

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC416599
Inspector	Gillian Walters
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	North Lakes Children's Services Limited
Registered person address	Kirby Moor School Longtown Road Brampton Cumbria CA8 2AB
Responsible individual	Anthony Middleton
Registered manager	Thomas Peter William Abbey
Date of last inspection	12/02/2014

Inspection date	13/06/2014
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Previous inspection	good progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	none

This inspection	
Overall effectiveness	adequate
Outcomes for children and young people	adequate
Quality of care	good
Keeping children and young people safe	adequate
Leadership and management	adequate

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	adequate
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Young people receive a good quality of care and support from a dedicated and well-motivated staff team. Care planning is thorough and takes good account of young people's individual and diverse needs and how these can be best met. Consequently, young people settle quickly into placement, with the large majority making good progress from their starting points. Many achieve long-term stability and successfully make the transition to independent living.

However, the home's pre-admission arrangements have proved insufficiently robust to ensure that the home only admits those young people whose individual needs they can meet. As a consequence, outcomes for some young people have been less favourable and have resulted in disruption of their placement.

A recent and significantly high number of missing from home episodes has challenged and tested this home. Despite good efforts to follow agreed procedures and work co-operatively with police, placing authorities and other professionals, the home did not achieve a significant reduction in the frequency of events to effectively minimise risk. As a consequence, some young people's persistent behaviour compromised their safety and well-being. However, some young people who remain at the home say that they feel safe and well protected and that relationships between them and staff are good.

The home continues to review and evaluate its practice and performance. Quality assurance arrangements for the home are effective and appropriately inform the home's development planning. This success of this process ensures that continuous improvement remains their priority and informs action planning.

Full report

Information about this children's home

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

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
12/02/2014	Interim	good progress
24/05/2013	Full	good
18/03/2013	Interim	good progress
10/08/2012	Full	good

What does the children's home need to do to improve further?

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
11 (2001)	ensure that the children's home is conducted so as to promote and make proper provision for the safeguarding and welfare of children accommodated there. This relates specifically to obtaining full and comprehensive information in advance of an admission that will inform decisions concerning the appropriateness and any associated risks (Regulation 11(1)(a))	24/07/2014
16 (2001)	prepare and implement a missing child policy. This relates to addressing the steps to be taken to prevent children from being absent without permission in addition to the procedures to be	24/07/2014

	followed and the roles and responsibilities of staff in such situations. (Regulation 16(4)(b))	
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Recommendations

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

- ensure the children's home only provides admission to children whose assessed needs they can reasonably expect to meet. This relates to the effectiveness of the location in meeting the need of children who may go missing and place themselves at increased risk of harm (NMS 11.2)
- ensure information about the 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. (NMS 22)
- ensure notifications are always recorded with the clarity and in sufficient detail for Ofsted to determine if appropriate action has been taken to safeguard and protect the young people.³⁴ (NMS 24)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **adequate**

Young people mostly settle quickly into this home and establish meaningful relationships with staff. This provides them with good stability that enables them to achieve a range of positive outcomes across all areas of their development. Many enjoy long stable placements, developing positive self-esteem and confidence that prepares them for independent living. However, since the last inspection the outcomes for some young people have been particularly poor. Some young people's behaviour and choices have resulted in increasing their vulnerability and at times placing themselves at significant risk of harm. As a consequence of the level of risk presented, those young people have now moved on from the home. This has resulted in considerable disruption for all involved; especially those that were achieving and had previously enjoyed good placement stability.

Most young people have good arrangements for regular contact with family and friends that enables them to maintain those relationships that are important and significant to them. One Independent Reviewing Officer commented, 'Staff are really good at facilitating contact; really brilliant.' However, for those involved in risk taking behaviours this has resulted in a deterioration of some previously positive relationships that had been rebuilt with family members. As result, those young people have become distanced from supportive family relationships.

Health outcomes for young people are generally positive. Staff are consistent in promoting healthy lifestyles. Young people are actively discouraged from smoking and given practical support and advice concerning this and other undesirable activities that can negatively impact on their health. Young people understand the importance of good nutrition and as a result enjoy a healthy well-balanced diet. Young people benefit from good access to routine and specialist health care provision. They are supported to attend regular appointments and check-ups to ensure their health care needs are appropriately identified and addressed. Nevertheless, some young people have placed their health and safety in jeopardy by their recent involvement in risk taking activities when missing from the home. This negatively impacts across all their personal outcomes.

Most young people still engage appropriately in education and make positive progress in both academic and vocational studies. Young people in the main attend a local school operated by the provider with some also undertaking study at a local college. As such, young people have good opportunity to experience an alternative learning environment that supports them as they move towards independence. Young people develop confidence in their abilities and readiness to move on. Those making planned moves from the home are encouraged and supported to pursue college placements. This enables them to achieve the skills and qualifications that will take them forward along their chosen career path.

