

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Julian Parker
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is operated by a national, private provider and looks after three young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The service offers planned and emergency admissions, and provides short, medium and long-term placements. Young people are likely to require high levels of support.

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 provides both short to long-term accommodation for young people with complex emotional and behavioural needs. Some placements take place at very short notice which can impact upon the stability of existing residents. Young people say that they feel okay about change; they feel safe and generally enjoy positive relationships with most of their full time staff team, most of the time.

Some changes to the leadership of the home has occurred since the last inspection with the appointment of a registered manager. The homes management and recording of practice however identifies little progress occurring. The existing management arrangements for the home do not as yet confirm that the necessary leadership confidence or requisite support is in place to ensure progress.

Good care planning confirmed by regularly reviewed individual care plans support the internal measurement of placement progress although for some young people this remains almost static.

The views and wishes of the young people in relation to the care they receive influences its delivery by setting targets and developing reward systems. The use and recording of 'placement plan sessions' addresses behavioural issues by setting realistic improvement targets for young people, but sometimes fails to address existing problems. With support provided by care staff some young people effectively develop their emotional resilience and improve their practical abilities to begin their transition towards semi-independent living.

Full time staff have a sound knowledge of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding, recognising the particular hazards and behavioural issues for each young person both in the home and the wider community.

Management monitoring systems do not effectively inform the homes improvement agenda or assertively address practice shortfalls. The home is dependent on the regular use of 'Bank staff' to maintain its operational staffing level which detracts from the homes potential to stabilise and improve.

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)	produce a children's guide which includes the address and telephone number of the HMCI and ensure that these details are current and correct (Regulation 4(3)(c))	12/10/2013
31 (2001)	ensure that all parts of the of the children's home used by children are suitably furnished and equipped and of sound construction and kept in good structural repair externally and internally , by reporting all identified shortfalls to the property at the earliest possible occasion by using the existing systems (Regulation 31(2)(d))	25/10/2013
32 (2001)	ensure after consultation with the fire authority arrangements for persons working at the home to receive suitable training in fire prevention and evidence this by confirming this in the homes record of training (Regulation 32(1)(d))	12/10/2013
27 (2001)	ensure that all staff receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. This applies to the consistent logging and recording of supervision practice and the recording of physical intervention training (Regulation 27(4)(a))	25/10/2013
25 (2001)	ensure that there is at all times having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of the children accommodated in the home a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working at the children's home (Regulation 25.1 (b))	05/10/2013
34 (2001)	establish and maintain a system for improving the quality of care provided in the children's home. This relates particularly to the accuracy of detail in the homes records.(Regulation 34(1)(b))	05/10/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that there is a written development plan, reviewed annually, for the future of the home, either identifying any planned changes in the operation or resources of the service, or confirming the continuation of the homes current operation or resource (NMS 15.2)
- ensure that staff have access to support and advice and are provided with regular supervision by appropriately qualified and experienced staff. Specifically by putting into place arrangements to ensure the continuity of staff supervision where this is compromised by the supervisor's absence (NMS 19.4)
- ensure that information about each child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read what is written about them and correct errors, add personal statements and sign to confirm that they have done this, for example with their placement planning sessions (NMS 22.5)
- ensure that the manager regularly monitors, in line with regulations, all records kept by the home to ensure compliance with the homes policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Ensure that immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring (NMS 21.2)
- Ensure that staff actively promote the welfare of children living in the home by following up incidents such as those related to bullying behaviour by means of Placement Planning (key worker) sessions. (NMS 4.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Those young people living at this home for some time demonstrate improvements in their confidence and self-esteem as confirmed by reductions in harmful, risk taking behaviour and some improvements to their self-care.

With encouragement young people re-establish engagement in meaningful activities and education, however, the frequency of attendance and consistency of this commitment remains variable reflecting low level starting points. Some young people have made friends in the home enabling them to feel more emotionally secure in their home. Young people frequently recognise the risky situations that may get them into trouble and how they can avoid these temptations. By forming meaningful attachments with their carers some young people gradually become more confident, emotionally resilient and able to achieve.

When compared to their starting point on admission some young people make improvements in attending and attaining in their educational placements. Not all young people can be motivated to attend despite receiving practical support and

good advice from staff.

Where young people's circumstances involve criminal behaviour they benefit from living in a place of safety and receiving practical advice and personal support to cooperate fully with youth justice agencies and the police. Clear, written behavioural contracts make the expected conduct within the home explicit.

Young people understand the importance of healthy living and usually respond positively to the help available. They are encouraged and helped to attend all health related appointments and when at home receive a well-balanced diet, often reflecting different cultural backgrounds. Specialist advice and support from external agencies promotes emotional health, informs safe sexual health and addresses specific issues such as the misuse of substances. Most young people accept that this support is provided to promote their wellbeing although they do not always put it into practice.

