

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Ian Dickson / Linda Christie
Type of Inspection	Random

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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 secure children's home is owned and managed by a local authority community and social services department. It is registered to provide full-time secure care and education for up to 20 young men between the ages of 10 and 17 years. All the young people placed at the centre are referred by the Youth Justice Board.

The centre consists of three living units, a school unit, a gymnasium and administrative offices. Each of the units is purpose built, two more recently than the third.

High walls and fencing prevent the young people from leaving the site without authorisation. Each of the three units has at least two communal spaces, a kitchen area and single lockable bedrooms for each of the young people. The centre has been extensively refurbished and further improvements to improve the facilities for young people are due to commence next year.

The centre is situated in open land on its own site, reached by an unadopted road off a busy main road on the outskirts of a residential area.

Summary

This was an unannounced interim inspection, made to evaluate the progress made to meet recommendations made at the previous inspection. The standards included under 'staying safe' were inspected in full, and four standards under 'organisation' that led to recommendations following the last inspection were also reviewed.

There was nothing in this inspection that would indicate that the service delivery or provision had deteriorated since the last inspection and there were significant improvements seen in some areas, for example recreational and vocational opportunities for young people. The overall rating of good is continued.

The staff team provide a high quality of care to the young people accommodated. The accommodation is bright, homely and consistently improving. Young people report that they feel safe at the centre and enjoy positive relationships with the members of staff who work with them. There are people easily accessible within the staff group and independent of the centre who the young people can speak to if they have any issues or concerns.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There were five recommendations made following the last inspection. Three of these were met in full. The remaining two were partially met. Their introduction was too recent to assess progress so they will be repeated to review development. One related to the promotion of equality and diversity in displays and written information, and the other to the recruitment procedures of the local authority human resources department.

The centre has a good safeguarding policy and procedures that enhance good staff working practice to keep young people safe. These have been strengthened to ensure that staff at the centre are not involved in investigations related to colleagues working at the centre.

There are clear procedures to ensure that statutory checks are carried out with applicants to work with children and young people at the centre. These have been revised further to ensure that they include a clear mechanism for the authority to satisfy itself that candidates applying for posts to work with young people in are not disqualified from doing so. However, this revision is very recent and has yet to be applied in practice.

The frequency and quality of formal staff supervision has improved significantly, and the centre's quality assurance systems are also developing very positively. There are clear plans to improve them more comprehensively in the near future through the introduction of a new database.

The individual cultural and religious needs of all young people are well supported at an individual level. However, there is limited evidence of the systematic promotion of equality and diversity for young people in the written information given to young people, their parents or other stakeholders.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people's privacy is respected and promoted and confidential information is carefully stored and handled. The centre has firm plans to fit suitable privacy covers to bedroom door observation hatches to safeguard young people's privacy but this work remains outstanding.

Effective mechanisms are in place which ensure that young people are protected from abusive treatment. There is a range of opportunities for young people to make complaints and represent themselves without fear of recrimination, and be confident that their complaints are taken seriously. Complaints procedures are easily accessible and confidential, and independent support is available from the advocacy service and complaints officer from the local authority.

The centre has a good safeguarding policy and procedures that enhance good staff working practice to keep young people safe. These have been revised in agreement with the local authority to ensure that staff from the centre are not involved in any investigations that involve other staff working there. This is to avoid the risk of any conflict of interest.

These safeguards will be further improved by the planned installation of CCTV and the appointment of a permanent nurse at the centre. These initiatives reinforce the centre's capacity to protect staff and young people from abuse by ensuring that any abusive act would be identified and independent health evidence would be readily available to any investigation.

Young people are effectively protected from bullying, which is effectively tackled through good anti bullying measures, supported by positive professional relationships between staff and young people and good supervision.

The centre presents more as a good children's home than a secure unit, which actively supports its proactive stance to support young people to spend time in the community where this is assessed as safe and appropriate. Careful assessments have ensured that no young person has absconded from the centre or during planned activities in the community in recent years although many have had the opportunity. There are very effective mechanisms in place to manage 'release on temporary licence' and planned activities that minimise any risk of absconding whilst encouraging the positive reintegration of young people back into the community.

Young people are well protected through transparent and thorough notification procedures. Appropriate authorities are notified promptly and appropriately of all significant events.

Young people are assisted and encouraged to avoid behaviours which may result in their getting into trouble through the use of good behaviour management strategies. There are very effective mechanisms in place to manage challenging behaviour and promote positive effort by young people. The relatively low use of restraint and the positive atmosphere and relationships evident within the centre suggest that these mechanisms remain effective. Some records do not include space for young people's comments and are often not signed as seen by them, even though there is an expectation that this will happen.

Young people and the community are protected by security arrangements at the centre. Effective measures in place ensure that the premises are secure and safe for the young people, staff and visitors whilst remaining as domestic and welcoming in character as possible.

The living accommodation and facilities on the residential units for young people create a homely and cheerful living environment. The units are domestic in character. Security is discreet but very well managed.

There are clear mechanisms in place for centre managers to ensure that essential recruitment checks are carried out with potential candidates applying to work with young people. At the time of this inspection the responsible local authority did not yet have a procedure in place to satisfy itself that candidates applying for posts to work with young people in residential settings are not disqualified from doing so. However, the centre management immediately revised recruitment and staff vetting procedures to address this shortfall. Recruitment procedures for new staff now include clear mechanisms to ensure that applicants are not disqualified from working with children and young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Staff are well supported to manage their work with young people. The level of informal support from colleagues and managers is excellent. The frequency and quality of formal staff supervision

has improved significantly, and there is routine monitoring of supervision records. This ensures that any issues identified are appropriately addressed and performance targets set for staff. Annual appraisals of staff take place and are used to advise future staff training and development. Personal development plans are in the process of being formulated for all staff.

Good progress has been made to improve the collection and collation of information at the centre, although this work is still ongoing. In partnership with the local authority, the centre is developing a database to record and evaluate information as part of a quality auditing process. They already routinely gather and collate information for the Youth Justice Board which is being incorporated into the centre's new database.

This centre has a well established and experienced management and staff team with little turnover of staff. There are good processes in place to identify, review and address issues. These include consultation with young people, parents, social workers and other significant stakeholders. Managers routinely consider the range of views and feedback and use this to improve the service and to develop planning. The centre is innovative in its approach to service delivery and has introduced a range of innovative practices for the benefit of young people, for example, excellent vocational and recreational activities.

Staff and managers are sensitive to the individual needs of young people and there is good evidence of diverse needs being well supported at an individual level. However, there continues to be limited evidence of the systematic promotion of equality and diversity throughout the centre and in the written information given to young people, their parents or other stakeholders.

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 Children's 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):

- review and revise the records of incidents involving young people to ensure that they have the opportunity to comment in writing and sign the record, which will be countersigned by the member of staff responsible for the entry (NMS 22.14)
- revise and improve arrangements to promote and inform young people, staff and visitors about equality and diversity (NMS 1, 7.3, 7.4 and 7.6).
- ensure that recruitment procedures used by the local authority human resources department include the requirements of the 'Disqualification for Caring for Children Regulations' (2002), such that no applicant found to be disqualified from working with young people under may be appointed at the centre (NMS 27.2).