Young people mostly achieve a good level of independence before moving on from the home. They benefit from the consistent support of their keyworkers and other staff to learn a range of skills that are successful in equipping them for adult life. One social worker commented, 'She will now listen and reason and that is credit to the home.'

Quality of care

good

Young people benefit from living in a nurturing and caring environment. Staff provide a consistent and supportive approach that assists young people to settle quickly into the home's routine. This promotes young people's feelings of safety and enables them to successfully develop relationships with staff and their peers. Young people are able to express choice about their allocation of keyworker. This means that they generally engage more positively with allocated staff and progress to build meaningful and trusting relationships. One social worker commented, 'I am pleased there are more female staff. This is a very positive development.'

The home provides good support to ensure young people's needs are met and their personal identity promoted. Care planning is of good quality and is based on a thorough and detailed assessment of young people's individual needs. However, during this inspection it was identified that in one case the quality of information accepted from a placing authority at the point of admission was flawed and insufficient. As result, the omission of information from the placing authority meant the home was unable to accurately assess and plan for the young person. Additionally, it meant that the home was unable to fairly take account of the likely impact of the new admission on others. Ultimately this impacted negatively on the home's ability to promote the welfare of some young people.

Many young people are placed some considerable distance from home and are more used to living in more culturally diverse communities where their own cultural needs are more easily met. Staff work closely with young people to understand their needs and preferences for things such as food, hair and skin care. This means their needs and identity are positively promoted. One social worker noted, 'Her cultural needs are well met. She has regular contact with family and will bring any items she wants from home. Staff will source foods locally and further afield if necessary. They will research on the computer together to identify any items staff are not familiar with. Staff will make sure she has the things she likes and prefers.'

Staff support and encourage young people to participate in a range of activities that appeal to their personal interest and will provide them with good fun and exercise. For some young people this means the opportunity to develop talents. For example, singing and cooking. For others this means new opportunities to participate in activities that they have not previously experienced. For most young people this allows them to positively develop their interests and enjoy purposeful recreation

time.

Young people are familiar with the home's arrangements for dealing with complaints and know how to raise an issue if they feel worried or unhappy about something. Young people understand the role of independent advocates and know how to access support to promote their rights. Staff encourage young people to know their rights and have their voice heard. They provide a range of opportunities including informal discussions, key worker sessions and young people's meetings that allow young people the opportunities to express their views and wishes. Consequently, young people feel confident in expressing their views. They know their views are important and will be listened to.

The home is well-maintained and appropriately located for young people as defined within the home's Statement of Purpose. Young people are interested in their environment and have contributed to the homely feel of the property. This includes some internal redecoration and developing the outside patio area of the home. Young people personalise their own bedrooms to their individual taste and have choice in their decoration and furnishings. Consequently most young people achieve a positive sense of belonging and take pride in how their home looks.

Keeping children and young people safe adequate

Young people say that they feel safe and well supported by staff. They comment on all staff as showing genuine concern for their safety and well-being. One young person commented, 'My keyworker genuinely cares. She tries more than others to help me and keep me safe.' However, some young people have chosen to engage in some risk taking behaviour that has at times compromised their safety. There have been 36 instances of young people reported missing since the last inspection in February 2014. Mostly these episodes have been absences of a few hours duration at a time, primarily during day time or early evening hours. However, of particular concern is a small number of occasions when these absences were overnight and in least on one occasion in excess of a 24-hour period. For those young people their vulnerability, particularly to exploitation from adults and other young people, was on occasion significantly increased.

The home's approach to dealing with such events is highly proactive. For example, the home has comprehensive procedures in place to deal with occasions when young people go missing. Staff are well trained and fully conversant with the procedure to follow when such events occur. As such they are quick to report when children go missing and work effectively with local police to achieve the young person's earliest and safe return to the home. The home invests staff time in working with young people on their return to understand the triggers and patters associated with absences with the aim of discouraging future occurrences and providing appropriate support to ensure young people stay safe, understand the dangers associated with their behaviour. One social worker commented, 'The staff are proactive in dealing

with matters such as when young people go missing from home. They take prompt action.'

The home seeks to engage partner agencies, including placing authorities, the local authority, and police at an early stage to strategically assess and establish effective safeguarding plans. Such plans are kept under frequent review. This enables early identification and action when it is reasonably deemed that a young person's needs can no longer be safely met within the home. The home's policy clearly documents the procedure to be followed in the event of a young person being absent or missing. However, it does not sufficiently address the home's measures to prevent young people going missing. This shortfall means that staff have not got immediate access to essential guidance that enables them to be clear on the range of ways they can prevent and minimise such behaviour.

Young people benefit from individual risk assessments and behaviour management planning that takes account of their history and known risks. The home's pre-admission process is structured to gather relevant history and detail prior to admission to ensure that there is a clear understanding of young people's needs and risks. Information gathered prior to a young person's admission is in most cases is of good quality. This means the home can reasonably assess their ability to meet the young person's needs, consider the potential impact of their placement and effectively plan their care. As such the home accepts new placements, having assessed risk and suitability based on the information provided. However, the responsible placing authority for one recent placement omitted to identify and provide significant information in advance of the placement that would have called into question the suitability of the placement at that time. As a result the placement quickly proved to be unsuitable for the young person concerned, largely in relation to the location of the home. It also had a negative impact on another young person previously settled in placement. The home acted appropriately in identifying their inability to maintain the placement, acknowledging that they could no longer effectively keep those young people safe.

