

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC035500
Inspection date	3 February 2010
Inspector	Linda Christie / Malcolm Stannard
Type of Inspection	Key

Date of last inspection	19 August 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

This centre is a registered children's home which provides secure accommodation for up to 24 young people between the ages of 10 and 18 years, eight of whom may be female. The centre is situated on the outskirts of large city and is operated by a county council.

There are two residential units available, one containing 16 beds and the other eight beds. All bedrooms are single accommodation and contain en-suite toilet and shower facilities. A formal education facility is available on the site. Recreational facilities available include a gymnasium, an outdoor sporting facility with an artificial surface, and a vocational workshop.

The centre accommodates children and young people who may have been sentenced, remanded or require secure accommodation following an assessment of vulnerability. During the inspection 22 young people were in residence.

Summary

This was an announced inspection to evaluate the quality of care and security at the unit. The key standards in the Every Child Matters outcome groups were inspected, along with progress against the recommendations from the last inspection which took place in August 2009, including those related to the education provision. The education service was inspected by a Her Majesty's Inspector for Education.

This secure unit is managed by an experienced and organised management team, who consistently monitors and evaluates the care and service for young people. Recruitment and selection procedures have been further improved to ensure even safer recruitment practices. The vetting of staff is robust.

The support to young people in preparation for discharge and preparation for adulthood is a particular strength of this unit. The range of life skills and practical vocational training available to young people is excellent. The health needs of young people are identified and appropriately addressed. The measures taken to keep young people safe are well established and consistently applied.

There has been some progress in improving the quality of education provided for young people, but with a significant number of changes of personnel in the school, including the head of education, there is still work to be done to improve standards and outcomes for young people.

Young people are generally positive about the care they receive and several gave examples of how being placed in the secure unit has helped them deal with issues in their lives, including self harming and offending behaviours.

This secure children's home continues to provide a good quality of care to young people.

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 two recommendations made at the previous inspection of the unit in August 2009, and five relating to the education provision were carried forward from the last licence approval inspection in February 2009.

Managers were asked to ensure that records of behaviour management are completed appropriately and any inconsistencies minimised. The improved monitoring of these records has helped ensure consistent recording of events. Cross referencing between records is now embedded. This practice supports the protection of young people by ensuring a timeline of events can be tracked.

As young people were not involved in the recruitment of staff or managers, a recommendation was made to involve them in the process. Action has been taken in this respect. Young people have been involved in the appointment of the head of education and the intention is to involve them in the appointment of the recently advertised unit manager's post.

Overall, satisfactory progress has been made in meeting the five recommendations related to the education provision. A large number of education staff have left the unit, some of whom have been replaced as part of a recruitment programme. Many education initiatives are recent and it is too early to judge the impact of these on the outcomes for young people. Improvements have been driven forward by the enthusiastic and committed leadership of the unit manager and the acting education manager, drawing on the skills, energy and expertise of the whole staff team and the good support of the local authority. The clear school improvement plan and associated action plan to tackle the recommendations from the last inspection, have focused on bringing about the necessary improvements and on continuing to build the strong and positive ethos of the education department which puts young people at its centre. Staff are clearly working towards meeting the school improvement plan, and aims and objectives are monitored regularly. The education and training team understand what they have achieved and what they still need to do in order to make further progress.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Food provided at the unit is healthy, nutritious and of good quality. Young people are able to choose from a range of meals offered and can contribute to the make up of the menu. All dietary needs are catered for, including any medical or cultural requirements, and a healthy option is always available. All staff are aware of the need to encourage young people to eat healthily.

Good resources and practice are in place to promote good health in young people. 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. Health care needs are reviewed on a monthly basis and an updated health plan is created. A final medical exit pack is made available to the young person enabling them to ensure the health care they receive when they leave the unit is appropriate.

Input from practice nurses is available at the unit on a part-time basis. Further comprehensive support is provided by a General Practitioner who undertakes regular visits to the unit. External dental and ophthalmic services can be accessed by young people. Young people's mental health

needs are met by a team of professionals whose services are purchased independently by the unit management. Access to an assistant psychologist is available on a daily basis. There is a good level of support in place to meet all young people's health needs.

Young people are given a wide range of information regarding healthy lifestyles and are encouraged to participate in enrichment sessions highlighting areas of personal health and hygiene. Computerised babies and pregnancy bellies are available for young people to use, allowing them to experience the associated health and care issues. The unit holds the healthy schools' award.

