

Inspection report for Children's Home

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Inspector	Barbara Davies
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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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

Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is registered to provide care for eight children, of either sex, between the ages seven and 12 years with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home is owned by a private company.

The house is an adapted farmhouse and its location is rural and isolated. The service has its own transport to access local community facilities. The house consists of two lounges, a music room, a large kitchen and dining room on the ground floor. Young people's bedrooms and adjacent bathrooms are located on the first floor. There are extensive front and rear gardens, including play equipment and a small football pitch.

The home has a school on site, which is registered with Department for Children, Schools and Families and is inspected by Ofsted.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an unannounced interim inspection during which the key standards in staying safe were inspected. There were no outstanding actions or recommendations. The overall quality rating continues to be good with some outstanding aspects of practice to keep children safe.

The service provides a structured and nurturing environment for children and their safety is paramount. There are no incidents of absconding and behaviour is extremely well managed. A focus on recognising and rewarding good behaviour results in extremely low levels of sanctions and physical restraint. Children say they are well cared for by staff and enjoy the time they spend with them. Although some children would like to live in a less remote position, the consensus of opinion is that 'it is a great place to live with lots of opportunities to take part in activities and to play in the fields'. Complaints procedures are well publicised and children know how to raise concerns. There is much recognition from placing social workers and parents of the progress that children make and of the positive outcomes that are achieved.

Although some changes have been made to the children's guide to make it more accessible to younger children, it is still not age appropriate in the use of language and font size and does not provide a full summary of the matters in the Statement of Purpose. Following this inspection, the home has also been asked to consider how it can provide children, for whom there are no contact restrictions, with access to a phone that they can use without reference to staff.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no actions or requirements made at the previous inspection. There are sound systems in place for monitoring and improving the standard of care provided.

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.

Suitable arrangements are in place to protect and promote the privacy of young people. Children have their own bedrooms and are given keys so they can lock their doors. This gives them some control over who enters their bedroom and allows them to store their possessions safely. Some of their possessions are also kept in safe keeping in the office. Given the age of some of the children, more supervision may be required at sensitive times, such as, getting changed and when using the bathroom. Staff receive guidance on safe practices and take precautions to keep themselves and children safe. Confidential information is stored in locked cupboards in the staff office to prevent unauthorised people from gaining access. There is no specific payphone for children to use so they cannot make calls in private without reference to staff. While this is a breach of regulations the home is caring for a number of young children for whom there are contact restrictions in place. The Registered Manager demonstrated a commitment to considering how such an arrangement can be implemented in practice. Children confirm being able to make phone calls on request.

A complaints procedure is in place. Although not included in the service user guide, young people receive their own separate version. Copies are also displayed in communal areas of the home to remind children of the action they can take if unhappy about the way they are being cared for. Children spoken to said they know how to make complaints but would mostly talk to staff if something is wrong. Excellent practice is evident with the home routinely seeking written feedback from placing social workers, parents and children about the quality of care provided. With one exception, feedback is extremely positive about the standard and consistency of care given and of the outcomes achieved. A less positive response was received from a parent but the reasons for dissatisfaction were not evident.

Staff are alert to the potential for bullying to occur. A focus on keeping children constructively occupied and engaged in activities helps keep conflict to a minimum. Staff know to maintain a high presence and intervene quickly to prevent disputes from escalating.

Staff complete training in safeguarding and child protection during their induction

period. Regular updates, provided by the Registered Manager during staff meetings, ensure that staff remain up to date and fully aware of reporting procedures. Copies of procedures and policies are available in the home for staff to refer to if they want clarification about the action to take.

Policy and procedural guidance, reinforced with verbal briefings by senior staff, inform staff about the action to take in the event of children being absent without permission from the home. Since the last inspection in March 2010, there has been just one incident of a child attempting to abscond. Appropriate action was taken to prevent absconding due to the age of the children and risks posed by the isolated location of the home. A system is in place for informing parents, social workers and Ofsted of significant events that take place.

Staff receive training in conflict resolution to equip them with skills to manage the behaviour of children. Accreditation has been obtained with the British Institute for learning Disabilities (BILD) and written guidance produced that shows the approved holds that staff are allowed to use. Behaviour of children is good and positive relationships have been forged with staff. Staff use de-escalation techniques effectively to limit the need for sanctions and physical restraint. Good behaviour is recognised and the rewards and sanctions record shows that the number of rewards far outweigh the number of sanctions. There are few recorded incidents of physical restraint since the previous inspection in February 2010. An occasional slight increase in number at certain times is accounted for by personal difficulties that young people may be facing. Therapeutic interventions, such as art therapy, are available to support children during these times. The reason for one sanction related to the practice of a member of staff but was ambiguous in its content. Although the Registered Manager said the matter had been explored during a key working session with the child, no written record was kept of this. It is not clear whether consideration has been taken as to whether any further action is necessary.

Well-established systems are in place to manage environmental risks posed to children. There is routine maintenance and servicing of equipment. Fire alarms and evacuation procedures are completed at the frequency recommended by the local fire officer. Risk assessments on the premises and grounds give consideration to special measures that need to be in place because of the isolated location of the home. Safeguards are taken to protect children when participating in outdoor activities, such as cycling and walking. Only staff with experience and holding a relevant leadership qualification are permitted to organise the activity. A risk assessment is completed ahead of each event to identify the particular safeguards that need to be implemented on that occasion. Amongst other risk factors these take into account climate conditions and the dynamics of children taking part.

Robust systems are also in place for assessing the suitability of staff to work with children. Confirmation of the checks completed on each member of staff is sought and retained at the home each time a young person is admitted.

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.

The home is well organised. The senior management team are committed to delivering high standards of care and improving practice. They are aware of their roles and responsibilities and strive to make the home a safe place for children and are aware of their responsibilities. Information is published, within the Statement of Purpose that describes the home's policies and practice. A more child-friendly version specifically for children has been published. However, it does not provide full details and the font size and language used make it difficult for children to read and understand. The Registered manager said that key workers go through the guide with children to explain the contents.

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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
1	ensure that the children's guide is a summary of the Statement of Purpose and is produced in a format appropriate to the age, understanding and communication needs of the children (this refers to using language and font size that is age appropriate.	31/12/2010

	Also including all matters in schedule 1 in the Childrens Home's Regulations in a simplified way) (Regulation 4 (3)(4))	
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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):

- consider how children, may be provided at all reasonable times and without reference to persons working in the home, a telephone on which to make and receive calls in private. Where arrangements regarding privacy and accessibility differ for individual children ensure this is provided for in placement plans and understood by children (NMS 9.5)
- ensure that the registered person records the appropriateness of individual uses of sanctions together with any subsequent action taken (this refers to the recording of one particular sanction in which staff practice was referred to and as discussed with the Registered Manager during the inspection) (NMS 22.11)