

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Paul Taylor
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The service is a privately-run children's home providing care and accommodation for up to three young people between the ages of 10 and 18 years, who may have emotional or behavioural difficulties.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service 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 **good**.

This is a well-managed and effective service. Young people benefit from placements in the home and make significant progress. Individual support and the promotion of education are particular strengths. Highly personalised care plans and attention to detail, underpinned by a committed and caring staff team, ensure that young people's well being and welfare are seen as paramount.

The home has robust monitoring systems and is reflective in its practice. The management team actively seeks the views of all stakeholders, identifies areas of weakness and points to develop. Young people report feeling very well cared for and supported. They confirm that they have made progress while living at the home. One young person commented: 'I don't have as many incidents as I used to'.

Very good links are maintained with stakeholders and statutory agencies. The home pursues rigorously any incidents relating to young people's safety and well being.

The home does not yet have clear, evidenced protocols in place to support the practice of occasionally locking an internal door to a communal area. Young people's views are not always recorded on every occasion that a sanction is imposed. The home does not have evidence of all staff qualifications in the recruitment records. The results of internal reviews of practice and quality assurance related to Regulation 34 are not currently forwarded to Ofsted.

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
26 (2001)	ensure that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to any person employed in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 2 (5) i.e. documentary evidence of any relevant qualifications. (Regulation 26 (3) (d))	31/05/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that where any sanctions, disciplinary measures or restraint are used, children are encouraged to have their views recorded in the records kept by the home (NMS 3.18)
- ensure that physical restrictions on normal movement within the home are not used unless this is necessary to safeguard children and promote their welfare and development. Such measures are only used where agreed with the responsible authority and, if appropriate, the parents. Such restrictions do not impose similar restrictions on other children (NMS 10.4)
- ensure that an evaluation of the monthly monitoring of matters set out in Schedule 6 is sent to HMCI at six monthly intervals. (Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 5 Children's Homes 3.14)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people make excellent progress during their time in the home, especially when taking into account their starting points at the time of admission. Young people benefit from being able to make trusting relationships with members of staff. They are offered close support. This enables them to make sense of their histories and background and helps them to feel valued and respected.

Young people prosper from having their health needs promoted to a high standard. Specifically, they have their emotional and psychological well being nurtured and specialist support put in place if it is needed. Due to the support they receive, young people's awareness of risks associated with certain behaviours is raised; for example, alcohol misuse and sexual health issues.

Young people benefit from living in a home where their views and welfare are seen as central to practice. They gain from being able to voice their opinions in a number of forums and this enables them to feel empowered and valued.

Young people make significant progress with their education. They gain from living in an environment where their progress is valued and promoted and their educational outcomes significantly improve. Attendance at school for young people is excellent and young people benefit from living in an environment where school attendance and the value of education are embedded in the culture.

Additionally, young people are encouraged and enabled to take part in positive activities in the community. They receive very careful and sensitive support, if they need it, in order to attend some activities. As a result of this, young people's social skills and confidence are markedly improved, especially when bearing in mind their starting points.

The structure and strategies put in place to support the young people manage their behaviour enables them to become more settled and leads to a significant decrease in risk-taking behaviours. If there are incidents of note, young people benefit from close staff support and intensive debriefing.

Young people benefit significantly from well-prepared plans to develop their life skills and independence. They gain from having detailed care plans which outline which strategies are needed in order to support them to develop their life and independence skills to their fullest ability.

Quality of care

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

A committed and conscientious staff team ensures that the young people's well being is at the centre of their practice. Emphasis is placed on developing trusting and supportive relationships so that each young person's progress can be nurtured and improved.

The staff team value and support each young person's views and opinions. Young people's meetings happen regularly and the young people decide the agenda. This practice enables them to voice their concerns in a group setting if they wish. Additionally members of staff ensure that each young person has formally identified time set aside for them in order to discuss their feelings. The young people also have ready access to senior members of staff, including managers, on an informal daily basis.

Any restrictions on young people, for instance with regards to contact with certain individuals, are made clear to the young person concerned. Young people are aware of how to complain and to whom. Additionally, members of staff meet with them and

make them aware of their rights and avenues of representation on a regular basis. There have been no formal complaints made at the home since the last inspection.

Individual care plans identify in detail how each young person should be supported and what strategies need to be in place in order to help the young person grow and progress. A senior member of staff, through regular detailed assessments, identifies each young person's progress and how they are benefitting from living at the home. Young people also have a 'child friendly' version of their care plan written for them. This ensures that they understand what their plan is and gives them yet another opportunity to endorse and comment upon their care. Each young person's identity is valued and any specific needs, whether cultural, religious or related to learning difficulties or conditions, are known and met to an excellent standard.

Young people receive excellent health care and have their emotional and psychological well-being promoted to a particularly high standard. The home actively pursues appointments with health care specialists if needed and will advocate strongly on behalf of them in order to improve their access to services, such as child and adolescent mental health services.

The staff work closely with other agencies in order to promote young people's progress. Close contact with placing social workers ensures that planning and progress as well as vulnerabilities can be discussed and responded to proactively.