The systems in place for the administration and storage of medication are robust. Written policies and procedures are available for staff guidance. The nurse is able to prescribe any required medication and the visiting General Practitioner is able to do so for controlled drugs. Only senior staff administer medication and all have received training. Medication storage is secure and extremely well organised, with regular checks being made of prescribed and non-prescribed stock. Records of the administration of medication are well kept and regularly audited. A first aid trained staff member is available on each shift.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Staff and management at the unit respect young people's privacy and confidentiality. Policies and procedures are in place for staff guidance and training is undertaken. All personal information is handled and stored securely.

A system is in place to enable young people to make complaints or raise concerns without the need for recourse to staff. Any complaints made are taken seriously and investigated within a short timescale. Records of the investigation are held and a response letter is provided for all young people following a complaint. External monitoring of all complaints is undertaken by a local authority officer. An independent advocate visits the unit and is able to speak with all young people, who are confident that they can raise concerns.

There are robust child protection procedures in place at the unit. There are good and effective working relationships with the local authority designated officer and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Managers from the unit are members of and play a significant part in the work of the board's secure sub-committee. All areas of practice are transparent, with comprehensive records of any dialogue with external agencies. Young people are protected from abuse with appropriate responses made to any allegations. All staff are trained in child protection awareness.

Written anti-bullying procedures, which contain details of the unit's strategies for dealing with reported bullying, are available. Good informative guidance is given to young people, so that they know what to do if they feel they are being bullied. Managers and staff are trained to identify any instances of bullying and confirm its unacceptability. Young people are protected from bullying.

There are clear procedures in place in should young people be absent without authority. Risk assessments are completed if visits are to be made off site for mobility. Should a young person absent themselves, staff members are aware of the practice to be followed to enable protection for all concerned.

Young people at the unit are encouraged to display positive behaviour and contributed to the development of a revised incentive scheme now in operation. Staff members use good professional relationships, along with mediation and negotiation, to promote appropriate social behaviour. Any sanctions used are appropriate and recorded. Staff will, where possible, negotiate reparation as an alternative to a formal sanction.

There has been an increase in the number of restraints occurring at the unit since the last inspection. Data regarding physical intervention is analysed to identify trends or any issues requiring attention. The increase is attributed to the need to keep some of the young people presently accommodated, safe from physical harm. Staff receive support from the external mental health professionals in their work with these young people. Closed circuit television recordings of all restraints are viewed as part of safeguarding meetings held internally at the unit which reviews practice. This enables any discrepancies or areas of improvement in staff practice to be identified; this ensures the welfare of young people is protected.

The use of single separation is appropriate and takes place for a short time only. Records are held of any occurrence and contain monitoring details of these periods. Individual risk assessments are in place for all young people and are regularly updated.

All behaviour management records are monitored and audited by members of the management team who provide feedback to staff. Entries in the behaviour management records are thorough and can be cross-referenced, enabling tracking of incidents. All incident record forms are reviewed by the monthly safeguarding meeting to ensure consistency and clarity of recording.

There is an expectation by managers that all staff receive a debrief session to offer support and guidance following incidents. The quality of these debrief sessions varies and some staff are not as well supported during this process. There are no records of a formal debrief with staff, even after they have been involved in the restraint of a young person.

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 are recorded. Staff receive training in fire procedures, and health and safety, as part of their induction and on a six-monthly basis.

There are very good recruitment and selection procedures in place to ensure only appropriate, experienced and capable staff are appointed to work with the young people. These procedures have been further improved to include testing of staff both in written and moral reasoning capabilities prior to a decision being made about offers of employment. The recruitment and selection process is compliant with recognised good practice in relation to the appointment of residential care staff.

Young people are protected by robust systems and procedures for the management of visitors to the unit.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Good progress has been made in relation to broadening the range of accreditation and to ensure all areas of the curriculum are accredited where appropriate. The National Open College Network

qualifications have been introduced including the Diploma, with two staff posts appointed to deliver the programmes. Open College Network programmes have been introduced in literacy and numeracy, information and communication technology, together with building skills, carpentry and joinery, motor vehicle studies, English, life skills, mathematics, physical education (PE), and food and technology design. The first awards will be made in March 2010. Staff are appropriately qualified or completing their training qualifications. Young people are able to access better learning opportunities through this new enriched curriculum and the improved collaboration between the academic subjects and the vocational training areas. The young people are particularly positive about the improvements in the vocational training opportunities.

