

Inspection report for Children's Home

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Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
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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 service is a children's home that is registered to care for three young people from the age of eight to 17 years old on admission, who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home offers opportunities for young people to develop socially acceptable skills and gain an understanding of independence.

The home is a modern three-storey detached house close to local amenities. To the rear of the building there is a small garden with a conservatory and there is parking space for two cars on the front driveway.

There were three young people resident on the day of the inspection, all of whom took some part in the inspection process.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The purpose of this unannounced full key inspection was to reassess all the Every Child Matters outcome areas. Three out of five outcome areas continue to be graded as outstanding because the setting is very successfully providing for children to make progress in their behaviour, education, emotional health and well-being. High quality outcomes are underpinned by good organisation and leadership, coupled with dedicated, well supported and trained staff. Young people's views are heard and there is high quality, individualised support to meet each one's differing needs. A period of stability is being enjoyed by three young people in placement and their progress is outstanding in many areas. Some small organisational and record keeping shortfalls give rise to four recommendations. These have not adversely affected children, but do have the potential to do so.

Improvements since the last inspection

No recommendations or actions were raised at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The kitchen is never locked and it is next to the dining room, providing a very welcoming area to sit, eat and talk together in a homely atmosphere. Older young people in placement have made significant gains in their ability to prepare a range of nutritious meals and all young people are encouraged to eat orderly meals together

and take part in the work of preparing and clearing away. These routines support young people to be healthy and function better in all their activities. Young people can make choices about the food that is bought and sometimes assist in shopping and cooking. Information is not currently displayed about menus and healthy eating, but a fruit bowl provides a source of healthy snacks.

Young people are given good guidance and hygiene routines to help them take control of their bodies and health, for example, regularly showering, cleaning their teeth and understanding the importance of sexual health. Each young person has a member of staff identified to support them during the whole two day shift. This staff member provides stability and emotional support, as well as reinforcing the benefits of rest, sleep and cleanliness for health. Careful liaison takes place between all those working with the young person, so that everyone is aware of the current issues and their impact upon the well-being, behaviour and general health of the young person. Young people are either not smoking or reducing their smoking. None are misusing drugs. They are encouraged to pursue an active lifestyle, including sports and outdoor interests. Episodes of illness are therefore few.

Each young person has an individual health record which is part of their case file. Their medical, dental, optical and hearing needs are all met in an organised way, with regular appointments and encouragement, for example, to wear prescription glasses. Accidents are properly reported, recorded and first aid treatment given by suitably trained staff. Young people are encouraged to wear appropriate safety gear, such as helmets and protective pads when using stunt cycles. First aid supplies and medication are safely stored. These practices support young people's health well.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people's privacy is well respected. They have a key for their own bedroom which has an en-suite bathroom. Staff always knock and ask permission to come into the room. No surveillance or locks are used to prevent access to communal rooms and young people enjoy free access to phones, computers and electronic games consoles which are appropriate to their age and agreed safeguarding needs. Safe behaviour is consistently modelled by staff who provide one-to-one care and reinforce house rules which protect everyone. If searches take place, the reasons are clearly explained to young people and a procedure followed. However, guidance about when it may be necessary to search young people's possessions is not currently given to young people when they come to the home and they are not signing the records of searches. This slightly detracts from what is generally good practice.

Young people know how to complain if they are unhappy about any aspect of living in the home. They use the complaint forms in the home and have a series of contact numbers and addresses for advocates and organisations, including Ofsted, to whom they can complain. Records show that their complaints are addressed in a timely manner. However, the complaints system does not provide for the recording of

informal and verbal complaints and their outcome, for example, from neighbours. As a result, there is an incomplete picture of the action taken by the home following various verbal complaints about incidents in the locality. The home has recently started to retain evidence of compliments, and these include positive comments from professionals involved with young people about how the home facilitates good access to independent support and advocacy to help young people's voices be heard.

The home's procedures are suitable and effective in safeguarding young people. Each young person has the contact numbers for their own local authority social worker and safeguarding unit and the home keeps copies of the safeguarding procedures of each local authority where young people come from. Staff have regular child protection training and good links with schools, social care, police and medical professionals. Robust action is taken, in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures and children's homes regulations, if children make disclosures about abuse or if there are allegations against staff. Each young person has a detailed placement plan and individual risk assessments of their activities. These detail appropriately how their rights to family contact, use of the telephone, supervision and privacy are balanced with the need to safeguard them, and those around them, from harm. All staff know and operate within these parameters so that children are consistently protected. However, the home does not have or regularly review a risk assessment of the times, places and circumstances when the risk of bullying is at its greatest. Nevertheless, young people are increasingly able to trust adults because they see how high staffing levels and skills prevent bullying.