As a result of the experience of this placement and changes in The Children's Homes Regulations the home is actively reviewing risks associated with its location, specifically its suitability in meeting the needs of those young people who have a significant propensity to go missing or absent themselves from the home. The completion of this assessment will support effective decision making in relation to the home's future consideration of placements.

The use of physical intervention is infrequent and only ever used by the staff team as a last resort. Staff are trained and skilled in behaviour management, identifying the quality of their relationships with young people and their ability to de-escalate challenging situations as they key reason that they are able to keep physical interventions low level and to a minimum. Consequently, the incidence of restraint since the last inspection has declined. However, on one occasion a senior member of staff intervened contrary to acceptable practice, in an attempt to prevent a young

person going missing. This matter was appropriately investigated and accordingly reported to Ofsted as required. An Ofsted visit on 27 May 2014 identified a shortfall in the home's policy that has since been reviewed. Records for all disciplinary measures used are well documented, including both staff and young people's views. This enables a good opportunities for both staff and young people to reflect and learn from the events that they have been involved in. Good management oversight ensures that practice is appropriately scrutinised.

Recruitment arrangements are robust, ensuring that all staff are suitably qualified, skilled and experienced to work with young people. Staff are thoroughly checked and vetted before coming to work within the home. This ensures that young people are not exposed to adults who may increase their vulnerability of do them harm.

Leadership and management

adequate

The Registered Manager has been employed with the company since August 2010, becoming this home's Registered Manager in March 2012. He has good experience of working directly with children and young people and possesses both a level 3 award in Child Care & Education (Special Needs) and a level 5 Diploma in Leadership & Management.

The home's Statement of Purpose has been recently reviewed and updated and provides a clear account of the homes aims and objectives. Placing authorities, parents and other stakeholders have a clear understanding of what the home provides comment positively on the quality of care and support provided to young people placed in this home. One social worker commented, 'I am very pleased with this home. This has been a very stabilising placement. She has really progressed. The staff are really good; they follow through and do what they say they are going to do.'

Staff benefit from regular good quality supervision and support. Their professional development is a priority within the organisation. This includes the provision of regular training and an annual appraisal that ensures they possess the necessary knowledge and skills to provide a good and consistent quality of care.

The home has appropriately acted on the recommendation made as a result of the last inspection. There has been an effective review of the findings from the internal monitoring process, resulting in a report being provided to Ofsted within the required timescale. This provides helpful evaluation of the service and its performance between inspection visits.

Three requirements were additionally identified during a recent Ofsted visit on the 27 May 2014. The home has also acted promptly in addressing these, ensuring that shortfalls in the home's records have been rectified. For example, the home now appropriately documents all the required detail for each child admitted and discharged. It also ensures all that young people's individual records are accurate and complete, reflecting when necessary consents are provided. The home has

reviewed and is in the process of updating its policy on restraint to ensure that there is no ambiguity in the detail and that all staff are clear that this disciplinary measure cannot be used as a preventative measure to stop young people absenting themselves from the home.

The organisation is proactive in ensuring that young people understand how to complain and that they are appropriately supported to do so. The home has established procedures to be followed to ensure that all matters are fairly and quickly dealt with. There has been one complaint raised since the last inspection. This has been fully investigated and the outcome reported back to the young person concerned. The manner in which matters are dealt with provides reassurance to young people that what they say will be listened to and taken seriously. The home promotes the use of restorative meetings as appropriate following any complaint to ensure that a good opportunity exists to repair and rebuild relationships.

The home's monitoring arrangements have been further strengthened with the appointment of a new independent person that visits and reports on the home's performance and ability to safeguard children. The independent person reports at least a monthly basis to Ofsted and reporting is of a high standard. It provides a clear evaluation of the service. Time is taken to consult with young people, their parents and other stakeholders. This ensures that there is good opportunity for their views to contribute to the visitor's assessment of the home.

The home's manager is proactive in ensuring that Ofsted is kept advised of all significant events that occur. This promotes transparency and ensures that Ofsted is made aware of events as they occur. However, a minority of written communications have lacked sufficient detail and clarity. This means that the reader cannot always fully appreciate and evaluate the content of the information provided. Young people's records are well maintained and kept up to date. This ensures that information is current and easily accessible to those that have the right to view it. However, some discrepancies in the detail of one incident recorded were identified. This resulted in some uncertainty about the detail of the event and meant that the young person's permanent record was less than accurate. Such shortfalls lessen the value of information and do not promote the young person's future understanding of events.

What inspection judgements mean

Judgement	Description
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.

Information 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 framework of inspection for children's homes.