

Inspection report for children's home

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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

This Secure Unit is managed by a local authority. It is located in a residential area near to the city centre.

The Unit is registered as a secure children's home and is approved by the Secretary of State to provide secure care and accommodation for up to 16 young people aged from 10 to 17 years. There are currently 8 young people resident at the unit of mixed gender, 6 of whom are placed on a welfare basis.

Formal education for all the young people at the unit is provided on site. There is an indoor gym and sports hall, external recreation areas, a music room, garden and poly-tunnel for horticultural use and a vocational kitchen on site which are all available for use by young people.

Summary

This was an announced, full inspection to evaluate the quality of care and security at the secure children's unit. Its purpose was to advise the Secretary of State regarding approval of the centre's fitness to continue to offer secure accommodation to children and young people. All the national minimum standards and the additional licensing standards under each of the Every Child Matters outcomes were inspected. The formal education provision at the unit was also inspected on this visit.

There are good arrangements in place for care planning and healthy living is promoted throughout the work at the unit. The provision of activities and work carried out to prepare young people for when they leave the unit, the arrangements for health care, and relationships with external providers are good.

The main area of deficiency at the unit is the way in which procedures are carried out in relation to safeguarding issues and interaction with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The practice undertaken does not ensure the safety and welfare of young people is protected, or that an appropriate response is made to an allegation of abuse.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection in February 2009, the management at the unit was required to ensure that accurate records of sanctions, restraints and single separations were held. The content and accuracy of these recordings are now satisfactory.

The management was also asked to develop a consistent approach to anti-bullying work by ensuring training was available for staff and to explore alternatives to sanctions. All staff have now received training in anti-bullying and this helps to make young people feel safe. There has been a dramatic fall in the number of sanctions used at the unit. Staff are developing practice and undertaking much more mediation with young people, embracing the restorative justice model. Where sanctions are used they are done so more imaginatively. This means that young people can understand how their actions have impacted on others, rather than merely receiving a blanket sanction.

The formal plan for activities required development. Activities are now planned on a monthly basis and each young person receives an individual plan so that they are able to see what is on offer and can choose what they would like to attend. This development means that clashes of appointments can be avoided and lessens the chance of activities being cancelled as staff have further time to prepare.

All placement plans are now written in a much more comprehensive and individual manner. Identified needs of young people are broken down so that all staff are aware of how, in practical terms these needs are to be addressed. This means that young people are able to receive more targeted work from their key workers and specialist workers.

A recommendation was made that support for staff through formal supervision was offered consistently. There has been a large increase in the number of formal staff supervision sessions which have been completed throughout the staff team. This means that young people are able to receive support from staff who are themselves supported.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The food provision at the unit is good, young people have a choice at mealtimes with healthy options available. The menu is currently undergoing major change which means that presently, the one displayed in the unit does not always match the meals provided. Whilst there are already some opportunities for young people to contribute to the type of meals available, the creation of a new menu allows much more consultation. Members of the health care team are also able to contribute to ensure healthy eating is at the forefront of thinking. All dietary needs are met including cultural or medical requirements. A kitchen is available to which young people under staff supervision have access. This enables them to plan meals, prepare them and learn about healthy eating. Risk assessments are carried out prior to use of the kitchen facility which means not all young people can use this routinely. Healthy lifestyles are promoted, with young people being able to learn about food production.

There are good resources and arrangements in place to promote good health in young people. Physical exercise opportunities exist through education lessons and leisure activities along with ample opportunities for young people to be out in the fresh air. Medical needs are assessed upon admission and an individual health care plan is devised from the range of information available. Appropriate medical consents are obtained and held on file. The plans are updated regularly and a final copy is made available to the young person when they leave the unit, enabling them to ensure the health care they receive in the future will be appropriate.

