

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC416599
Inspection date	24/05/2013
Inspector	Gillian Walters
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	18/03/2013
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Service information

Brief description of the service

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.

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 **good**.

Young people are making good progress in this home in relation to their starting points. Thorough and well documented planning clearly identifies young people's individual and specific needs and details the support they require to achieve positive outcomes in all aspects of their lives.

Young people enjoy positive relationships with staff; most have formed close and trusting relationships that enable them to feel valued and supported. Young people benefit from the consistency the home offers. They understand what is expected of them and as a result feel safe, secure and stable in their placements.

Young people enjoy living in the home and successfully contribute their views and ideas to making their environment more comfortable and homely. Young people benefit from living in a warm and friendly environment that ensures they feel suitably nurtured and cared for.

The provider has good insight to the home's particular strengths and weaknesses and is proactive in seeking to improve the service provided. The home benefits from consistently strong external monitoring arrangements that challenge practice and activity within the home. However, shortfalls have been identified as a result of this inspection; these together demonstrate some weakness in the home's internal monitoring and management arrangements. Areas for improvement include: the provision of supervision, appraisal and staff support; communication with the home's local authority; internal monitoring of the home, and standards of cleanliness within the home.

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
16 (2001)	ensure staff work in accordance with the home's safeguarding policy providing prompt referral to the local authority in whose area the children's home is situated, of any allegation of abuse or neglect affecting any child accommodated in the children's home. This relates specifically to contacting the Local Authority Designated Officer in advance of any internal investigation (Regulation 16(2)(b))	30/06/2013
27 (2001)	ensure that all persons employed receive appropriate supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 27(4)(a))	30/06/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure the home provides a comfortable and homely environment and is well maintained. This relates specifically to staff promoting and ensuring standards of tidiness and cleanliness are maintained in communal areas such as hallways and bathrooms (NMS 10.3)
- ensure the operation of sound employment practices and good support for staff. This relates specifically to the provision of support to staff through regular staff team meetings (NMS 19.1)
- ensure the manager regularly monitors, in line with regulations, all records kept by the home to ensure compliance with the home's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. This specifically relates to issues identified by external monitoring arrangements that have not been addressed due to delays in internal monitoring. (NMS 21.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people benefit from living in a home where their needs are thoroughly

assessed and well understood. Detailed and thorough planning contributes to the knowledge and understanding staff have of young people's histories and individual needs. This ensures that young people receive the appropriate and timely support and guidance they require.

Young people enjoy warm and trusting relationships with staff that enable them to feel confident that they are safe and well cared for. Young people benefit from the support of a staff team that are consistent and fair in their approach. This ensures that young people have structure and certainty in their home environment that enables them to feel appropriately secure and settled to make good progress in their lives.

Young people benefit from regular attendance at a local school operated by the provider. They are making good progress in their learning, and benefiting positively from individual education programmes that enable them to achieve a range of accredited qualifications and awards that match their age and abilities. Some young people also attend college in the locality on a part-time basis, widening their educational experience and offering opportunities to explore further education and career options.

Young people understand the importance of healthy living. They receive comprehensive advice and support from staff and the company's health care professional to ensure that they have sufficient knowledge and guidance to make positive choices that will promote good health. Young people are encouraged and enjoy taking part in a range of activities that provide them with regular opportunities for exercise and socialising with their peers. Most young people benefit from regular visits to a local youth resource that is situated close to the home that provides gym facilities, sporting activities and clubs. Some young people also enjoy the experience of volunteering and mentoring in this facility. This enables them to develop a range of new skills and provide valuable support to the community. For those young people involved, they have developed greater maturity and pride in their achievements.

Young people benefit from the assistance of staff in maintaining contact with family members and friends. For many young people, their families live some distance from the home, requiring staff to travel with them to facilitate home visits. Staff also encourage regular telephone contact and families are welcome to visit the home; this ensures that young people sustain those relationships that are most important to them. One family member commented of staff, 'They are fabulous, very helpful and supportive. Very understanding, provide good communication.'