Some young people value the regular unsupervised contact they retain with their family and friends. When used responsibly they can utilise learned social skills and maintain meaningful relationships. By working within social worker approved contact arrangements most young people recognise that concerns about their welfare and safety is the main objective of their placement.

Utilising 'independent living skills' programmes, the home teaches basic skills to receptive young people for their transition into adulthood. Some young people say that they like this aspect of the placement. In these cases personal file recording shows that these programmes begin ahead of statutory pathway plans. All young people can receive this help to prepare for the move into independence; however, some are reluctant or unwilling to engage in this planned transition preferring the security and predictable routine provided by the children's home.

Young people say that for most of the time they like the home they live in. They will, usually with inducements, contribute to the daily running of the home by helping with general house chores and to varying degrees keeping their rooms tidy. They have a say in the décor of the communal areas and in that of their own personal space. Young people regularly contribute their views and ideas at their weekly meeting letting staff know what the home could improve upon, choosing activities and meal planning. By bringing to the meeting important communal issues such as that related to behaviour, bullying and damage inflicted to the home, young people are actively reminded about their responsibility for conditions in which they live. Young people receive a weekly allowance to spend as they choose plus an opportunity to increase this by demonstrating socially acceptable and expected behaviour.

Quality of care

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

An incomplete staff team currently provide guidance, care and practical support to

young people. Relationships between staff and young people are generally friendly, structured and effective, using humour and wherever possible existing rapport to diffuse potentially difficult situations. Young people say that they feel accepted for who they are, but find it increasingly difficult to relate to the changes in the care staff team as a result of staffing shortages and sickness absence.

Young people know how to raise any concerns and make a complaint. They have immediate access to staff, the manager and complaints forms when they want to share their concerns. No new concerns emerged during this inspection but a previous complaint about the use of a physical restraint remains unresolved. The homes complaints file includes guidance for young people whose first language is not English and details about the use of independent advocates and placing authority representatives.

The views and opinions of young people influence the daily operation of the home. Occurring informally through everyday living and recorded by more formal meetings, young people help make the decisions that shape weekly life in the home. Staff explain situations clearly to help young people appreciate how decisions are made, particularly when it is not always possible to act upon their wishes.

Young people can easily understand the provider's behaviour management strategies. A praise and reward system, based on enhanced pocket money and reward activities is an effective incentive. Young people realise that all behaviour related incidents should become the subject of placement planning, keyworker sessions, so that they can realistically review the adverse effects of inappropriate or risky behaviour. Records indicate that behavioural concerns are not always followed up by these sessions, potentially undermining their value and young people learning about the consequences of their actions.

Young people are encouraged to be fully involved in the development of their individual placement plans. On-going planning, observation and assessment, and records made of significant incidents enable staff to evaluate the progress young people make. These generate reports for social workers and statutory reviews about the effectiveness of the children's home placement in stabilising complex behaviour.

The provider's guidance and policies relating to health effectively help promote the medical, physical and emotional well-being of young people ensuring that wherever possible they receive attention directly or from placing authority specialists. Staff discuss their individual Health Plans with young people identifying particular health needs, for example accessing helpful advice about quitting smoking, eating a balanced diet and taking exercise. The involvement of other health professionals supports plans that identify more particular needs; such as the emotional support provided by trained therapists for understanding specific behaviour or addressing those risks associated with substance misuse. Regular training from the provider equips staff to deal with minor accidents or ailments and administer medication safely.

All young people with school placements receive help, encouragement and practical

support to attend and remain in education. For most, their actual attendance is erratic and at best satisfactory taking into account their starting point at the time of placement and the limitations placed on them by the available educational provision brokered by placing authorities. However, it is evident that staff do work well and in partnership with the Looked After Children's Education Service to improve opportunities. For one young person this has achieved full attendance.

Young people can access and enjoy a range of recreational pursuits and outings. Some young people grumble about the financial reins placed on regularly attending expensive activities such as go-karting and cinema attendance. Some positive experiences and opportunities are sometimes refused when young people prefer to visit their friends in the community or play electronic console games. Young people are 'street wise' and cautious about which youth clubs they attend recognising the risks posed by some local gangs.

The homes location within a multi ethnic area helps meet the individualised needs of each young person including those related to their culture, religion, sexuality and background. All staff members understand from care plans, each young person's specific issues, their particular needs and how these are communicated. The home makes inroads with enhancing young people's esteem and quality of life by including them in the day-to-day decision making about their placement and encouraging inclusive, tolerant, socially acceptable behaviour in the local neighbourhood and wider community. An understanding of other cultures is promoted by some posters, artwork and discussions generated by staff using meals from differing countries.