Good progress has been made in establishing an agreed programme of observations. The school improvement plan partner and the acting head of education observed lessons and provided constructive feedback to staff about how to improve their teaching. Some grading of lessons was over generous. Links were made to other performance management and quality development processes but this was new and it was too early to judge the impact of this on standards in teaching and learning. The secure unit has benefited greatly from the external expertise provided by the local authority. The quality of teaching in vocational training is satisfactory and better. The young people particularly enjoy and learn well in practical sessions. In academic lessons, teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learning was hindered during the inspection by some extreme emotional and behavioural difficulties with specific young people. However, classroom management was good and the staff used their skills well to continue to engage positively with the young people.

Satisfactory progress has been made in relation to initiating and embedding good quality assurance systems, in-house training, and observations of teaching and learning. The local authority has established a good relationship with the centre and provided full support following the February 2009 inspection. Identified support has been allocated to the centre to work with the centre manager and the acting head of education. The improvement plan is clearly linked to the previous inspection recommendations. Education teaching advisors and supporters are in place to help staff improve their performance. A number of teachers and teaching assistants have undertaken specialist training in the self-evaluation process.

Quality assurance improvements are satisfactory. New individual learning plans are targeted to the young people's learning needs. Teachers have a better understanding of how to assess success, achievement and improvement in attitudes to learning. Some learning plans are completed well but others lack clear targets and are too general in their comments. Young people are involved in agreeing their learning targets but they do not always understand what they have to do to improve their performance.

Satisfactory progress has been made in relation to the setting of targets for young people's academic and training progress. Young people meet with their teachers to agree learning targets. Short, medium and long-term targets are agreed and the young people are able to see these targets during their lessons. The process for monitoring completion of these targets is clear. Teachers use their skills well to keep learners on task and give positive and constructive feedback through the lesson. This was particularly good in PE and cookery classes. However, the cookery room is too small for the number of learners in each session and the light weights programme for young people in PE does not take sufficient account of medical advice on what is appropriate for different ages and growth spans of the young people.

In English the teacher responded well to the young people's challenging behaviours and used the incentive scheme to keep them to task. Formal assessments have recently been introduced every 12 weeks and six months, and the early signs of improvement in the young people's attitudes to assessment are positive. Certificates are displayed in many areas of the centre to help motivate and encourage young people. Young people are proud of their achievements and many are able to recite exactly the certificates they have received. Young people are actively encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and development and this is reinforced effectively through the points system which rewards achievement and positive attitudes.

A new system of formal meetings between the young people's key worker and tutor identifies agreed targets and this provides continuity between the education department and the care teams outside of the classroom environment. This system is beginning to provide continuity for the young people.

Progress in relation to ensuring teaching staff have appropriate access to subject specific professional development is satisfactory. The local authority supports the teaching staff across a range of professional curriculum development areas. Managers can now access the forum for middle managers and leaders. Staff are able to access subject sector forums outside of the centre and a variety of external network meetings provide management and subject specific support to staff. Staff are either qualified or completing their qualifications in order to support the delivery in the new accredited subject areas. In November 2009 three staff qualified as assessors and a further six staff have completed National Vocational Qualification and deliver the accredited agriculture and horticulture programme. A further six staff began the sports and leisure coaching course in January 2010 to deliver the PE and health-related studies.

There are good working relationships in place between education and care disciplines. Young people are encouraged and supported to achieve in their education. Information is passed during handover meetings between education and care staff which enables the support required by young people to be identified. Assistance is given with homework and care staff ensure that the correct equipment is available to complete work.

A wide range of activities and enrichment sessions is undertaken at the unit. Good planning is in place to enable leisure and more formal enrichment sessions to be available. Some staff members have taken appropriate training and qualifications, enabling them to enhance the skills of young people and provide some quality sessions. Young people are able to develop confidence in their skills during these periods. There are occasions where there are inconsistencies in the motivation of staff to provide opportunities for young people to take part in interesting activities. External providers are used to provide more specialist activity and enrichment sessions. Young people are encouraged and enabled to partake in leisure activities.

Good resources are available, including sports and craft equipment and indoor games. Areas which can be utilised by young people include a gym, an artificial surface sports pitch and vocational workshops. A beauty therapy room and computer access are also provided. The vocational experiences available to young people at the unit have increased during non formal education time. Some enrichment sessions are held which enable young people to consider different cultures and people with disabilities.