A nurse is available at the unit on a part time basis and further support is provided by a GP who visits. The nurse oversees young people's health progress, medication and appointments with external specialists. There are good structures in place to ensure young people are able to access specialist provision when required. Dental, ophthalmic and drug and alcohol services are all available. The access to and quality of mental health support continues to improve, all young people receive a mental health assessment on admission. Members of the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Team then meet with the young people and plans are put in place for support. These include individual meetings with the young person, key workers and support sessions for staff members. All staff members are trained in first aid. The health of young people is promoted proactively.

The system in place for the administration and storage of medication is robust. Written policies and procedures are available for staff guidance. The nurse is able to prescribe any required medication and the visiting GP is able to do so for controlled drugs. All shift leaders have received training in medication administration and further instruction in medication management is presently taking place. Medication storage is secure and extremely well organised with regular checks being made of prescribed and non prescribed stock. Records of administration are well kept and regularly audited. Only trained staff administer medication. Young people's welfare is protected by the procedures in place for the administration of medication.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

The staff team respect young people's privacy and confidentiality. Staff members practice is not unnecessarily overbearing or intrusive into young people's bedroom or bathroom areas. Young people are able to use the telephone in private although the phone on one unit is not presently working. Bedroom doors are fitted with an observation window which are kept covered by a curtain. Staff know how to handle sensitive information about young people, which is kept confidentially and stored securely.

There are good and improved systems in place to ensure that young people are able to make complaints but effective action to deal with matters raised is not taken in every case. A complaints box is available in a communal area and young people are able to write down their concerns and post them. Contact cards are available in admission packs; these can be used to contact a manager who is external to the service. An independent advocate visits each week. Young people know how to make complaints and feel confident in doing so. Some complaints and concerns are addressed informally with a member of staff. Complaints are recorded in each living unit's complaints log. On two occasions entries show that young people had made complaints containing allegations about staff, requiring external referral. This information had been dealt with internally and had not been passed on to the Local Safeguarding Children Board for their consideration, in line with the agreed procedure. Young people's welfare has not been robustly protected by relevant prompt referral of important issues.

Staff receive safeguarding training opportunities at the point of induction and on an ongoing basis. Staff are aware of how to deal with allegations or suspicions of abuse and access support from a manager. The team has access to professionals from psychiatric services and work in collaboration to protect young people. There are improved records of risk assessment available and staff have a range of positive strategies for dealing with young people who self-harm. However information regarding potential welfare issues is not held, recorded or dealt with in a systematic way. This means that information that should have been considered by professionals outside of the unit is not always passed on. The unit's systems for protecting young people and safeguarding them from abuse are inadequate.

Since the last inspection in February 2009, the staff team has received in-house training in bullying awareness and restorative justice. The number of instances of possible bullying taking place has declined. The increase in activities available and a more structured approach to free time has meant that young people are engaged in meaningful pastimes. Young people say that they are not bullied and that the staff intervene to prevent any bullying situations from escalating.

The units management team and staff have developed their approach to behaviour management to incorporate the use of restorative justice. Although this approach is fairly new, there has been a reduction in both the use of physical restraint and the number of sanctions used. The number of physical restraints, sanctions and single separations used and the quality of recordings are monitored by managers. There are significant overall improvements to the quality of recording of these incidents. Statistical information is produced in order to identify trends and patterns. Whilst there is no formalised system to use this data to inform care practice, the information has been used less formally to a limited but positive effect. A debrief session for staff has recently been introduced in order to give them the opportunity to express concerns and to develop their approach to managing behaviour.

There are good security and health and safety procedures in place to ensure young people are protected from harm, including the completion of regular building risk assessments. Fire procedures are well established, including evacuation drills. All tests of the fire alarm system and drills are recorded. Staff receive training in fire procedures as part of their induction.

Young people's safety and welfare are appropriately promoted by a consistently rigorous staff recruitment and selection process. An assistant manager monitors the local authority recruitment and vetting procedures and only signs these off as being acceptable when she is satisfied that all the appropriate checks have been made. Young people are involved in the selection process for new staff: This is excellent practice. Staff personnel files held in the authority's headquarters include all the information required by regulation.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Staff at the unit are supportive of individual young people's needs. They encourage their learning in education and there are good relationships in place between care and education staff which assist in communication. A forum meeting is held to discuss any cross discipline issues. There is positive cross working in place and daily handover meetings are held which enable the level of support a young person may need to be clarified.

