

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Robert Curr
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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 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.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is privately run and registered with Ofsted to provide care and accommodation for up to three young people, of either sex, between the ages of 10 and 17 years.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

Young people benefit from good levels of close individual support. They are happy and make good, steady progress overall. This is confirmed by parents and professionals involved with the home who say that young people thrive there. One professional commented 'the atmosphere in the home is very good' and another said 'it's friendly and homely and I can tell that young people are happy there.'

Young people make positive and trusting relationships with staff which helps them to feel happy and settled. Their specific health needs are fully met and they enjoy a healthy lifestyle. Staff encourage and support them with their education. They attend school on a daily basis which maximises their potential for achievement. Young people are encouraged to practice and develop their life skills and they take part in a range of activities that promote their social skills and support their general development. They benefit from living in a homely environment that is kept safe.

The home is managed effectively and there is a clear commitment to continuous improvement of the service for the benefit of young people. Staff are trained and competent. They have a good understanding of the specific needs of the young people they look after and they are committed to ensuring that young people are well cared for.

Requirements and recommendations have been made as a result of this visit to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Areas for improvementStatutory 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
31 (2001)	ensure all parts of the children's home used by young people are kept reasonably decorated and maintained; in particular the	31/10/2011

	education room window and lounge carpet (Regulation 31)	
33 (2001)	interview with their consent and in private, such of the children accommodated there, as appears necessary in order to form an opinion of the standard of care provided in the home (Regulation 33 (4) (a))	31/10/2011
22 (2001)	ensure that the use of any electronic monitoring is provided for in individual placement plans and consent is agreed with each young persons placing authority (Regulation 22 (1) (a-d))	30/09/2011
4 (2001)	ensure the Statement of Purpose includes the arrangements that are made for consultation with the young people accommodated about the operation of the home (Regulation 4 (1), Schedule 1 (15))	30/11/2011

Recommendations

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

- contribute to the development of each child's care plan, including the pathway plan (NMS 12.2)
- develop a children's guide that is individual to the home and describes the services and facilities it provides for young people (NMS 13)
- ensure there is a written development plan, reviewed annually, for the future of the home. (NMS 15.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people make good progress in all aspects of their lives, especially good achievements in education. One social worker said 'She has done really well. She has started to think about her behaviour and consequences.' Young people receive beneficial support to develop a positive self view and recognise and build confidence in their abilities.

Education is highly valued and as a result young people achieve very good personal goals such as re-integrating to mainstream education placements, achieving full-time attendance in school and gaining national GCSE qualifications up to A*. One young person said that they were annoyed when staff made them get up for school and then said 'I am glad I go and it's good.' Young people are therefore able to maximise opportunities, gain on lost time and achieve positive results.

Young people benefit from varied opportunities to socialise and learn from leisure and educational activities. Friendships within the community are promoted and young people's friends are welcomed in the home. Young people's contact

arrangements with significant family members are fully promoted and the building and maintaining of those relationships is a major strength. For example, one young person was supported in having a holiday. Young people benefit from the sense of security this gives them in their home and promotes an atmosphere and feeling of belonging.

Young people are able to express their feelings in a variety of forums and in day-to-day living. The committed and enthusiastic staff team understand each young person's family histories and experiences and support them to express any concerns, anxieties and worries as well as celebrate any achievements. For example, certificates and records of achievements are placed in 'memory boxes' to help young people make sense of their lives and continue an ongoing record for the future. Young people fully benefit from the security, stability and sense of consistency this provides both now and for their longer-term relationships and in to adulthood.

Good practice ensures young people enjoy positive health and lead healthy lifestyles. There is a nurturing and educative approach to help young people understand the benefits for them of enjoying good health, for example, how diet improves behaviour, skin and hair. In addition equality and diversity is promoted by the recognition of the need to be aware of specific conditions such as the purchase of specialist hair products. Young people demonstrate good awareness of their health needs and progress in key areas in their health plans. Enthusiastic forward-thinking staff members make good use of specialist knowledge and engage in individual therapeutic programmes to support each young person and respond to changing needs.

In the main, young people are being prepared for a transition to adult life. Staff strongly encourage young people to be self-sufficient. This includes preparing their own breakfast, other meals and taking responsibility for other chores around the home. One young person stated that they are taking responsibility for understanding their own banking arrangements. Although independent living skills are part of the daily routine, this is not formally agreed in the independence plans or pathway plan.

Quality of care

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

Young people benefit from good care plan packages which are updated on a regular basis by the staff together with the young person. All cultural and religious needs are identified and addressed. Staff have established safe and productive links with a local place of worship. A social worker said 'she's thriving there; she said she loves the staff, those are her words'. Young people feel involved and consulted about all aspects of their lives and their plans from the start of the introduction process to the home. As a result they quickly settle in and want to stay long term. One young person has returned to the home to continue the positive support they were offered previously. A social worker stated 'the admission process made all the difference in this being a success because she felt that they wanted her and she would be safe.'

Young people do well because the manager and staff have high aspirations for the young people to succeed and achieve whilst also feeling comfortable and happy. A staff member said 'It's a lovely environment. Very homely and the atmosphere is relaxed.'