The staff team work very closely and consistently, especially with managing and supporting young people's behaviour and progress. Emphasis is placed upon nurturing the young people and enabling them to develop positive behaviour and social skills. Restraint has not been used in the home and sanctions imposed are relevant to misdemeanours. Young people report that they feel they are treated fairly. Although the record of sanctions is clear, the young person's views are not consistently recorded after an incident requiring a sanction.

Additionally, education is highly valued and promoted in the home. There is an established culture that all young people attend school or college and this has led to exceptional attendance rates and excellent educational achievements, especially when bearing in mind each young person's starting point and their often turbulent and unsettled educational history. The school works closely with educational settings so that support can be provided to the young people if necessary and achievements can be celebrated.

Young people are assisted and encouraged to take part in activities in the community and to develop positive peer friendships and relationships. Staff will advocate for young people in order to enable them to gain access to activities and offer subtle support if needed and in a way which does not stigmatise them or make them stand out. Each young person's vulnerability is known and so the staff team plans sensitively and assists the young people if necessary. The routines of the home are set to provide structure, but at the same time are flexible and responsive to each young person's individual needs.

The home is very well maintained and very comfortable. Young people are able to choose the décor and furnishings. This approach enables them to feel an investment in their environment and that their views and preferences are valued and responded to.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people report feeling safe and well looked after at the home. They feel that the staff are concerned with their welfare and will take steps to make sure they feel safe. Bullying is not seen as an issue in the home and young people are confident that staff will address any issues of conflict should they arise.

Clear protocols and a high awareness of each young person's vulnerability if they go missing ensure that any incidents are addressed swiftly and effectively. This approach has led to a marked reduction in incidents where young people have gone missing or have gone out without permission. Any protocols in place are in line with local police strategies and policies and this ensures that the home and police can work closely together in the event that a vulnerable young person is missing or absent without permission.

There have been no incidents of restraint in the home. Staff are trained in the method of physical intervention should the need to hold a child arise, but strategies used to support young people and to calm them during times of distress and challenging behaviour are very effective.

The home has a very clear recruitment process which ensures that all checks for prospective employees are thoroughly carried out before they can commence work. This ensures that only adults with acceptable employment and personal histories are allowed to work with the young people. While the manager reports that qualifications are checked when members of staff apply for posts and bring them to interviews, records and evidenced proof of these qualifications have not been kept in their recruitment files.

The home has very effective links with external agencies. These ensure that any issues relating to young people's welfare are swiftly passed on, so that protection and support for young people is seen as paramount.

The home is well maintained and safe. Risk assessments are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that all members of staff are aware of each young person's vulnerabilities and what measures need to be put in place to ensure their safety. On occasion, the kitchen door has been locked to ensure that young people cannot gain access to potentially harmful items. While all members of staff and young people are aware of this practice, there is no written guidance in place and therefore the placing authority has not been able to formally endorse the practice.

Leadership and management

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

The service has an established and experienced management team which provides good oversight and monitoring of the operation of the home. Continuous improvement is achieved by regular and robust monitoring of the quality of provision. Stakeholders' opinions, including those of young people, parents and placing social workers are sought on a regular basis. Feedback from these is assessed by senior members of staff. Shortfalls are addressed promptly and records maintained to evidence how these have been addressed.

Monitoring visits are undertaken on a regular basis and the resulting reports point out any specific shortfalls. A written action plan is then put in place to show how these have been rectified. The home has also a system whereby trends are analysed as well as statistical information. This informs managers as to whether the home is effectively managing specific areas. As yet, results of this monitoring system have not been forwarded to Ofsted.

Good records are kept which analyse and show how young people benefit from living in the home, for example records of how young people's educational attendance and achievements have improved and how incidents involving the young people have lessened over time.

The home is kept in very good condition and is sufficiently resourced to ensure that young people benefit from high quality furnishings and a very comfortable environment.

The home has enough staff available to ensure that the young people receive the support they need in order to make progress and to feel safe. The staff team is a very committed group of people who ensure that each young person's needs are central to their practice. The staff team receive regular training which enables them to keep up with developments in practice and ensures they have the skills, knowledge and confidence to work with the young people that the home accommodates and to offer an excellent standard of care. Staff report excellent support from managers. 'I just love working here', was a comment made by a member of staff.

Clear evidence is maintained by members of staff of when they have had to ensure that social workers have kept to their commitments to visit the young people. This approach has meant that while some visits have sometimes been delayed, the home has ensured they are not forgotten or cancelled and this in turn has enabled young people to keep in regular face-to-face and meaningful contact with their social workers.

Records maintained give a very good history of each young person's experience of living in the home and show in detail how each young person has progressed and what their aspirations and targets are. All records are stored securely.

All significant events are passed on to the relevant agencies promptly and efficiently and a very good record maintained of the incidents and how the home has sought to resolve them. This shows that the home conscientiously and effectively shares significant information with stakeholders and statutory agencies.

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.