There is a good system of planning for activities and enrichment sessions. A monthly schedule is provided which details all sessions planned. Young people receive an individual copy of the plan so that they are able to see when they have any meetings or reviews coming up. The range of activities provided continues to increase and the motivation of staff members to lead sessions has improved. Enrichment weeks are also undertaken, these generally concentrate on a defined subject, enabling the young people to learn about different cultures etc whilst having fun.

A good range of resources is available for leisure activities, including a fitness suite, sports hall, climbing wall and artificial outdoor sports surface. The unit has the availability of a music suite along with board and computer games, craft materials and books. External facilitators are used to provide sessions such as sport coaching and movement to music and visiting sports teams are also invited to provide the opportunity for organised games. Young people are able to develop confidence in their skills and are supported and encouraged by staff to engage in activities that may be new to them.

Young people make good progress in formal education during the relatively short time they are at the unit. Over the last year virtually all young people had made significant progress in their literacy and numeracy. Over 80% of young people achieved an improvement of one

national curriculum level in literacy and numeracy. Around 50% of young people progressed by two national curriculum levels in literacy and 33% improved their numeracy by two national curriculum levels and some made very substantial progress of over four national curriculum levels.

All young people who were taking GCSE courses at their time of entry into the school were able to continue with their studies. Many young people completed coursework successfully during their time at the unit, although many had left by the time they came to take their final examinations. Young people are successful in achieving ASDAN awards and 12 young people gained the full bronze award and 7 the full silver award over the last year. The achievement of Koestler awards for work in art, media, poetry and creative writing is very impressive with over 50 awards being gained over the last year. Whilst young people's good progress is recognised and celebrated well through awards and certificates the unit has recognised that there is scope to improve the levels of formal accreditation of this learning especially through the use of ICT based assessment which has recently been introduced.

Standards of work are generally good. They are especially high in art, media, beauty therapy and physical education, which plays a major role in helping young people to maintain healthy lifestyles during their time at the unit. The presentation of young people's written work is satisfactory. More attention could be given to the correction of spelling and grammar.

Attendance is satisfactory. Punctuality is generally good with most young people arriving on time in the mornings and after lunch, enabling crisp and purposeful starts to lessons.

Behaviour, although variable, is generally good. Young people's relationships with teachers and teaching assistants are generally respectful and good-natured. In vocational and practical lessons young people's behaviour is almost always good. In a few instances during the inspection young people used bad language. Whilst in most cases this was challenged effectively, in a small number of instances it was not.

Teaching and learning are good overall. Lessons in PE, art and beauty therapy are particularly successful with young people making good and often very good progress. These lessons consist of a good range of progressively complex activities that provide stimulus and challenge to young people. Any reluctance to engage and participate is handled particularly well and young people work hard and enjoy their learning. In a very successful individual beauty therapy lesson, a young person was challenged to produce complex work which she did to a very high standard. In a minority of lessons, tasks rely too heavily on the use of printed worksheets and the work is too simplistic. Young people fail to engage with these tasks and do not see their relevance. It is in this minority of lessons that behaviour deteriorates and young people do not make the progress they are capable of.

Teachers and teaching assistants use praise and encouragement effectively. Good support is provided to young people which helps them remain on task and to focus on their work. In a few instances, teaching assistants are slightly over-directive and do not give young people sufficient opportunity to solve problems for themselves.

During the inspection some very good behaviour management was observed. Situations were de-escalated skilfully and calmly, resulting in young people engaging in the lesson and making good progress. Some teachers are highly skilled at managing young people who are initially

reluctant to participate in lessons. In a very successful creative studies lesson a young person, who was initially very reluctant to participate, produced some outstanding photography in part due to very skilful behaviour management by the teacher. In a few lessons behaviour management was less effective. In these lessons the tasks set were often unimaginative and simplistic. This resulted in making it more difficult to persuade young people to participate.

