concerns to a manager. The home acts appropriately when a concern arises about young people's safety, and alerts other agencies properly. Therefore, there is no evidence that the shortfall in knowledge has had an adverse impact on young people.

Young people are safeguarded because managers ensure that staff carry out routine fire safety checks. They also make sure that health and safety checks and inspections are up to date. The fire risk assessment does not currently include a contingency plan for if the home becomes uninhabitable. So, in that event young people may experience unnecessary delay while managers look for options.

Leadership and management

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

The provider appropriately uses external monitoring to assess the conduct of the home. It is evident that the manager responds to recommendations made as a result of that monitoring. The manager also carries out periodic reviews of the quality of care in the home. The reviews cover all of the elements that the regulations require. Where there is analysis of the prescribed records, the manager's analysis is thorough, identifying strengths, weaknesses and action points. A few elements do not benefit from any apparent analysis and the manager, instead, simply describes the related systems. However, those systems enable managers to understand the home's strengths and weaknesses. Managers have addressed the recommendation made at the last inspection. The manager operates an active development plan, reviewed and updated each month. These factors, including most of the review of the quality of care and the external monitoring, indicate that, generally, young people benefit from care that is open to continuous improvement. However, the providers and managers have not properly monitored admissions to the home.

The Statement of Purpose is clear and sufficiently detailed. However, the provider does not operate the home in a way that is consistent with its Statement of Purpose.

In the section on admission criteria, the Statement of Purpose refers to the very damaged young people that the home accommodates. It goes on to say that these young people 'have managed to stabilise their behaviours through previous methods of behaviour management and assistance with their emotional needs'. Young people's plans indicate that the provider has admitted several young people whose behaviours had not been stabilised.

The provider, rather than the home's internal management, makes the decisions to admit young people to the home. Pre-placement reports refer to current behaviours that concern professionals, including verbal and physical aggression. In one case, the report's author that by placement in this home, with a strict routine, the young person will be able to move forward and stabilise their behaviour. Within the records sampled, there was no indication of the provider checking whether the young person met the criteria given in the Statement of Purpose. Rather, working with young people who have settled, the home has had to address predictably challenging behaviour that has resulted in damage to the home and distress to neighbours. These factors mean that young people do not benefit from a home that the provider manages effectively. This is despite the provider's and manager's otherwise active attention to monitoring the home's conduct and quality.

Young people are cared for by an adequately competent and supported staff team. Staff receive regular training in core topics, and some staff have additional, individual training in specialist areas. Staff receive regular supervision. The manager has addressed a lapse in fortnightly staff meetings. The manager cancelled some meetings to allow the staff to focus on managing young people's behaviour during that period. Sufficient staff are provided to adequately cover the home's duty roster. This involves managers finding extra cover through overtime or the use of bank staff because of vacancies. Managers have actively recruited additional staff to join the staff team. A turnover in the staff complement means that only a minority of the staff have achieved the level 3 Children and Young People's Workforce Diploma. The rest of the staff are either undertaking the Diploma currently, or are about to start because they have only recently completed their probationary period for working in the home.

The provider has improved the home's kitchen and a communal bathroom, and fitted an en suite bathroom to the only bedroom without one. However, the manager's plan to wait to carry out repairs or redecoration means that young people experience a poor standard of accommodation elsewhere. Such as in other communal areas, and where they have damaged their own bedrooms.

Managers demonstrate a commitment to equality and diversity. They do this by displaying information on a notice board and providing information booklets for staff and young people to use.

The home keeps records on children securely. Staff write clear records, and keep them up to date. Those records contribute to an understanding of young people's

lives in the home. This is because the summaries and reports reflect the progress young people are making in different areas of their lives. The home submits notifications about significant events to the relevant authorities. Managers take appropriate action following incidents. These factors mean that the home supports young people by having effective administrative systems.

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.