

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Maire Atherton
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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 is a local authority children's home providing planned longer term placements (a minimum of six months) for up to six young people aged between 10 and under 18 years of age. All five young people placed have lived in the home for more than a year.

The detached house, created from two semi-detached houses, is near the town centre, on the edge of a residential housing estate. There are good transport links within easy reach of the home. For example, there is a train station within walking distance.

Downstairs the accommodation comprises a lounge, dining room, quiet room, games room and a kitchen. There is also an office and staff facilities. Upstairs there are six single bedrooms and two staff sleeping-in rooms. There are three bathrooms, two of which have all facilities, while the other one has a separate toilet.

Summary

This unannounced inspection looked at all the key standards under the Every Child Matters outcomes. The home continues to offer young people a good service, with some outstanding features.

This is a well-managed home with a competent and established staff team. Young people benefit from frequent opportunities for individual work. The establishment and maintenance of excellent relationships between the staff and young people is a real strength of the service. This provides a basis for open communication which enables staff to effectively promote the safeguarding and well-being of the young people.

Areas identified for improvement include risk assessment, additional staff guidance on privacy, and ensuring some records are completed fully.

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 no requirements or recommendations made following the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The health and well-being of the young people is actively promoted by the staff team. Young people enjoy a varied and balanced diet, including foods from other cultures, prepared by the cook using fresh ingredients. The young people have a good relationship with the cook and frequently talk to her about their meal preferences, particularly around birthday menus and celebration cakes. One young person talked about the 'trampoline' cake creation made for the last birthday. Young people are given lots of information about healthy eating alongside support and encouragement to develop good eating habits. Young people work with the cook in food preparation either to make a meal for themselves or for the whole group. One young person is in the process of compiling a recipe book based on the cooking being done with the cook,

as part of preparation for moving on. Evening meals in particular are social occasions where staff and young people reflect on the day they have just had and plan the evening ahead.

Young people say that staff are good at making sure that they attend routine healthcare appointments and other appointments when necessary. Young people are also encouraged and supported to take regular physical exercise. Staff are knowledgeable about the healthcare needs of the young people and have access to support and advice from healthcare professionals, the looked after children's nurse and a clinical psychologist for example, that they use in their work with young people.

Young people are cared for by staff who receive the training they need so as to give medication and first aid when necessary. Training is planned for staff on the recently revised medication policy. The risk assessment process for young people self-administering medication is insufficiently detailed. There are sound systems in place for medication stored and administered by staff.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The young people's right to privacy is understood by staff and generally demonstrated in practice. Young people give examples of this such as they open their own letters and staff knock on bedroom doors and wait for an answer before opening the door. The quiet room is available to them to meet privately with visitors should they wish. These areas are outlined in guidance to staff. Staff have concerns about some aspects of mobile phone use and consider that this has the potential to put young people at risk. The measures that staff adopt are a delicate balancing act between the duty to respect privacy and the duty to safeguard. These measures are not included in the current staff guidance.

Young people make their views known and make complaints to staff on a regular basis. These views are taken seriously and discussed informally as they arise so that the formal complaints procedure is very rarely used. Additional opportunities for young people to raise concerns are provided through individual advocates for each young person, a visiting external advocacy group, their social workers and senior managers within the local authority undertaking monthly visits. Young people are also provided with information about how to access other external resources such as Child Line.

Staff have a clear understanding of their respective roles in reporting child protection concerns and this is underpinned by regular training. Staff are familiar with and know where to find and use the local authority safeguarding procedures. Young people seek physical contact with staff and they respond positively and appropriately to the young people, demonstrating an easy warmth and conveying a sense of security and belonging within safe parameters.

Young people say that there is no bullying in the home. They think this is achieved by a zero tolerance of bullying in the home and staff challenging any comments that could be interpreted as bullying. Good staffing levels and vigilance also minimise any opportunities for bullying to occur. There have been no unauthorised absences by young people.

The positive, constructive relationships that exist between the staff and the young people are key to the effective behaviour management in the home. There is a strong emphasis on the

positive reinforcement of desirable behaviour. Staff work hard to identify situations that could become challenging and engage with young people to distract and divert them from negative behaviours. This strategy is generally successful and results in the limited use of sanctions and physical interventions. Young people report that the staff use of these behaviour management tools is fair and is to keep them safe. There is one instance of a record of physical intervention not containing the full information required. The records of incidents do not routinely have the attachments necessary for evaluation.

The home takes the health and safety of young people seriously. There are clear systems in place for assessing environmental and individual risks. Some risk assessments are not easily accessible and some have not been updated to reflect changes. The range of service records and checks required are up-to-date with one exception, that of the electrical installation in the house.

There have been no new staff employed since the last inspection. The human resources function of the local authority have just been outsourced and will manage future recruitment.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people speak very positively about the individual support they receive from staff. This is clearly outlined in care plans, which reflect a range of needs, including those relating to identity. There is an established keyworker system in place, but the young people can, and do, approach any member of staff with personal concerns. Relationships between the staff and young people are excellent, a real strength of the service. This enables staff to implement strategies to engage and stimulate young people. All young people have independent advocates that they meet with regularly and they can readily access support and advice from an independent advocacy service that visits the home.

