

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Morgan
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Date of last inspection	9 January 2009
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is registered to accommodate up to eight children and young people aged between 12 and 18 years of age. The home is an adapted, Victorian property operated by a private company. It provides care for up to twelve months to children or young people with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. Care includes education on site and regular camps. There are eight young people resident at present, of which three contributed directly to this inspection. Because of the regular trips that are attended by all children and young people, there are usually no more than six at home at any one time.

The home is situated in an area of outstanding natural beauty, but is also close to leisure facilities and shops. There are good bus and train routes to local towns and cities. The building is set in its own grounds with gardens and established trees at the front and back and car parking. The office and lounge are on the ground floor as well as the dining room, kitchen and games room. Young people have individual bedrooms.

Summary

This full inspection covers all areas of care and finds the overall standard of care to be good with areas of outstanding practice, for example, in enjoying and achieving, family contact and staying safe. The visit was unannounced and shows that a consistently high standard of care is provided over time. Equality and diversity issues are also being addressed well and there are no areas of major concern. Improvement has been made since last time to staff training but less progress has been made with the number of National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) assessments completed. Further work is also needed to ensure that placement plan targets, including those based on risk assessments, are clearly reflected throughout all areas of care.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Two recommendations arose at the last inspection. Since then, eight staff have benefited from training regarding managing young people's contact with their families. This is an important feature in staff and young people staying safe and in young people benefiting as much as possible from meetings with their parents and other significant people. The achievement in the staff team of NVQ at level 3 remains below the required level and potentially reduces the impact staff have on young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people enjoy a good range of healthy, nutritious meals that include fresh vegetables, salad and fruit. Staff are aware that diet plays an important part in normalising extreme behaviours. Young people have opportunities to plan, shop for and prepare meals, especially when they are away on trips. The sociable aspect of mealtimes is given a high priority, with adaptations made for individual needs, and attention to styles of meals that reflect other cultures. Parents consider that their children eat 'well and healthily'. The good health of young people is also addressed well by the way the home arranges services to meet their complex individual needs, for example by referring to specialist health professionals and proactively

seeking-out others, according to the circumstances of the individual. Thorough systems are used regarding the administration of medication, including when young people wish to self-administer.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children and young people benefit from a particularly clear and thorough complaints process that is always explained to them. It includes written responses to complainants and is displayed in the home. Records go into fine detail and show what action has been taken as a result of a substantiated complaint. In other respects, there is outstanding practice regarding the welfare of young people, for example, regarding respecting their privacy and in the level of staff training regarding child protection. Young people said, 'staff check on us to make sure we're ok', and, 'they're always telling us how to stay safe'. Young people also benefit from programmes of training that help them learn about staying safe. Bullying is effectively minimized. Young people who are at risk from going missing are protected appropriately, which includes the appropriate use of physical interventions as a last resort and the option of talking to an independent person afterwards.

Young people are assisted to develop socially acceptable behaviour, such as respecting other people's privacy, and there is excellent practice in this area. Individual behavioural plans are used and staff display a high level of consistency in the way they apply the rules to individual young people. This means that young people quickly understand the boundaries and feel safe, which helps them to benefit fully from their stay.

The home also provides young people with particularly high levels of physical safety and good levels of security. Fire safety issues, for example, are well managed by specific staff who have received appropriate training. Records are thorough and there are especially clear risk assessments. Safety of young people is also assured as far as possible, by exceptionally thorough recruitment procedures. Good practice in recruitment is represented by the involvement of young people, when appropriate, and clear written guidance to staff.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Individual support to young people is of a particularly high standard and is a critical part of the service. Staff address any cultural or religious issues sensitively, and young people are helped to deal with their sexuality. Effective policies and high staffing levels help to ensure that staff establish effective working relationships with young people as early as possible. Thorough risk assessments are written to allow young people to take controlled risks. However, these risk assessments are less precise than others in use in the home and, in a minority of cases, do not sufficiently reflect the placement plans. Arrangements are constantly reviewed and adapted to ensure the best outcomes for individual young people, for instance, when arranging the timing and attendance of camps and trips. Specialist services are also provided, including those from a psychologist who visits every week that is a great benefit to staff and young people. Such inputs are well integrated with the education that occurs on-site.

