

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Stella Lovie
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a private children's home that provides care and accommodation for up to four young people 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 **inadequate**.

There is a very mixed picture in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of this home. Children and young people make good progress in a number of areas of their lives. That is undermined by the fact that some have reported experiencing harm while living in the home. This potentially impacts adversely on their longer term emotional and psychological well-being.

Children, young people, relatives and some external professionals are highly positive about the quality of care delivered by the staff. Particular praise is directed at the very constructive relationships forged between staff and the children and young people. That said, other professionals voice concern about communication and working together issues with the home which have an adverse impact on effective interventions. Placement plans are unfocussed and do not promote improved outcomes in line with care planning objectives.

Safeguarding is judged to be inadequate. This is because the home has failed to protect some children and young people from other young people in their peer group. Child protection procedures have not always been followed, and children and young people's safety has been compromised. The home's relationships with local statutory agencies are strained. This means that children and young people do not always benefit from reliable safeguarding practice. In addition, records held by the home do not fully reflect the multi-disciplinary decision making process about child protection concerns.

Leadership and management arrangements have been strengthened since the inadequate progress judgement in the last inspection in February 2014. The new

Registered Manager has addressed all the shortfalls identified in that inspection. However, significant other weaknesses remain. There is concern about the sufficiency of staff to meet the needs of the children and young people cared for. This is further compounded by the inadequacy of staff training and supervision. The manager has also failed to notify Ofsted of all serious events in line with regulation. This inhibits the scrutiny role of the regulator. The manager has also not informed the local authority of all out of area placements of children and young people in the home. Consequently, effective working together with key local agencies is inhibited.

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
12A (2001)	notify, in writing, the local authority for the area in which the children's home is located without delay of the admission of a child into; and the discharge of a child from the children's home (Regulation 12B (1) (a) (b))	27/06/2014
16 (2001)	implement the written policy which is intended to safeguard children accommodated in the children's home from abuse or neglect, and which sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect (Regulation 16 (1) (a) (b)) *	27/06/2014
25 (2001)	ensure that there is at all times, having regard to the number and needs of the children accommodated, and with regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children accommodated, sufficient number of suitably qualified and competent persons working at the children's home (Regulation 25 (1) (a) (b)) *	27/06/2014
27 (2001)	ensure all persons employed receive appropriate training and supervision, with particular regard to training in peer to peer sexual abuse, self-harm and child sexual exploitation (Regulation 27 (4) (a))	18/07/2014
30 (2001)	notify, without delay, the persons indicated in column 2 of the table in Schedule 5 of any events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 5. (Regulation 30 (1))	27/06/2014

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice

Recommendations

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

- ensure children have prompt access to specialist health services when they need these services, with particular regard to prompt access to child and adolescent mental health services (NMS 6.4)
- encourage and enable children to make and sustain friendships with children outside the home, with particular regard to promotion of greater involvement in the wider community (NMS 7.6)
- support children to attend school, with particular regard to effective and timely planning in relation to secondary school transfer (NMS 8.3)
- make a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a member of staff, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken and the decisions reached. Place it on the person's confidential file and provide a copy to the person as soon as the investigation is concluded. Retain it on the confidential file for the required period of time (NMS 20.7)
- ensure effective sharing of information, with particular regard to obtaining copies of records of child protection meetings (NMS 22.7)
- ensure that the requirements of each child's placement plan are implemented in the day-to-day- care of that child, with particular regard to key targets and measurable outcomes in relation to children's care plans. (NMS 25.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Children and young people develop positive bonds with motivated and enthusiastic staff who care about them and act as influential role models. They benefit from a nurturing and structured environment. They are supported to express their views freely about any issues, which are then listened to and acted on by staff. As one young person commented: 'They're very chilled here, it's like they actually love and care about us'. This helps children and young people to aspire and improve their life chances. It also encourages their self-esteem and confidence.

Children and young people have good attendance at their various educational provisions. Their academic attainment is mostly positive in relation to their starting points. They are well motivated by the home's evident commitment to improving their education. This approach is based on a strong emphasis on building trust, thereby helping children and young people to feel secure. As one education professional confirmed: 'Her risk taking behaviours have significantly reduced since she has been in the children's home. Her emotional safety has primarily been achieved by the home developing a trusting relationship with her and by placing clear, firm, consistent boundaries around her.' That said, there is a lack of proactive planning in relation to some children and young people's imminent transfer into secondary school. This is not helpful in supporting that crucial and vulnerable next stage in their educational career.