The curriculum was reviewed and revised thoroughly earlier this year. This has resulted in a curriculum that is now very broad. It consists of a very good balance of the core subjects of English, mathematics and information and communications technology, creative subjects such as art, drama and media, physical education, personal, social and health education, cookery and religious education, as well as a very good range of vocational subjects including construction, hairdressing, beauty therapy, horticulture and motor vehicle maintenance. This gives young people continuity in their studies and prepares them well for their return upon release to mainstream education and training.

The timetable is planned well, taking into account the small numbers of young people accessing it. It caters well for the individual needs of young people and contains a good degree of flexibility. It operates smoothly on a day to day basis and is reviewed frequently.

Young people's learning experiences, their achievements and enjoyment, are enhanced significantly by the inclusion of a number of innovative activities such as enterprise weeks, challenge weeks, film weeks and charity days. The sale of young people's artwork on the theme of "Heaven in Devon" and "Colours of the Continent" has raised over £1500 for an orphanage in the Philippines and for the "African Glue Kids". Some outside agencies such as drama groups also make good contributions to young people's achievements and enjoyment.

Young people are supported well during their time in education at the unit through formal and informal processes and procedures. A good induction programme enables young people to begin education soon after their arrival. The induction consists of an on-line assessment of young people's levels of literacy and numeracy and topics that require attention. This forms the basis of the Individual Education Plan targets which, although specific, are not worded in child-centred language. A pilot of a Working Individual Education Plan is underway to address this problem.

Young people are withdrawn from literacy and numeracy lessons on a planned basis to receive individual tuition and this is effective in raising standards of literacy and numeracy.

Each young person has a personal tutor who meets with the young person and their key-worker at least monthly to review overall progress and to produce a tutorial progress report to which young people contribute.

Young people value the opportunity to comment on education formally through surveys and questionnaires and they also value the awards and certificates for effort, behaviour and achievement. The points system works well, is understood by young people, and is applied consistently and fairly by teachers. The Student of the Week award has high status amongst young people who find it highly motivating.

Careers education is included in the main education curriculum; this is especially important since the input from Connexions is variable and overall is insufficient.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people have their needs effectively assessed and these are set out in writing in the placement plan. The quality of placement planning has seen improvement. Documents are well written and provide a good level of detail. They provide good direction to staff in how to meet each young person's individual needs. Regular updating is carried out by the young person's key worker. Meetings are held weekly with other professionals involved in young people's care and information from these and from statutory reviews is included in the plan.

Young people's development and progress are reviewed regularly within the expected time frame. Young people confirmed that they can choose whether to attend their review meeting. Key-workers support them through the review process and assist them to express their views. Written reports are prepared detailing progress for all meetings held.

Where appropriate staff support young people's relationships with their family and significant others and contact is encouraged. Young people are encouraged to use the telephone or write letters and families are able to visit by prior arrangement.

The admissions procedures ensure that introductions to the unit are carried out in a predefined and sensitive way. Young people receive an admissions pack when they arrive. The pack contains essential information about day-to-day life and expectations, as well as information about advocacy and how to complain. A staff member is available to explain the contents of the pack and to help the young person familiarise themselves with the daily routine and procedures. An independent advocate is available to speak with following admission.

The unit encourages a culture of consultation and cooperation with young people and their families. Young people are listened to and enjoy positive relationships with the staff team. Meetings take place every week and encouragement is given for views to be aired. Each young person has a key-worker allocated on admission who they meet with regularly, the staff member listens to the young person views and provides individual support, including linking with families in order to consult about young people's care needs.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

There is a good structure in place which assists young people to prepare for living independently or moving to a future placement. Initial workbooks are made available to all young people and upon completion, they are able to move onto the "food for thought" and Asdan packs. This enables them to experience a wide range of life-skills experiences, such as cooking, laundry, food hygiene, personal hygiene and sexual health. Young people are able to move through the packs at their own pace with assistance from staff.

