

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Christy Wannop
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Date of last inspection	11 January 2010
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home looks after three children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, aged between 11 and 17. There should be no more than a five year age gap between children, unless they are siblings. The service offers planned and emergency admissions, and provides short, medium and long term placements. Children are likely to have had previous failed residential care placements and require high levels of support, called 'Support Plus.'

The home is operated by a national private provider of services for children, and there are other homes in the region nearby. It is a detached house on a housing estate with good transport links to the city centre and to community leisure, educational and health facilities. There is an independent clinical psychology and psychotherapy service that can be commissioned separately for individual children. The manager is registered in respect of this home and another children's home operated by the organisation.

Three children currently live at the home and all took part the inspection.

Summary

This is the first inspection since the service opened in January 2010. It was an unannounced key inspection and looked at outcomes for children in the areas of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, economic wellbeing and organisation. This inspection found consistently good outcomes in each area.

This is a well-organised, child-focussed service that meets most, and exceeds many of the national minimum standards. There are some shortfalls in detail of record keeping but these do not impact on the good experience of care and the excellent relationships between staff and children. The service keeps children safe, makes good arrangements for health care, values and promotes their participation in education and the community, and helps them to make the most of their skills and talents. Opportunities for independence are well integrated into daily life. Staff communicate well with children and there is an atmosphere of mutual respect. Partnership working with parents and professionals is good. The imaginative and caring staff team are helped by clear procedures and an efficient manager who drives good practice and accountability.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection and so there are no previous actions.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The service makes good arrangements for children's health. Staff promote healthy lifestyles through plenty of outside activities, fresh air and opportunities for children to burn off energy. Well organised care planning ensures that health appointments are kept and children have good emotional, physical and mental health. Children say they get the help they need from a range of health professionals. Their welfare is safeguarded by the home's policies and procedures

for storing and administering medicine and treatment. Staff are qualified in first aid so children get the care they need when accidents occur.

There is an excellent approach to healthy eating and ensuring children have a balanced diet and staff are well trained in health, nutrition and eating disorders. Children are active cooks at the home and enjoy inviting guests for dinner and planning surprise parties for each other. Meals reflect the cultural diversity of the staff group and the young people's personal tastes. Mealtimes are enjoyable, social occasions where children participate in wide ranging conversations and develop social skills. Food is fresh and plentiful and hygienically prepared. Parents and social workers are positive about how the service maintains the good health of children and one child said, 'the staff....encourage us to eat healthy meals and snacks by giving us our 5 a day.'

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The service makes good arrangements for keeping children safe. Staff take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously and this is supported by good policy and robust procedures. The manager is pro active in developing relationships and contributes to the wider safeguarding agenda in the area through cooperative partnership working. Children's privacy is respected and they know that information about them is confidential. Staff act as 'good parents' through careful support when it is necessary to search for items which may cause harm to children. A social worker said that 'The placement has provided a safe and supportive environment.'

Children are kept from harm by a careful, protective approach if they run away. Local police describe the service as working in a complimentary way with them to 'exchange information without barriers' and this comprehensive approach facilitates children's safe return. A parent said that she appreciated that staff keep her child safe by staying with him wherever he goes. Staff communicate well with children and this creative strategy sorts difficulties out for children at an early stage, so issues do not turn into complaints. Children say that there are adults who they can trust and can talk to at the home.

Staff prevent dominant behaviour turning into bullying, and children report that staff take this issue very seriously. Adults and children work together using a range of resources to make sure that everyone is alert to signs of distress. Children can have challenging behaviour and staff are trained in, but rarely use, physical intervention. Staff work to reduce stressful situations, promote positive behaviour and act as good role models for children in their calm and equable manner.

A social worker described the way staff work with children as a combination of showing empathy and being able to put boundaries in place. One child said, 'I do think the rules are fair as if you break the rules then you will get a consequence.' Children build strong relationships with the adults who care for them and this is evident in the quality of the interactions and in the progress made by children in their short placements. A child described staff as, 'kind and nice to be around.'

The manager takes effective action to make sure that children live in a home that provides physical safety and security, free from unnecessary risks. Children also learn how to keep themselves safe and are involved in checks and fire drills. Professionals working with children placed in the home comment on good risk management plans around children's needs and

describe them as 'comprehensive, helpful, useful, current.' Recruitment procedures are robust and ensure that adults working with children are suitable. These strong arrangements make sure that children's right to safety and security are promoted.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The atmosphere in the home is inclusive and respectful of diversity and difference. Children get highly personalised individual support and care. Staff are sensitive and fully informed about young people's individual needs and wishes and give help and guidance about personal health and social and sex relationship education. Young people know that their cultural, religious and racial identities are respected and that any additional support for mental, emotional or physical health needs will be organised. Children are supported to take risks that are part of learning skills for growing up. A social worker comments on the good risk management and monitoring of children's safety, even when they are away from the unit.

