

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Anne Bannister
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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

This four bedded children's home is one of three run by a limited company. It is registered for four females, with emotional and behavioural problems. Education is provided in a purpose-built school on one of the company's other sites.

Overall effectiveness

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

There are many positive examples where young people have been supported to achieve good outcomes, particularly in educational achievements. Progress has been made from young people's starting points in reducing risk taking behaviour, and in learning to manage their behaviours in a positive manner. Young people enjoy positive relationships with staff and are developing emotional resilience to help them cope with difficult times in their lives.

However, the following shortfalls have been identified: the effectiveness of sanctions is not adequately reviewed; debriefing for staff and young people following an incident of physical intervention is not always recorded; placement plans do not demonstrate how staff are supporting young people's educational attainment; the quality of the presentation of staff induction is inadequate; safe recruitment practice is not always implemented; the organisation's monitoring of the home has been ineffective as it has failed to adequately review documentation and working practices which impact on the outcomes for 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
26 (2001)	ensure that the home does not employ persons unless they are fit to work at a children's home. Specifically this relates to the need to evidence safe recruitment practice (Regulation 26.1a)	30/09/2011

Recommendations

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

- evidence how the home promotes a learning environment and supports young people's development (NMS 8.1)
- ensure all staff and young people are given the opportunity to discuss incidents of restraint they have been involved in, witnessed or been affected by, with a relevant adult (NMS 3.17)
- ensure that sanctions for poor behaviour are not punitive but should be restorative in nature, so that children are helped to recognise the impact of their behaviours on others (Children's Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Volume 5:Children's Homes, 2.89)
- ensure that if a child is missing from home and their whereabouts is not known (i.e. the child is missing), the home's procedures are compatible with and have regard to the Runaway and Missing from Home and Care protocols and procedures maintained and managed by the police or by the local authority for the area in which the home is located (NMS 5.6)
- ensure there is a good quality learning programme which staff are supported to undertake. Specifically this relates to the manner in which the induction of staff equips staff with the skills to meet the needs of the children and the purpose of the setting (NMS 18.1)
- ensure that children receive prompt feedback on any concerns or complaints raised and are kept informed of the progress (NMS 1.6)
- ensure there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the home. (NMS 21.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people receive individualised support in line with their needs and wishes. Placement plans set out their assessed needs and show how these needs will be addressed on a day-to-day basis. Young people benefit from supportive relationships with the staff team. They are clearly at ease and comfortable in relating to staff, who implement effective strategies to encourage positive, socially acceptable behaviour. The staff work closely with all agencies to ensure young people receive the support they require. One social worker said 'I have never known a children's home to be so supportive of a young person living away from her family. I can not fault the care they provide.'

Young people's identified health needs are well met. They are encouraged to take

responsibility for their own health and when necessary professional support is provided to help them achieve this. Young people confirm that when they are unwell the staff look after them. One young person commented 'I couldn't fault the way they looked after me; they were great.' Young people understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and are encouraged to involve themselves in some form of regular exercise. They are encouraged to eat a healthy and nutritious diet. Young people are involved in planning menus and activities that they enjoy and that also promote their physical well-being.

All young people participate in individually planned education programmes provided at the company's registered school. Young people are positive about school and the fact they are working towards formal qualifications. One young person said, qualifications would, 'help me get a better job in the future' and 'if I hadn't come here I wouldn't have any qualifications to put on my CV.'

From admission young people are encouraged to develop skills which will equip them for independence. This is achieved through involvement in household tasks, menu planning and food preparation. Regular resident's meetings provide a venue where issues about the running of the home can be discussed, and key-worker sessions enable young people to talk in private about anything that may be worrying them. One social worker commented about the progress a young person has made since admission stating 'I am so proud of her. Staff are very aware of her needs and respond to her appropriately. The more they get to know her the more they are promoting positive changes in her behaviour and preparing her for independence. I am very pleased with the care they provide.'

Young people feel they are consulted and listened to about issues which can be resolved within the home. However, they are unhappy about the length of time it takes to receive a response from senior managers within the organisation when issues they raise have budget implications.

Young people are assisted and encouraged to maintain contact with family and friends. The frequency of this contact is negotiated with the placing authority, young person and the family. Staff support these visits and ensure that any difficulties that arise are shared with placing social workers so that young people can maintain positive relationships with key people in their lives.

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy positive relationships with a committed and caring staff team. Staff use their skills and knowledge of the issues each young person brings to the placement to de-escalate situations which have the potential for conflict. Young people benefit from clear and consistent boundaries which promote positive behaviours. The use of positive praise and reward is effective in promoting positive behaviour. Young people are aware of the sanctions that staff can use and feel these are fair. However, when sanctions are used there is no evidence that staff reflect on

whether they have been effective in promoting positive changes in young people's behaviours.

Young people benefit from the promotion of healthy diets and physical exercise as part of their day-to-day routines. Staff promote healthy outcomes and educate young people on making positive health choices and the benefits of these. Where young people engage in unhealthy activities, such as smoking, staff encourage them to engage with support services. The company employs a registered nurse who provides guidance for staff on the management of health care for young people through its health policy and procedures. She ensures specialist training is available so that staff have the skills to meet young people's identified needs. She also ensures arrangements for the storage and administration of medicines are safe, well organised and meet the needs of young people.