Records are kept of young people's participation in activities, enabling identification of those young people who may require some assistance from staff to encourage participation. Sessions

are evaluated so that any changes required to the way they are run can be identified. All activities which are undertaken are risk assessed in order that young people are not exposed to unnecessary risks.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people are admitted to the secure unit as sensitively as possible and are well supported by staff. Admissions procedures ensure young people are protected by means of a thorough initial assessment of their vulnerability or particular challenge they may present to others. They are also encouraged to contact family and let them know they are alright and in a safe place. Young people experience a thorough induction to ensure they fully understand routines and expectations.

Assessment and planning procedures are good. All young people are subject to a comprehensive assessment at the point of admission and throughout their stay. The assessment and planning procedures are designed to ensure that each young person's individual needs are identified and addressed. Consideration is consistently given to ensuring that preparation for discharge is included in all planning and direct work interventions.

Each young person has a care plan which reflects their individual and diverse needs and this is regularly reviewed as part of a weekly internal case management system, and monthly during formal care and sentence review meetings. Reviews take place in keeping with expected national standards.

All young people have an allocated key worker and co-worker who are primarily responsible for addressing the individual targets identified in the care plans and their personal care needs. They are supported by a senior manager who holds the role of case manager. They are responsible for overseeing the plans and ensuring regular review of progress and quality of interventions.

Young people report very good relationships with their key workers and other staff, and give numerous examples of how they feel staff have helped them. One young person described feeling more mature and having a greater understanding of their offences and the impact on the victim.

Relationships between staff and young people are positive and friendly. Good use is made of humour by both staff and young people, and there is obvious honesty and mutual respect between them. Care staff are positive about their role as key workers and clearly have an impact on the young people, helping them change attitudes and behaviours. They have a range of resources available to them to carry out direct work with young people and are also involved in a number of group work sessions. They do not routinely work with young people to develop life skills; this is mainly done by the resettlement worker and the vocational instructors. This is an area of work that key workers would like to develop further.

The views of young people and their families are actively sought through the placement review process. Young people are also consulted on the day-to-day running of the unit through regular key-work sessions and monthly unit meetings. They can also meet with the appointed visitor each month during the monitoring visit. There is evidence to indicate that young people's views

are taken into account and action taken to address concerns on an individual basis. Young people also play a part in influencing changes to rules and procedures.

Young people have good contact with family members and others of significance to them. They have private access to telephones, and families are invited to visit. Parents responding to the pre-inspection survey confirmed they are made to feel welcome during visits.

Young people can have access to a mentor if they have little or no contact with family members, or if they would like to speak with someone of a similar background or culture. Several young people have regular contact with mentors who were specifically recruited by the secure unit to support young people, including those from diverse communities, such as children of travelling families. This is excellent practice.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are very well prepared and supported for discharge and reintegration back into the community. This commences from the initial planning meeting and is constantly discussed as part of the reviewing process.

Dedicating one staff member to resettlement work indicates the commitment the unit has to preparing young people for discharge. This encourages the young people to have aspirations about further education and future work prospects, develop self-care skills and confidence in their economic future.

The resettlement worker has an important role in planning for each young person's discharge and works diligently to hold placing agencies to account in planning for future placements or accommodation, and education or training.

The resettlement worker takes the lead in what is a very good multidisciplinary approach to preparing for discharge and adulthood. Two vocational instructors provide a wide range of vocational taster courses in vehicle body repair and a number of building skills such as carpentry and bricklaying. The home economics teacher ensures young people develop practical cooking skills and is supported in this by the resettlement worker. A mock kitchen and bedroom area has been created to help recreate a bed sit environment for young people. They have opportunities to develop basic skills in furnishing and decorating these areas. The whole area was built by young people under the direction of one of the vocational instructors and is an excellent resource.

Young people also build up a portfolio of the life and vocational skills they have undertaken during their stay in the secure unit. This is an outstanding resource which provides a written and photographic record of their achievements. The resettlement and vocational instructors also provide written references and other evidence on headed notepaper, although not identifying that they are placed in a secure unit. This provides an excellent resource for young people when they are applying for jobs or for college courses.

There are effective arrangements in place to ensure that all young people have appropriate clothes to wear and are suitably dressed. They are able to have a say in the clothes bought for them, or are able to shop with staff if risk assessed for mobility outside of the secure unit. Young people have access to a wide range of toiletries and personal items as needed.

The building is very well maintained and efforts are made to ensure as homely an environment as possible within a secure setting. The premises are continually updated and renovated to ensure the facilities available are appropriate to service delivery.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

A range of information is available to inform parents, professionals and young people about the practice and procedures in the unit. The Statement of Purpose is comprehensive and contains all information as required and is regularly updated. The information is easy to read and informative, and is freely available in the reception area and on living units. The young people's and parents' guide can be made available quickly in another language if necessary. Young people view a DVD as part of the admission process.