Children and young people understand the importance of healthy lifestyles, eat a balanced diet and take appropriate exercise. Some children and young people manage their own health appointments in accordance with their age and understanding. They are supported to engage with routine and specialist services such as sexual health and drug and alcohol teams. This ensures that they remain fit and well and begin to address unsafe lifestyle choices. However, some children and young people still smoke and have not yet participated in cessation programmes. Also children and young people are waiting for therapeutic work with specialist mental health teams several months after placement. This impedes their emotional and psychological development. In addition, some children and young people's risky behaviours have escalated to the point of causing possible harm to other children and young people in the home. This has led to children and young people experiencing sudden unplanned moves from the home. As one social work manager commented: 'I am very disappointed about our young person's outcomes here given how his placement had to end so abruptly.' Clearly this has not been conducive to promotion of positive emotional health and well-being.

Children and young people are supported to undertake a wide range of enjoyable activities and trips out. These achievements are celebrated and recorded in photos to share with family and friends, and form part of a visual record of their time in the home. This allows them to have positive memories of their childhood and contributes to their understanding of their care experience here. However, children and young people currently have limited engagement with the wider community in terms of participation in local clubs. This is recognised by the home as an area for development in order to promote children and young people's independence, and to help them build social networks.

Children and young people are all involved in the preparation of the meals. This helps them develop skills that they will require when living independently in the future. In addition, children and young people are encouraged to undertake small tasks around the home, such as setting or clearing the table, or keeping their bedroom tidy. These small measures provide them with a sense of achievement on completion and help them to gain competence as part of a natural process of growing up, supported by adults.

Quality of care

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

Staff work hard to establish and maintain positive relationships with children and young people based on the values of good parenting and trust. This represents a real strength of the home. As a result, children and young people enjoy warm relationships with staff and there is a good rapport between them. They feel that staff really care about them. As one young person commented: 'It's nice here. It's just like a nice home. It's like a little family here. We sometimes argue and fall out with each other but that's just normal.' This is further endorsed by feedback from a parent: 'We have total confidence in them. The staff don't just work here – it's more

of a vocation for them. They are passionate about the care they give the young people.'

Staff provide children and young people with honest and accurate information and involve them in key decision-making. They invite children and young people to make recommendations about the service and assistance they need. This is further endorsed by clear and consistent boundaries. As one external professional commented: 'The staff have worked consistently and very well with the young person placed here. They have invested in his well-being and in return his behaviour has improved very significantly. Staff go the extra mile to ensure they support the provisions the young person is attending and thus ensure that education is sustained and improved upon. Staff's engagement with him is genuine and positive and this is evidenced through the positivity in the working relationships'.

Children and young people are cared for in line with their individual placement plans. Cultural and personal identity needs are identified and met. Those plans though are insufficiently focussed on clear, measurable outcomes, and do not all link with care planning objectives. This means that interventions with children and young people are not targeted enough. As a result, some children and young people have not received timely access to therapeutic services they require to meet emotional and psychological needs.

Staff provide children and young people with a living environment which is suited to their individual needs and reflects the high value they place upon them. The home is located in a pleasant environment and is very comfortable. It is furnished to a good standard. This serves to promote children and young people's sense of well-being. Some areas require re-decoration though, and there is a current plan in place to address this.

Children and young people contribute to the development of the home because staff provide regular opportunities for them to present their views at group and individual meetings. They confirm that staff listen well to them, and respond promptly to any matters raised.

Young people are encouraged to think seriously about their health in a holistic way, paying attention to the quality of their diet and their general fitness. They are also advised and educated in respect of risk behaviours including substance abuse and sexual activity. Children and young person are encouraged to make their own choices and decisions about their health and treatment and lifestyle in accordance with their age and understanding. They are supported to maintain good personal hygiene. Children and young people's welfare is safeguarded by sound policies and practices around the storage, administration, management and disposal of medication.

Staff promote constructive relationships between children and their birth families. They maintain links with parents to ensure they are kept informed of children and young people's well-being and progress. This enables important attachments to be sustained.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

There is evidence of significant tensions in the working together relationships between the home and local safeguarding agencies. This includes both a current and historical context of serious communication difficulties. As a result, safeguarding procedures have not always been followed by the home. This has compromised children and young people's safety. The situation remains unresolved and would appear to inhibit working together on both sides in relation to safeguarding matters that arise in the home. As one local authority manager commented: 'They have done some good work with our young person but I am disappointed with how the home has handled recent events with him. I think there are a number of issues for me in how they have acted. I think they need to reflect on what has led to his placement within the organisation ending. I think the home has issues around communication with the local authority. I am concerned about other young people who have been placed in the home without the local authority's knowledge.'