Young people have consistent opportunities to learn to manage their behaviour in an acceptable way and are making good progress with this. For example, they have individual daily and weekly reward schemes enabling them to earn extra pocket money for achieving consistent routines and good behaviour. Key carers give high quality support to their designated young person. Young people are given praise and encouragement when they manage situations positively and appropriately. For example, they might ask if they can remove themselves from a situation by going to their bedroom for a short time instead of losing control and having a violent or destructive outburst. Staff have highly effective communication within the team. As a result, they know in detail about each young person's present needs and issues day-to-day. The high levels of support and individualised care that staff give mean that behavioural incidents are few. Instances of young people being absent without authority are rare and behavioural incidents requiring restraint are also reduced.

Security is proportionate to essential requirements, such as locking medicines, chemicals and sharp knives away. Training, procedures and checks ensure that the building and utilities are safe and adequate for purpose, both day-to-day and in the event of an emergency. For example, fire evacuations drills are regular so that everyone knows what to do. Contingency plans are in place for crises, such as sustained power loss or flood. Damage to furniture or decoration is mostly made good promptly and staff cooperate fully together to ensure that everyone plays their part in ensuring that the house is kept safe and clean for children during each shift. Visitors to the home are properly checked and monitored to keep children safe.

Similarly, the organisation's robust recruitment and induction systems ensure that children are cared for by carefully selected and suitable adults.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people receive an excellent level of individualised support from committed staff and managers who are consistently available to them and work successfully to nurture positive relationships with them. This starts from the moment they are introduced to the home and given their personal copy of the young people's guide. Access to individualised therapeutic work is provided from various local sources to help each young person come to terms with their difficult experiences and family relationships. Personal, health, social and sex education is provided mostly through key worker sessions. There is reliable evidence from observation and monthly progress reports that each of the young people in placement are making excellent progress. They are settled in good routines, managing their anger and behaviour well, and making friendships as a result.

There is constant and successful work from all staff to achieve and maintain good quality relationships and a harmonious household where each child is recognised as a significant individual who makes a contribution to the home and who takes responsibility for their part in the group. As a result, each young person truly feels secure and participates with increasing competence and appropriateness. Outings, holidays and individual hobbies are nurtured, encouraged and enjoyed. For example, young people go to youth club, go-karting, horse riding, Taekwondo and swimming. They play locally with school friends, visiting BMX parks. Group outings to theme parks or cinema take place on occasions, although young people's interests and ages are diverse at present. Within the home, young people are learning to cooperate well together and share during their free time, perhaps playing active electronic games, completing art homework, or watching favourite television programmes together.

Particular success is being achieved presently with every young person managing full-time education or training. Excellent support is provided, tailored to each young person's situation, to support good working routines and successful learning. Staff help young people get to school by supporting the achievement of good night and morning routines. They develop trust and competence so that young people can now use public transport or bicycles to get about and attend school trips and events. Consistent weekday routines include time for every child to settle to complete homework and/or spend time quietly before the evening meal. Staff support this well and the time is used to further children's success in developing their learning and self-discipline.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are very appropriately placed here and their needs are assessed and met with insight and success. Each young person has detailed and continuing care plans addressing all areas, such as health, education, culture and individuality, family contact and behaviour. All incidents and significant events, positive and negative, are noted and used alongside key worker records to make monthly summaries of each young person's progress. Young people's progress since placement is excellent. They are learning to manage anger; to attend school and complete homework, and are developing positive peer and adult relationships. They are learning valuable life and independence skills, such as budgeting, cooking and getting themselves to school on time.

Key workers are matched very carefully to young people because the aim is that they will be the main adult to whom the child can develop a real and positive attachment. In some cases, staff undertake specific training to assist them in empathising with their key young person's particular difficulties. These positive relationships are enabling children to understand what suitable relationships with adults are. As a result, there is great progress for individual children as they learn how to conduct themselves properly, stay safe, establish appropriate friendships, and understand their sexuality.