All young people understand the importance of being well prepared as they move into adulthood. Young people are successfully acquiring a range of skills appropriate to their age that will support them in making the transition. For some, this has included the experiences of cooking, budgeting for their personal requirements and learning to travel independently. Young people have engaged well with their individual programmes and have achieved confidence in their abilities. A social worker commented positively, 'the best independence programme I have seen.'

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy positive and meaningful relationships with staff. They understand and appreciate that staff care for them and want to help and support them. Young people enjoy living in a calm and relaxed environment with staff that are understanding of and sensitive to their needs. As a result young people enjoy stability within the home. One young person commented, 'It's a good place to be, staff listen and will help you out until you leave. It has been one of the best placements for me.'

Young people know that their views are important and valued by staff. This enables them to settle into the life of the home and successfully establish their identity there. Young people have good opportunities to express their views, with most young people receiving regular individual key working sessions with staff and all participating in regular house meetings. One young person said, 'I convinced him to paint my room black and purple. I love my room.' Another young person spoke of her key worker saying, 'She listens and understands.'

Young people are familiar with the home's complaints procedure should they wish to raise an issue they are unhappy about. Young people also have good access to advocacy should they wish further support in raising an issue. The home has recently contracted the services of a freelance advocate, ensuring that young people have dedicated and easy access to such support should they require it.

Young people benefit from effective assessment and planning that takes account of their individual and specific needs. Planning is comprehensive and of a high quality and is regularly reviewed to ensure that the support provided is successful in addressing all aspects of their development and changing needs. Young people have good understanding of their plans and contribute positively, identifying those issues that are important to their culture and personal identity. As result, young people are well engaged with planning for their future, establishing aspirations and developing positive self-esteem.

Young people's health care needs are clearly understood. Young people benefit from the contribution and regular oversight of health care matters provided by the organisation's health care professional. Young people are able to receive direct advice and support on a range of health care issues such as sexual health, smoking cessation and skin care. Staff are also able to access further guidance and advice on promoting young people's health needs. Young people have the re-assurance that all their routine and specialist health care needs are well co-ordinated.

Young people benefit from the support and interest shown by staff in promoting their education and learning. Staff liaise closely with the organisation's school and local college as appropriate, attending parents' evenings and providing support with homework and revision in the home. As a result, young people understand the importance of learning and developing their knowledge to improve their future

employment prospects.

The home is located in a residential area within walking distance of the city centre. This enables young people to enjoy easy access to all local shops and facilities. The home is generally well maintained and furnished to a good standard providing young people with a comfortable and homely environment. However, during this inspection some areas of the home were found to be less clean and tidy than the standard maintained in other parts of the house. This shortfall indicated that staff were not consistently promoting good housekeeping standards that enable young people to have a continued pride in their home.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say they feel safe in this home and are confident that staff are there to support and protect them from harm. Young people generally get along well together with only occasional disagreements. Young people do not express any concerns about bullying and identify that this would be taken seriously by staff if it were to occur. One young person commented of staff, 'Whenever we want to do stupid things; they are there to support us; they are caring for us.'

Staff promote positive behaviour with young people in this home, agreeing incentives that will encourage them to achieve their goals. For most young people this has proved successful, enabling them to enjoy additional treats and rewards for consistently positive behaviour. Young people are aware that, on occasions, physical intervention is necessary to ensure the safety of a young person or others around them. The home has established systems in place that ensure all such incidents are appropriately documented and reviewed to ensure compliance with the legislative framework and good practice. Staff are skilled and experienced in behaviour management techniques, and take part in regular training to ensure their knowledge and practice is current and competent.

For most young people, physical intervention is a rare occurrence. However, the home recently experienced an acute peak in the number of incidents during a period when a young person was settling into the home following admission. The home has successfully reviewed practice during this period and amended care planning.