Education itself, with respect to care standards, is outstanding. There is a school on site, recently approved by Ofsted, that provides individualised packages of education. Staff support any education that is provided off-site, too, for example, in mainstream schools. High, often

maximum, levels of attendance are quickly achieved, which is to the credit of all concerned. Young people say that the school is 'great' and they learn that education can be rewarding. Parents feel that their children 'come on in leaps and bounds here', which they have not done in other placements.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people often arrive in a crisis. However, appropriate policies and procedures ensure they are able to move into the home in as sensitive a manner as possible, considering their individual circumstances. Good arrangements ensure, for example, that young people are quickly familiar with the expectations of the home and are, therefore, helped to settle-in as soon as possible. Similarly, when they leave the home, appropriate information is passed to their future placements, which means that the benefits of transitions to new placements are maximised.

There is a strong emphasis on young people learning to make appropriate decisions, which is based on very effective relationships between them and staff. A contributory feature here is effective role modelling by staff in a variety of settings, both on site and off. Young people feel they can have their say in care issues and some aspects of the operation of the home, such as the decoration of their rooms.

Having moved in, young people's needs are assessed effectively and comprehensively in a short space of time. Their individual placement plans describe their needs well but do not sufficiently say or track how they will be met and implemented. This shortfall is then reflected in subsequent documents, such as review reports. Overall, however, plans are satisfactory and show that substantial and complex work is undertaken with young people. Statutory reviews monitor progress regularly and are facilitated well by staff. Young people are routinely helped to be involved in their reviews.

The home is exceptionally good at keeping in touch with parents and facilitating contact between them and young people. Sensitive, and in some cases potentially dangerous, issues are addressed well. Contact meetings on-site effectively balance the needs of individual young people with those of the group and staff have been appropriately trained.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people enjoy a well-presented home that is spacious, well-maintained and light. There are separate rooms for music, pool and computers. It provides good opportunities to develop domestic skills and gardening skills, and is well located for other amenities, whether urban or rural. Much of the care received by young people prepares them for adulthood. In particular, effective attention is paid to their social skills and addressing emotional and behavioural obstacles that will otherwise create difficulties later in life. Practical skills, such as budgeting, shopping, cooking are also addressed well. Use is made of young people's backgrounds to expose others to different cultures, such as in preparing meals.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Young people have their individual needs addressed well and issues of diversity are raised regularly. These matters are considered in

detail in a thorough statement of purpose. All the required areas are covered well and it shows, for example, how the relatively high maximum number of young people is addressed by several being away on camps most of the time. An attractive guide is provided to young people, the content of which is also described verbally. These, and other issues regarding their daily care, are recorded well in individual case files that young people are encouraged to see.

The statement of purpose also clearly describes the staffing arrangements and ways in which staff themselves gain support. Such measures include staff meetings, supervision and comprehensive procedures. These are supplemented by other guidance and forms that help staff make appropriate recordings.

Staff benefit from a particularly high level of qualification in the senior staff team, including two staff with social work qualifications. However, although there is a high level of competence on each shift, the NVQ achievement level amongst other staff is too low, which has a potentially detrimental effect on outcomes for young people. On the other hand, young people are looked after by staff who have excellent training opportunities, coordinated by a designated person. Clear training policies are in place and courses are resourced well. For example, induction training is of a realistic length and a suitable number of staff are sent on specialist courses, such as the fire marshal and children’s contact courses. Staff are available at or above the required number to meet the needs of the young people. In practice this means that each young person always has an individual member of staff to talk to.

Management of the home is effective and the registered manager uses staff efficiently, for example, by delegating responsibilities to individuals. The manager reviews records every month. Importantly, however, the care of young people accommodated in the home is checked using a variety of systems, including feedback sheets from young people themselves. Practices are adapted in the light of this information. Such methods are clearly effective in ensuring that good to outstanding levels of care are provided.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- ensure that significant risks are defined in the placement plan and appropriate risk assessments are made, with regard to these being interconnected in all cases (NMS 7.9)
- ensure placement plans show how objectives will be met on a day to day basis, the contribution to be made by staff, and how the effectiveness of the placement is to be assessed in relation to each major element of the plan (NMS 2.1)

- ensure that a minimum ratio of 80% of all care staff have completed their Level 3 Caring for Children and Young People National Vocational Qualification. (NMS 29.5)