All the young people are in full time education. Young people are actively supported by staff to understand and value education. Young people give examples of how staff do this by helping them with homework and providing them with what they need to do this, attending parents' meetings at school and talking to staff at the school. The home works hard to ensure that the young people attend schools that best meet their needs. Staff are good at establishing positive links with new schools and maintaining existing links and there are clear examples of cooperative working, including personal education plans.

Young people are actively encouraged to pursue their hobbies and develop new ones. The staff work with young people to identify suitable groups and activities in the local community and, if required, support them to attend. Group activities, such as a Halloween party and trips to theme parks, are also enjoyed by the young people.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There are robust care planning and reviewing systems in place that fully involve the young people. Young people confirm that they know why they are in the home and what it is hoped that they will achieve whilst they are there. Care plans are reviewed regularly and young people contribute to the formal reviews in writing and in person.

Young people enjoy meaningful contact with their family and friends. Staff are flexible and sensitive to the wishes of the young people and their family and think creatively to enable contact to be a positive and enjoyable experience. Staff establish and maintain open lines of communication with families to provide them with up to date information about the young person and consult them in decision making in accordance with the care plan. Visitors are welcomed into the home and supervised as appropriate.

Young people have a voice in the home, they say 'staff listen and things do happen'. There are formal meetings for young people to express their views, both through the staff team and a visiting independent advocacy group. In addition staff are skilled at obtaining young people's views informally, through chatting at meal times for example.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are given the opportunity within the home to learn skills which will assist them when they come to live independently, and helping with household chores regularly is part of this. The development of pathway plans is underway. Young people are supported to budget their pocket money and allowances and all have bank accounts. The allowance system does not include budgets for clothing or personal requisites for any young people. Young people are offered support to make and attend appointments, with the hairdresser for example, with the expectation that they manage these increasingly independently as they mature and grow in confidence in preparation for independent living. On leaving the home young people are encouraged to return to visit and have the occasional meal.

The home is maintained to a good standard and there are systems in place to ensure that repairs are carried out as and when necessary. All the young people have their own bedroom. Communal areas are well- furnished and decorated with a good standard of cleanliness, thus providing young people with a pleasant living environment in which to relax, socialise, play and work.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The statement of purpose, which is due for review, and the young people's guide, which has been updated, accurately reflect the service provided.

The home is well-managed by an experienced and committed manager, supported by a strong management team. There is an established staff team in post and all staff either hold or are working towards qualifications relevant to their role in the home. This means that young people are cared for by a competent team that knows them well as individuals. Staffing levels are good and ensure that young people can be fully supported during contact and in pursuing individual interests for example. The night staffing of the home is usually one waking night and one sleeping in. As at the last key inspection there are occasions there are two sleeping in due to night staffing issues. The manager has risk assessed the current circumstances and determined that having two sleeping in staff is sufficient at present to safeguard the welfare of the young people. The staff team includes ancillary staff who play a significant part in ensuring the young people have a clean, warm and homely living environment. The staff team is made up of male and female staff who from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This helps the young people in understanding differences in people around them.

Handovers are structured and ensure that staff coming on shift have a detailed current picture of each young person. Staff report that they are well-supported through regular supervision and team meetings. Training is actively promoted and is used by staff to inform their practice in working with young people.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The home is careful to meet the needs of young people as individuals. Young people are educated by staff about difference and how to respect it. Young people are aware that discrimination of any kind is not tolerated in the home and that any discriminatory comments are challenged by staff.

There is clear and effective monitoring in place on a number of levels. The manager routinely monitors records in accordance with the regulations. A senior manager visits monthly and the written report provides an overview of the service, including an areas identified for improvement. Keyworkers audit young people's files on a monthly basis. The process for obtaining the missing records is not robust. Young people's records are safely stored and well maintained by staff providing a good picture of the young person's stay in the home.

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
9	ensure guidance is provided for staff and young people on when it may be necessary to search the information on a young person's mobile phone (Children's Homes Regulations 2001, Regulation 11 (2)(a))	30 November 2009
22	ensure all records relating to physical interventions and incidents are fully completed and available (Children's Homes Regulations 2001, Regulation 17(4))	30 November 2009
26	ensure risk assessments are updated to reflect changes in circumstances and are easily accessible (Children's Homes Regulations 2001, Regulation 23)	30 November 2009

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the risk assessment process for young people self administering clarifies what is meant by the phrase 'Fraser competent' (NMS 13.9)
- undertake checks of electrical installations at least every three years (NMS 26.4)
- develop the allowance system to increase budgeting opportunities for young people preparing for independent living (NMS 6)

- develop a more robust system for obtaining the records missing from young peoples' files (NMS 35)