The opportunity for young people to experience life skills and vocational opportunities during the evenings and weekends continues to increase. Young people are able to undertake cooking, horticulture and some basic maintenance skills. A parenting course is available as well as equine care for those who express an interest. A leavers' pack is available for young people to work through and this includes information in relation to health care, banking and where to seek help when living in the community.

Young people are well supported by staff to be appropriately dressed and to have choice in what they wear. They are encouraged to choose their own clothing and toiletries which staff will purchase for them. Those on appropriate mobility which allows trips into the local community, may be able to go shopping with staff and buy their own.

Mobility is used imaginatively to allow the opportunity for young people to experience the practical side of living independently. The system for approval of mobility is however disjointed and requires review to ensure that managers are able to give individual consent to mobility plans.

Management and staff at the unit strive to ensure that appropriate residential and educational placements are in place for all young people who leave the unit. They will informally challenge placing authorities who may not fully meet their obligations to young people. However the informal nature of this process means that on occasion there is no record of this advocating role having occurred. This means that plans required to be put in place may be delayed, causing uncertainty for the young person regarding their future.

The unit is a purpose built provision. There are good innovations in place to make the unit as homely and comfortable as possible given the security and safety implications. There is a good programme of maintenance in place for the building and it is well decorated and furnished. Young people are able to personalise their rooms within the limits identified by any assessments. Areas which require maintenance are identified early and rectification work undertaken without delay.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

The recently revised statement of purpose is well written, appropriately reflecting the ethos and principles which underpin the work carried out at the unit. It reflects the reduction in the number of places available. There is a range of user-friendly information available to young people, their families and professionals involved with the work of the unit and care of young people. These are clear and concise booklets which appropriately describe the care and services provided.

There have been changes in the senior management team, with the recent departure of the deputy manager and the reappointment of an assistant manager. The future of the secure unit is uncertain and as an interim measure the number of placements has recently reduced from 16 to eight. As a result the staff team is being required to reduce in size. All staff have recently been interviewed and tested as to their competency in their role as residential care staff and residential managers.

The unit manager and assistant managers have made every effort to support staff through a very difficult few months. Care staff are consistently provided with opportunities to meet with their line managers and receive formal supervision. Although there is monitoring of the frequency of staff supervision, records of the sessions vary in quality and their content is not sufficiently checked by managers.

The majority of staff are subject to a formal appraisal of their progress. The introduction of end of shift debriefing sessions has also contributed to staff feeling supported by managers and their colleagues. The impact for young people is that they are well supported by staff who

are themselves supported and who are increasingly clearer about the expectations of them in their role.

Despite concerns about their future employment, staff have maintained a good quality of care and support to the young people, meeting their individual needs and preparing them for life outside of the secure setting.

In order to secure the future of this service, the manager spends a considerable amount of time informing the Project management board and the County Council of the issues and making proposals for the future shape of the service. She and the external line manager regularly keep the staff team updated on the decision making process.

There is a good range of training and development opportunities available for staff. A training and development strategy reflects a well thought through process of planning and delivery taking into account the needs of the service. Over 91% of the care team hold a National Vocational Qualification level 3 in working with children and young people. Five staff have also achieved the National Vocational Qualification level 4 certificate. Although there is evidence of individual training needs being identified for care staff, this is not linked to a clear individualised development plan devised as part of the annual appraisal process. Also, the training needs of team leaders as front line managers are not so clearly reflected in the training strategy.

The induction programme for new staff is excellent. A comprehensive programme is available over a four week period. New staff then shadow more experienced staff and complete the Children's Workforce Development Council induction programme, which is a workbook based format and takes several months to finish.

Young people are cared for by staff who are competent to work with them and who are trained and appropriately inducted into their role.