There is good information available to young people about how to raise issues of concern or make a complaint. It is in an appropriate format for young people. Staff ensure young people have fully understood the options open to them for raising issues of concern and most issues are sorted out informally by staff. However, when a complaint has been formally raised there is no evidence to confirm that young people's views are sought about the outcome of an investigation. It is, therefore, not clear whether young people receive support to take concerns to a higher level if they are unhappy with the outcome of the initial investigation.

While staff reflect back on young people's behaviours and progress at each handover documentation, in general, fails to adequately evidence the extent to which staff evaluate the effectiveness of the work they are undertaking to promote positive outcomes for young people.

Some excellent work is being undertaken to meet young people's identified cultural needs. A key worker has spent time reviewing, with young people, the pros and cons of becoming involved in the gang culture that exists in the areas in which they spend home leave. Such sessions assist young people in considering the implications of becoming involved in gang cultures and this allows them to make informed decisions about their lifestyles.

Young people benefit from living in accommodation that is not distinguishable as a children's home as it blends in well with the local surrounding properties. Its location ensures that young people can access local places of interest, with good access to shops and recreational facilities. The home is clean, warm and welcoming and it provides a very comfortable living environment, which is decorated and furnished to good quality standards. Young people have a say in how their bedrooms are decorated and personalised. The home is very tastefully decorated, creating a homely environment.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people's safety and welfare is the priority of the staff team. Staff demonstrate a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities in keeping young people safe. Young people's welfare is protected through the application of the home's safeguarding policy. All young people say that they feel the home provides them with a safe place to live. They say that when bullying does occur staff respond promptly to address it and help them to reflect on the impact of such behaviour on one another.

Young people benefit from the skills staff employ to help them manage their behaviours. Staff receive training in the management of challenging behaviours and young people feel that staff only employ physical intervention as a last resort. Staff are skilled in using a range of de-escalation strategies to help reduce the need for physical intervention. Records of physical interventions maintained show why a physical intervention was necessary but do not evidence that young people and staff are asked to reflect back on alternate ways of managing such incidents in the future. For example, in some records staff have reflected back on the incident but there is no documented evidence to confirm young people have been offered the same opportunity. On occasions key worker records show that the young person has been given this opportunity but these records are not cross referenced to the physical intervention log.

Behaviour management plans focus on the risks young people present to themselves and others and suggest strategies that can be deployed to encourage socially acceptable behaviour. They include praise, rewards and incentives as well as more punitive measures. When sanctions are used to manage unacceptable behaviour there is a log maintained to record the sanction given and the reason for it. Deficits in recording result in there being no recorded evaluation of whether sanctions given are effective in promoting positive changes in young people's behaviours. It is therefore not clear that consideration has been given as whether less punitive measures could be more effectively implemented when future incidents occur. Quality monitoring processes regularly review the use of restraints and sanctions, but have failed to identify where records are not completed in line with the company's guidance.

There have been occasions when young people have been reported as being missing from home. Such incidents are well documented, and include a review of individual's risk assessments. Young people are encouraged to consider the risks such behaviours present and to reflect on how to keep safe in the future. This practice ensures that young people receive support and encouragement to take responsibility for their own safety. The manager is yet to establish links with the Police Runaway and Missing from Home and Care Co-ordinator to ensure that the home's practice reflects locally agreed protocols for coordinated responses to protect vulnerable children.

The organisation has robust recruitment practices which protect young people's welfare. However, one staff member recruited since the previous inspection commenced work in the home prior to their Criminal Records Bureau check being

received. Although he did not have unsupervised access to young people he was in post several weeks before all checks were completed. Such practice fails to adequately protect young people.

Leadership and management

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

Since the previous inspection the manager has resigned and there have been significant changes in the staff team. External visits by a senior manager have provided support for both staff and young people during this unsettled time. However, while the company has provided hands on support and advice to staff and young people their representative has failed to adequately monitor the quality of recording on key issues which impact on young people's welfare. An internal appointment has been made to the post of manager. The company is in the process of formulating a development plan which indicates short, medium and long-term goals for the home. The development plan aims to prioritise areas for further development and to assist the new manager in his role.

The Statement of Purpose and young people's guide are in the process of being updated to reflect changes in staffing and to incorporate legislative changes which have occurred since April 2011. The inspector was shown draft documents which will be available from the beginning of September 2011 and adequately reflect the aims and objectives of the service.

Young people benefit from a committed and energetic staff team who are able to see the positive in them despite the challenging behaviours they may present. Staff have a strong commitment to meeting young people's needs. Some of the staff hold appropriate child care qualifications; others are undertaking training and some have yet to be enrolled on training as they are completing their induction.

The organisation has its own comprehensive induction process for each new starter. When presented effectively it equips staff with the skills necessary to carry out their roles. It covers all key issues such as behaviour management, safeguarding, first aid, safe medication handling, basic food hygiene and fire safety awareness. However, the process is not always being adequately presented. This is because recently the whole programme, a process normally completed over several weeks, was completed in one day with some staff. As a result staff had insufficient knowledge of the key areas covered during their induction. Senior management checks had failed to pick up this deficit.

While informal supervision and support occurs on a daily basis there have been times since the previous inspection when staff have not received regular formal supervision. There are arrangements for all staff to receive regular supervision which ensures they have time to review and reflect on their practice identifies any outstanding training needs they may have. This ensures staff have the knowledge and competencies required to address young people's diverse needs.

As mentioned earlier monthly monitoring visits by the companies designated representative have failed to identify many of the issues raised in this report. Reports of the visits are not evaluative and do not show how shortfalls impact on the quality of care young people receive.

Statutory requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection have been met and confirm that when deficits are identified staff strive to improve their practice.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.