Young people are supported well to participate in reviews, meetings and therapy sessions. In some instances key workers arrange advocacy to ensure that young people can put their personal views across to professionals about what they want for the future. Young people are helped to understand the decisions made in the review meetings although reports, minutes and records of meetings are sometimes detailed and hard to understand. The home's staff are highly committed to helping children maintain and build their sense of belonging, through family visits, phone and electronic contact. Any restrictions on family contact are carefully explained and the issues dealt with sensitively and openly, helping young people to gain appropriate understanding about their past and family situations. Staff accompany children where necessary on long journeys to their home towns, facilitating and supervising family contact visits as appropriate.

Careful and considered preparations go into planned moves too, subject to the requirements of the placing authorities concerned. Similarly, new relationships between young people and staff are carefully nurtured when new staff are recruited. Young people are carefully prepared for the visits of prospective new staff and their views and feelings about them are fully taken into account before appointments and changes to carers are made. Young people also complete monthly consultation forms to say what they feel about life in the home, including their needs and wishes about leisure, culture, contact, health and safety, privacy and personal space.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people receive excellent care which fully takes into account their stage of development and helps to prepare them for living in a family or future independence. The daily life of the home provides good opportunities for children to take care of their personal hygiene, their possessions and personal space. The young people presently in placement have made immense progress in catching up educationally and in learning to manage their emotions and behaviour. Staff encourage young people to save some of their reward monies and help them to exercise age-appropriate choices about what they buy with pocket money. Older young people have saved for phones and special clothes. Bank accounts have been opened and young people are working towards managing their clothing and food budgets through these.

Young people enjoy a spacious, very well decorated and appointed home which feels like a real family home. Furnishings are comfortable, robust and to a high standard throughout. Young people's bedrooms are personalised and staff encourage them to keep their rooms clean and tidy. Young people have a television in their room and some of them have their phones and computers in there too. They are proud of their room and increasingly show good levels of respect for others' rooms, privacy and possessions. The pleasant environment helps each young person to feel safe and valued because staff provide consistently high standards of physical care and any damage or mess is usually quickly rectified without any breach of dignity for young people. The bathrooms are clean and very well appointed, with young people's towels and toiletries kept handy. There are computers, televisions and games consoles available downstairs which young people respect and use daily, with good help and support from staff.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The home's Statement of Purpose and the young person's guide provide full and personalised information which give a detailed account about what the company and the home is like. Support for staff is mostly well organised and effective, with high quality handover meetings between shifts and good levels of ongoing training for all. Staff work confidently and openly together and many are embarking on further professional and management training.

Appraisals and supervisions are not taking place on time in all instances, especially when staff are working between more than one home, but the new quality assurance lead person is organising a matrix for ensuring that this improves. Overall, young people are receiving high quality care from committed, skilled and consistent, caring staff. Managers are warm and active in the life of the home, providing consistent and competent leadership and presence for staff and children alike. The office and recording systems are organised in ways which all staff understand how to operate,

although there is some duplication of effort. Overall, staff morale is high.

Managers are taking steps to improve the timeliness of Regulation 33 visits so that they support the home's own monitoring better and are more effective to flag up weaknesses early. There is also currently a full review of the home and organisation's policies and procedures taking place in order to comply with the new minimum standards. The managers and company strive for excellence, but do not presently have a clear written plan or goals for the home itself. They have not considered where and how the outcomes for the young people in placement can be adapted and continuously improved. For example, there are some missed opportunities to personalise the downstairs rooms with photos or items chosen by young people and to display evidence of their achievements and interests.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good because the care of young people is highly individualised. Their rooms and case files reflect this clearly. Staff practice in a very caring, positive way, listening and valuing each individual young person's differences. They support young people's individual interests and preferences well and help them to balance these with the establishment of conformity to the basic social rules of life.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the complaints procedure provides for persons including neighbours to make minor as well as major complaints and that a written record is made of any informal attempts at resolving the complaint (NMS 16.3 and 16.4)
- ensure that young people are given guidance on when it may be necessary to search their possessions and ensure that when they are present during searches and that they sign the records (NMS 9.8)
- undertake risk assessments of the potential for bullying within the home (NMS 26.2)
- prepare a written development plan, reviewed annually for the future of the home, identifying any planned changes in the operation or resources of the home (NMS 33.5).