Young people rarely go missing from this home but when this does occur they return quickly and safely. Staff are well prepared and familiar with local procedures for reporting the absence of young people. Staff have a sound knowledge of young people's vulnerabilities. They possess a clear understanding of child protection policies and procedures and know how to implement them to protect young people.

The home takes all allegations made by young people seriously and strives to ensure that investigations are undertaken without delay or unnecessary distress to all those concerned. The home has established a rapport with the local authority designated officer to ensure clear channels of communication exist to discuss any issues of

concern. In relation to a recent matter reported, an internal investigation was initiated in advance of formal guidance and support from the local authority designated officer. Although the action taken was not consistent with local safeguarding procedures, it did not compromise the young person's safety.

Young people live in an environment that is physically safe and secure. All areas of the home have been assessed for potential hazards or risks and action has been taken, where possible, to reduce or remove such risks. The home identifies fire safety as a clear priority. Routine checks are made to ensure all systems and fire fighting equipment is in good working order. Young people regularly participate in evacuation drills to ensure they know and have practiced what to do in the event of a real emergency.

The home has a robust recruitment and selection process in place that promotes safer recruitment practice. Staff are suitably checked and vetted before taking up employment and having direct contact with young people. The home takes steps to ensure that all visitors provide confirmation of their identity on arrival and sign the visitors' book to indicate their presence in the home and nature of their visit. All these measures are designed to ensure that young people are not exposed to unsuitable persons who may do them harm.

Leadership and management

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

The home is effectively managed by a permanent Registered Manager who has good knowledge and understanding of the young people's individual needs and support requirements. He is proactive in supporting staff on a daily basis and working directly with young people, especially when they are in crisis. There is an awareness that while he is focusing on planning and supporting young people in clear periods of crisis, his attention is less focused on the routine management tasks associated with his role. This is an identified weakness acknowledged by both the provider and Registered Manager that is currently being explored and addressed. However, as a consequence staff supervision arrangements have not always been fulfilled and delays have occurred in completing some staff appraisals. This means that some staff have not been provided with the agreed level of formal supervision support as stated in the home's policy and have experienced delay in having their personal developmental needs assessed. Additionally, deficits have been identified in the frequency of staff team meetings that offer further opportunity for staff support and guidance.

The home is sufficiently staffed to ensure that young people have the required support to meet their individual needs. Young people are supported by a consistent and experienced staff team that are suitably trained and skilled to work with children and young people. All staff either possess or are working towards the relevant qualification appropriate to their position.

The aims and objectives, as outlined in the Statement of Purpose, are clearly

understood by young people, staff and placing authorities. Young people have successfully participated in making a short film about the home, outlining what it can offer and provide. This is available along with a young people's guide that is provided prior to admission. Together these resources ensure that young people have full information of the services and facilities provided by the home and what to expect when living there.

The home is adequately resourced and the provider has good arrangements established to internally and externally monitor the quality of care and activity within the home. However, the Registered Manager has experienced recent difficulty in maintaining agreed regular monitoring activity as promoted by the organisation. On some occasions delays have occurred in the manager's monthly monitoring schedule that have meant his monitoring activity has been overtaken by the organisation's external arrangements. This has resulted in delay in the manager identifying some shortfalls and acting on them. In contrast, the external monitoring of the home is regular and robust and has successfully identified a number of issues requiring action that are now being suitably progressed. A six-monthly review of previous monitoring activity in accordance with Regulation 34 has been completed and a copy of the report has successfully been provided to Ofsted. This report provides a satisfactory evaluation and overview of the quality of care provided within the home during the review period and reflects the views of young people, their families and placing authorities.

The home has a clear system in place to notify Ofsted and other relevant parties of significant events that occur within the home. This enables those with an interest in the young people's welfare to be kept suitably informed of such events. Young people's individual records are well maintained and organised, ensuring easy access to essential documentation relating to their placement, progress and achievements. All records are stored securely within the home ensuring young people's right to privacy and confidentiality is preserved.

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.