The service makes good arrangements to ensure children learn, achieve and enjoy their leisure. Education is valued as part of preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to attend and enjoy school, and achieve according to ability in secondary school and further training. One parent said that staff encourage children to take up hobbies, do lessons and think about exams and their future. Children can pursue individual interests, develop confidence in their skills and staff support and encourage them to engage in leisure activities. Children are busy and not bored. They are active and engaged with the adults who care for them who act as role models and give lots of positive attention. Adults are welcoming and put children first; they convey a sense of shared purpose and above all fun. A social worker said of staff, 'I am confident they understand, holistically, the needs of young people.'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There are good arrangements for helping children to make a positive contribution. Good assessments, care planning and review, from the point of moving in to moving on or out, help children to develop positively and to know they are making progress. Close key working and care planning helps children develop self-confidence and learn to successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges. Children explore their local community and this helps them to integrate. The service has cared for nine children in short placements since opening. Admission processes are good but are not supported by documented admission impact assessments. This means that the manager's thoughtful consideration of children's needs prior to admission is not evidenced.

The service supports children in a really positive way to maintain and build constructive relationships with families and 'goes the extra mile' to ensure children feel that these relationships are valued. A parent commented that communication with her about her child is good, and she is involved in all issues and decisions. Staff understand that friendships are important too, and children confirm they visit friends who in turn are welcome at the home. A social worker says that staff ensure any overnight stays with friends are safe through the checks they make. Consultation with children is good and they have a clear voice in the home through regular weekly children's meetings, key-working sessions and the generally high standard of communication between adults and children. Children confirm they feel involved and included in decision making; they feel they have a say in how the home is run because they are consulted

and their opinions respected. A social worker described how this good communication and flexible care planning suits children's needs.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children receive care and active support that helps them to prepare for adulthood. Children are helped to achieve their full potential, develop skills for adulthood, and learn to manage their finances so they will have enough money for the things they need in life. The service has a 'can do' enabling approach to making things happen for children and to giving them the chance to do things for themselves and others. Staff are imaginative, energetic and thoughtful about the needs of the children and share this enthusiasm with them. This two-way sharing is a real strength.

One child said they are prepared for independence because staff are good at explaining things to young people. Children live in a well-maintained and comfortably furnished home that provides plenty of space and facilities to meet the needs of three teenagers. There are enough downstairs rooms for young people to spend time alone, or in company. Children have a say, and like the way the house is decorated. They make art for the walls and take care of their bedrooms and possessions with staff help. This shows that they feel a sense of ownership of the home.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children live in a home that is organised around their needs and prioritises and seeks to improve their life experiences, through skilled and sensitive management. One parent described confidence that her child is safe, settled and well cared for and making progress.

Leadership and management of the service combines experienced efficiency and skilled organisation with a sensitive child centred approach. The Registered Manager is knowledgeable and aware of the children's legislative agenda and the issues faced by children in need.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Policy, procedure and good practice helps children to know that their individual needs on the basis of race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, gender, age and religion are valued and the service is able to meet their diverse needs in everyday life in the home. Children have good information about life in the home so they know what to expect, how they will be cared for and who they are likely to share with. The home also displays child friendly information about services that can help children, including access to advocates. Parents and placing authorities also have a clear statement about the operation of the home.

Competent, confident, and experienced staff provide close care for children and current staffing levels ensure a high level of one-to-one support. There are clear deputising arrangements and staff in charge have substantial experience. Almost half have achieved National Vocational Qualification at level 3 in working with children and young people. There is an established programme to ensure that all staff progress onto this scheme. Children have continuity from the stable staff team that provides a mix of male and female staff from a diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Good training and development opportunities are linked to the needs of the children and the purpose of the home. Staff are supported and guided in

safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare through frequent professional supervision. They described high levels of enjoyment and satisfaction in their work, particularly about the progress children make. One child described staff as, 'the best I have ever had since I've been in care.'

The welfare of the children in the home is promoted by rigorous monitoring by the Registered Manager and by external monthly audits carried out by managers from other homes within the company. The Responsible Individual has an active role, is well known to children and visits the home frequently. Records about the service and are clear and well maintained on the whole. However, there are shortfalls in the information within the rota, which does not show the managerial time spent in this home; neither does it identify staff by their full names. Staffing information required by Schedule 4 to be maintained in the home is generally satisfactory but does not include full information about bank staff. Records about children however, reflect their individuality and contribute to the sense of progress and development. The service uses technology well to compile a photographic history of children's achievements as a permanent record for them. Information is securely stored and children know they can access and add personal statements. Children benefit from living in a well-organised small home where they are central to the processes that focus on their needs and progress.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- ensure the needs of the child concerned, and the likely effects of his/her admission upon the existing group of residents, are taken into account, and recorded, in decisions on admission to the home (NMS 5.7)
- ensure the homes records are kept in accordance with Schedule 4 and 6. For example, that there is a record of all staff working in the home, and the rota shows full names of staff and managerial time in the home (NMS 33.1)