There are sufficient numbers of staff to meet the needs of the young people. This includes at least five staff working with the group of eight young people, with one of those a team leader. During waking hours there is also a senior manager in the unit carrying out the duty manager responsibilities. Teaching staff are also available during weekdays and they contribute to activities at the end of the school day. This is a good child to staff ratio, enabling staff to carry out regular one-to-one work with young people and to take them outside of the secure setting on mobility trips.

Young people's specialist needs are identified and addressed with them and support is provided to staff caring for them. One young person said 'I do not think I would have survived had I not come in to this secure unit'. The range of support systems described by the young person included support from unit care staff and the local CAMHS workers.

There is regular monthly external monitoring of the unit by the appointed visitor, which ensures that the care of young people and the service to them are good. The one notable and serious shortfall in the checking and tracking of information and reviewing of practice is that of the complaints made by young people and the potential safeguarding issues these present. Whilst the complaints and safeguarding logs are examined as part of the monthly monitoring visit, any discrepancies or lack of follow up to safeguarding referrals are not highlighted.

There are satisfactory quality assurance and performance monitoring procedures in place. The performance manager and the duty managers have a good oversight of most of the records and are aware of the events occurring in the unit. There is evidence of shortfalls in practice being addressed and remedial action taken to deal with this. However, this is not consistently evidenced in written form. For example any concerns about the standard of recording from a staff member are not reported to their team leader in writing to inform discussions during the next supervision session.

The improved quality assurance and performance management system has failed to identify that complaints made by young people and dealt with informally are allegations that require referral to the local safeguarding team. This does not ensure that the welfare and safety of young people are protected.

Young people's case records are held in an appropriate secure manner. Their progress and development reflects individualised care programmes over which they are well consulted. Case files are maintained to a good standard, although they are bulky documents and are difficult for staff to manage when searching for specific information.

Leadership and management of education are good. The head-teacher and deputy provide good leadership to staff. They know their school and young people well and are committed to improvement. They are aware of the weaknesses and areas for development. Good plans are being implemented to address these areas.

The composition of the management committee is appropriate in that the membership is comprised of a range of experienced professionals, including a local head teacher. The committee, together with senior managers, has successfully set a clear strategic direction for the unit, placing young people at the core of all activities, which is shared and understood by staff. The committee also provides a good balance of support and challenge to the unit's managers. Relationships with the local authority are strong.

Self-evaluation is thorough and mainly accurate and it reflects the appropriately self-critical culture demonstrated by senior managers.

The unit has developed productive partnerships with a range of external organisations, including training agencies, charities and a further education college.

There is a system of formal and informal lesson observations in place although few observations have taken place recently. Although managers have a realistic picture of the quality of teaching and learning, the lesson observation system requires more rigour and needs to be less formulaic.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Young people's individual needs are assessed and addressed, including any preferences they might have for meeting their spiritual needs.

There are positive images around the building that promote diversity and awareness of different cultures. A staff member taking a lead on equality and diversity ensures that details are available in booklet form for staff and young people about different religious festivals and other celebrations taking place each month.

Young people have recently raised funds to support children in need in Kenya and the Philippines. This has become a regular feature of the work with young people in the secure unit and the current project is to raise further funds for African children.

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
17	ensure that any allegations made known by young people of a child protection nature are referred to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (NMS 17, Regulation 16)	1 November 2009

Recommendations

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

- increase the level of formal education accreditation (NMS 14)
- raise the quality of less effective teaching to that of the best (NMS 14, LS 4.2)
- formalise arrangements to share the positive behaviour management system across the school (NMS 14)
- increase the frequency and rigour of lesson observations (NMS 14)
- review the process and procedure for agreement by managers to mobility plans of young people (NMS 6)
- formalise the structure to ensure exit plans are in place for an appropriate period prior to a young person leaving the unit (NMS 6)
- ensure all staff, including team leaders have clear individualised personal development plans in place (NMS 31)
- review and monitor the quality of formal supervision as reflected in the records of such sessions (NMS 28)