Young people learn to behave respectfully, show consideration for each other's cultural, religious needs and differences and develop tolerance from the encouragement and positive responses they receive from staff. Strong, supportive and nurturing relationships are built between staff and young people which enable inappropriate behaviour to be challenged and positive behaviour to be built upon and celebrated. A staff member said 'reinforcing when the young people are right as well as when they are wrong, so there is focus on both.' The strength of the relationships keeps any difficulties in perspective and allows for positive progress through challenging periods. As a result young people learn more positive ways to communicate their feelings and emotions resulting in a decreasing number of incidents. A parent said 'they give her support if she has any worries. They've got her to talk to them which isn't easy to do'.

Young people's needs are the central focus for all staff members and they are consistently consulted in day-to-day arrangements, for example, planning their individual menus, choosing colours and decorations in the home and being involved in choosing purchases for the home. A clear complaints procedure is fully understood and implemented by young people and staff members. Staff effectively address disagreements between young people before they reach the formal complaint process. As a result, young people learn how to manage relationships and conflict in a positive manner.

Young people live in homely accommodation which they like and say is 'just like a home.' They consider the home is comfortably furnished and they particularly like their bedroom area. However, there are some parts of the home that are not so well maintained. For example, there is water damage and damp around the window in the education room and general wear and tear of the lounge carpet. The home is well located with easy access to local amenities and public transport.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people feel safe in the home where safeguarding is a priority. Young people's safety and welfare is very important and central to all practice. Although young people do not always fully engage when staff highlight the risks around keeping themselves safe, young people say that staff continue to help them understand the risks and potential risks that behaviours and actions may lead to. Where particular risks are identified prompt communication takes place with social workers to consider appropriate responses. A social worker stated 'she's safe there and they are very good at keeping in contact with me.' Staff spend a great deal of time in individual sessions to talk through any identified concerns, to develop young people's own understanding of risks and the reasons adults are worried. As a result, some

young people's risk-taking behaviours reduce and they feel cared for and protected. A parent stated 'there's always enough people for her to talk to, I would say she's much safer there.'

Overall, there has been a positive reduction in the number of episodes of missing from the home. An independent advocate commented 'the fact they've held on to her for as long as they have when she always used to abscond is an achievement.' Staff respond quickly to any missing episodes and look for the young people whilst following locally agreed protocols. Staff state that young people are welcomed back to the home with 'open arms' and staff are genuinely concerned for them if they are missing. Young people are encouraged and able to record their views on the records kept following such occasions. Young people support each other to remain in the home. One young person said that they share their experiences with new residents to encourage them to stay.

Young people's individual vulnerabilities are understood and staff employ vigilance and strategies in line with the care plan package. Praise, rewards and incentives promote positive behaviours; sanctions are not punitive and are regularly monitored by the Registered Manager who comments upon their efficacy and whether they are appropriate. Records indicate that physical intervention is not used in the management of behaviour. Room searches are employed and an electronic surveillance alarm is being used to safeguard young people when leaving their bedrooms during the night. However, these arrangements are used for all young people, when not all assessments identify the need for everyone to have an alarm on their bedroom door. There are no signed agreements with regard to the electronic surveillance to show that the young persons placing authority consents to this measure being used.

Robust recruitment, vetting and supervision processes ensure that young people are cared for by suitable and well supported staff. Young people are involved in 'shadow shifts' with new staff, to give young people the opportunity to comment upon new recruits. This further enhances young people's ability to develop social and life skills.

Leadership and management

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

The home is effectively managed by a committed manager with the support of an enthusiastic deputy manager. The manager is aware of the new standards and regulations and is working to put these in to practice. Records show that regular visits under Regulation 33 of the Children's Homes Regulations are being carried out. However, although reports make clear recommendations there is no evidence that young people are regularly consulted and the reports do not contain their views. Therefore it is not clear that young people are actively contributing to the development and the quality of their care. A parent stated 'I think it's very well managed and run.' Although a further quality assurance visit has taken place, the home does not have a current annual development plan that sets out areas for improvement and the objectives for the service.

Three recommendations were made at the last inspection. These recommendations have been acted upon and consequently outcomes for young people are improved.

The provider meets the objectives detailed in their Statement of Purpose which enables young people to thrive in placement. However, it does not clearly set out how young people will be involved in the management of the home.

The young people's guide is given to each young person upon arrival at the home. It contains a range of personal information and useful telephone numbers relating to them. However, the guide is a corporate document that is not individualised to the home. Therefore, the guide is not providing a clear description of the care and support provided and how this is accessed.

Young people benefit from appropriate staffing levels. Care and support is given by a well supported and committed staff team. However, records indicate that young people do not always benefit from being cared for by a well established staff team. The home is sometimes staffed by new or inexperienced staff. Although these staff work alongside a more experienced worker, this does not ensure a consistent approach in the support and care that is offered to young people with complex needs. Staff members either hold or are enrolled on a relevant level 3 qualification.

All records are clear, contribute to the understanding and development of a young person's life, are up to date and are securely stored in a locked office. The majority of significant events relating to young people in the home are comprehensively and accurately recorded and notified to the appropriate authorities.

Young people have a positive and productive relationship with the manager who knows them well. The manager is building upon strengths within the staff team and has identified the areas of development and planning that are needed.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.