In contrast, feedback from some parents has been very positive about the effective impact that the home has had in safeguarding their young person: 'We have put our trust in this organisation and we do feel our daughter has made significant progress since she's been here. The change in her has been incredible. Even though she ran away this weekend back to her home area, her behaviour while missing has been so much better. She called her mum to let her know she's safe. We feel there's a chance for her here. The input professionally has been massive. Her attitude has changed definitely for the good. We're absolutely happy with the staff. It's just what our daughter needs. We think that they keep her safe here and we're not just saying that.' There is good evidence that staff take appropriate action in line with joint protocols with the police when children and young people go missing. This means that such incidents are minimised.

However, in recent months, several children and young people have reported inappropriate sexual behaviour towards them from other young people living in the home. The action taken by the home in response to these allegations has been insufficiently robust, both in terms of following child protection procedures, and in taking strong enough measures to protect the children and young people after the initial abuse allegations. This means that they have not been adequately protected from known risks. As one social worker observed: 'Staff know my young person well and put in strategies to help her which are mostly effective. But they haven't kept her 100% safe. There are lessons to be learned. There have been errors along the way. My question is around the supervision by the home after the first incident, and leading up to the second incident. Was enough done to ensure that both children were safeguarded. I wonder if the home should have taken her given known risks, or at least put in more robust safeguarding measures by a very careful risk assessment. Something clearly went wrong as the child in question was able to target another child in the home after the alleged incident with my child there.'

The home has not always been effective in securing appropriate multi-agency meetings to evaluate and plan interventions in respect of abuse concerns. The home is also missing key records of meetings which clarify the decision-making around such concerns, and have not been assertive enough in obtaining these key documents. This does not contribute to a good understanding of those children and young people's lives, and adds to confusion about who is responsible for what.

The home has accepted placements of children and young people from out of the local area with known risky behaviours and sexual vulnerability. The home has not always informed the local authority in writing of such placements in line with regulation. This adds to tensions in the working together relationships and does not promote effective planning in relation to resources. Furthermore, staff are not trained in managing high risk behaviours such as child sexual exploitation, self-harming and peer to peer harmful sexual behaviour. This means that they are not equipped to meet the specialist needs of the children and young people they care for.

Investigations into allegations against staff are handled fairly and swiftly. Appropriate consultation with the local authority designated officer takes place to ensure independent oversight of the outcome of the allegation. However, recording in relation to the allegation and the action taken, and the management of this sensitive information, is not compliant with minimum standards. This does not provide effective protection for all parties involved.

Leadership and management

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

The home now has a Registered Manager who has been in post since early May 2014. She has adequate prior management experience, including five months as the acting manager in this home. She has just enrolled onto an appropriate course to secure a management qualification. Feedback from some external professionals and relatives is very complimentary about her dedication and commitment to improving children and young people's lives. She is however at a very early stage in establishing herself in the home and in making a positive difference to the outcomes for the children and young people. That said, the manager has ensured that all the requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection have been acted upon.

The Statement of Purpose is clear, comprehensive and accessible. It helps staff and placing authorities to understand the aims and objectives of the service. The home is well maintained and resourced. Health and safety requirements are met.

Quality assurance arrangements have recently been strengthened by the employment of a suitably experienced and qualified independent visitor. This allows for more useful critical oversight to promote improvement. The manager's regular monitoring of standards of care is adequately thorough and includes evaluation of

trends and patterns of behaviour in the home.

The manager has undertaken training in the oversight of staff performance, as recommended in the last inspection, but staff supervision is not conducted regularly enough. This is a significant shortfall in light of the fact that most of the core staff have not yet completed their basic residential care qualifications, and have not had specific training to meet some of the needs of the children and young people they care for. This inhibits the effectiveness of their interventions, and does not allow for enough reflection on their practice.

Staffing has not always been sufficient to meet the children and young people's needs at times of crisis. This has contributed to inadequate levels of supervision of children and young people in the home. Children and young people's safety has thereby been compromised. It is another significant shortfall.

There have been some serious events in the home that have not been notified to all the appropriate authorities in accordance with regulation. This impedes the regulator in undertaking their scrutiny role and impacts adversely on the promotion of children and young people's welfare.

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.