Located in the city suburbs on a mixed housing estate where it is indistinguishable from other properties young people will often use public transport that provides easy access to a broad range of community amenities and recreational facilities. Efforts to improve the condition of the building through decoration in communal areas help brighten the homes appearance. Young people are always encouraged to respect and invest in their living environment but this does not always achieve the desired outcomes. The building does not look well-maintained throughout or on its damaged exterior boundary fence which presents visitors with a poor initial impression. Young people are not always sufficiently encouraged to keep their personal areas clean or tidy with broken furniture not being replaced in some bedrooms. Although a building maintenance contract is in place the manager has not reported for prompt attention all necessary repairs.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say that they feel safe at the home. Through focused placement planning sessions they can develop an understanding of why their particularly risky behaviour causes concern.

An anti-bullying policy is in place to address oppressive behaviour inside and out of the home and safeguard vulnerable young people. This is not always effective because some incidents are not addressed by staff sufficiently quickly through the use of placement planning sessions or children's meetings. Some young people

display a strong sense of responsibility by preventing their peers from being bullied but will often use inappropriate responses to do this.

Staff are provided with training in child protection including an understanding about how to make referrals. The home works in partnership with other professionals and placing authority social workers to provide an inclusive approach to safeguarding.

Incidents of young people going missing from home are generally specific to some individuals but these have reduced over time through the use of prevention action plans, improved relationships with staff and feeling settled within the home. The home actively follows national guidelines and local protocols in its well recorded response to children missing from care and the home.

Statutory records relating to consequences for unacceptable behaviour and occurrences of physical intervention confirm a very low level use of restraint in the home. All staff are required to complete annual refresher training in the use of an accredited methodology to maintain safe practice and recording expectations. Not all staff have met this requirement meaning that the safe management of young people in challenging situations cannot be assured. The managers monitoring has not identified this shortfall. Young people receive support to manage their behaviour by following an individualised 'risk management plan'. The homes recording systems enable young people the opportunity to reflect and comment upon all incidents arising from their behaviour.

Young people live in a modern four bedroomed detached house that is inconspicuous as a children's home. The home provides a functional and generally physically safe environment. The organisations maintenance team usually repairs any deliberate damage very quickly to maintain security and good environmental standards although on this visit some works were incomplete. A range of health and safety procedures, risk assessments and monitoring checks are available that when completed thoroughly confirm the day to day safety of the placement. Regular fire precautionary checks, including evacuation practice, confirm that young people are familiar with what action to take in an emergency. The absence of an up to date record, confirming that all current staff members have in date fire safety training, compromises this preventative approach.

The home adheres to the tested organisational recruitment procedures in place to safeguard young people. Suitability enquiries and safety checks carried out fully for all new starters ensure that only suitably vetted and selected staff can work at the home.

Leadership and management

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

A recently registered and inexperienced manager oversees the home. This is the first full inspection since this appointment has been made. All requirements from previous inspections have been acted upon satisfactorily.

The statement of purpose for the home is accessible and comprehensive. From this document children, staff and the placing authority can be clear about the aims and objectives of the home and what services and facilities it should provide. Presently the provider does not meet these requirements because there are key shortfalls in staffing levels, staff training and management monitoring.

The children's guide for the home, while being in a child friendly format, does not include all the contact detail that it is required to contain about contacting Ofsted.

Shortfalls in the quality and content of the homes monitoring systems, both external and manager led, mean that deficits in aspects of the day to day operation of the home are being missed, for example the timely reporting of damage requiring repair, confirming that all staff training is up to date, ensuring that children's records are always fully completed. This critical shortfall means that the quality of the service is gradually deteriorating and this will impact on the safety of young people. Similarly, the incomplete development plan currently in place indicates that the manager has not identified the strengths and weaknesses of the home or has any plans to address these.

The home is not at present adequately resourced with sufficient full time staff to consistently meet the needs of the children and young people being cared for. Young people report that they find it difficult to relate to the different bank staff and shortage of men being used to support the duty rota.

The homes records also indicate that remaining staff are not being fully supported or supervised by the manager or the senior staff in the home as a result of shortfalls in the team complement through resignation and sickness absence. This means that the quality of care being provided cannot be fully monitored or evaluated from practice feedback.

The provider has in place a comprehensive training and development schedule for all staff. The records in the home identify that both full time staff and bank staff deployed to the home have shortfalls in the currency of some of their statutory training, for example behaviour management including physical restraint and fire safety. These shortfalls mean that they may not in all cases be sufficiently skilled to enable them to provide good quality and safe care for children and young people.

The case records for young people are generally clear following set provider formats, stored securely but not always up to date in all sections. The information being recorded helps contribute to an understanding of the child's life, however, documents such as the placement planning records, which require young people's input and participation do not consistently include their comments or afford them opportunity to confirm their contribution by signature.

The homes record of significant notifications are satisfactory and accurately reflect those made to Ofsted. The manager is fully aware of his responsibility and the criteria for making notifications.

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.