The unit manager and his senior management team are well established in their roles. They are clear about the service they expect to be delivered to young people and they describe opportunities taken to improve care and practice by listening to young people and other stakeholders. There have been some recent gaps in the senior and operational management teams, with the departure after long absences of one of the two unit managers, and of a deputy unit manager. Interviews will shortly be held for the unit manager post. The deputy unit manager post has recently been filled by an internal candidate.

The head of education also left towards the end of last year and the new head is due to take up post in the near future. These absences have placed additional pressure upon the remaining managers, who have worked hard to maintain standards and ensure practice development.

The staff team reflects a good balance of age, gender, experience and cultural diversity. Staff have a range of skills, and utilise these in their work with young people, who often present with complex needs and challenges. Staff ratios are clearly defined and do not fall below the agreed safe minimum level. Arrangements are in place to cover for staff absence and this is done through use of overtime or by appointing casual staff to supplement the staff team when necessary. Some posts were left vacant last year pending confirming contracting arrangements with the Youth Justice Board. Recruitment to these posts has resulted in a number of new care and teaching staff taking up posts in the past 10 months. Consistency of care to young people is safeguarded as far as possible by ensuring a balance of experience and skills when planning the shifts.

Good opportunities are available for staff to meet as a team and to discuss the young people; mental health specialists provide advice in these meetings.

Young people are well cared for and supported by staff who are themselves supported and provided with guidance. The frequency of staff supervision has varied, but more recently has reached an 84% monthly average. Managers confirm that although they monitor the frequency of supervision, they do not check for quality of recordings. Of the files examined, there is inconsistent quality, with very good and detailed recordings in some, but brief notes in others. A particular area of support that is not well reflected in record form is the debriefing of staff after incidents of restraint.

The induction programme for new staff is adequate. Staff spend the first week receiving individual training and then spend two weeks supernumerary on shift, shadowing senior staff.

Although new staff complete a specifically designed workbook during their first few weeks in their new role, they do not complete the detailed Children’s Workforce Development Council programme for new residential staff.

All staff are subject to a formal appraisal of their progress, which results in an individual professional training and development plan being produced. There is a good range of training and development opportunities available for staff and obvious investment in these. A training and development strategy reflects a well thought through process of planning and delivery, taking into account the needs of the service and individual staff members. The number of staff who have achieved the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 award is currently at 73%. This was higher but some qualified staff have left the unit. A number of staff are currently working to obtain other NVQ qualifications and youth justice qualifications at degree level.

There is an effective system in place to ensure external monitoring of the unit. Regulation 33 visits are carried out by a social care professional from the children’s services authority. Monitoring is thorough with good reporting of the findings. Young people’s safety and welfare is promoted by this effective monitoring. They also have opportunities to meet with the appointed visitors and the visiting advocate.

There are excellent quality assurance and management information systems in place. The care of young people is continually adapted in the light of information about how the unit is operating. Detailed records are maintained and are consistent with regulation and guidance. They are routinely monitored and emerging themes included in a monthly performance management reports. The development and progress of young people are appropriately recorded to reflect their individual needs and circumstances. The files are detailed, appropriately monitored and include the necessary information required by regulation and good practice.

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 or cultural needs.

There are positive images around the building which promote diversity and awareness of different cultures. Staff receive training at least once a year in understanding equality and diversity. Young people have regular group activities to help them understand diversity in a wide range of subjects, including racism, sexual preferences and disability.

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):

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- ensure that all staff are supported by the availability of a debrief session following an incident of restrictive physical intervention (NMS 22)
 - establish a robust annual planning and evaluation cycle with agreed roles and responsibilities for all staff by drawing on the expertise and resources of the local authority (NMS 14)
 - develop further opportunities for staff to share good practice and improve the quality of teaching, training and learning (NMS 14)
 - review the process of lesson observations to ensure that areas for improvement are carried out by teaching staff (NMS 14)
 - continue to build on the work of education and vocational training ensuring staff work closer together in a more practical learning environment. (NMS 14)
 - establish a thorough risk assessment of practical learning areas to ensure that young people are safe from injury and harm (NMS 14 - NMS 26)
 - review the induction programme for new care staff to ensure they are fully inducted to the work of the secure setting and children's residential care in general. (NMS 31)