

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC020133
Inspection date	12/08/2011
Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	28/03/2011
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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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the *Inspections of children's homes – framework for inspection* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is registered for eight young people aged between 12 and 18 years of age. It provides care for up to 12 months to children or young people with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. Education is provided 365 days a year, both on site and through camps and outdoor activities. The large home is set in its own grounds and is accessible to leisure facilities and outdoor pursuits. There is a games room and music room. Staff are suitably qualified and equipped to provide challenging outdoor pursuits for young people as part of individualised education and care programmes.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **outstanding**.

The home is exceptional in providing highly personalised, well planned care. The individual needs of each young person are taken into careful account in every case. As a result, young people are making outstanding progress.

Each young person expresses very positive views about the quality of care in the home. For example, they say it is, 'a lovely environment', and, 'you can really talk to staff, it really helps you if you have a difficult background'. Young people are kept very safe and express clearly that they feel safe. This is because the staff input and clear behaviour boundaries provided by the home protect young people very effectively and enable them to take increasing control of their unsafe behaviours.

There are excellent relationships between staff and young people. Leaders, managers and all care and education staff have extremely high expectations of young people. They all work together in a highly effective and consistent manner on a day-to-day basis. This enables young people to achieve outstanding outcomes. Excellent staff practice is underpinned by consistent and effective management monitoring as well as clear ambition to achieve continuous improvements.

There is one recent occasion when a shortfall occurred in the application of the home's guidance regarding room searches. This has not had an adverse impact on the safety or well-being of the young people involved. One further advisory recommendation is raised regarding young people's involvement in their records. This is raised in order to assist the home's continuous improvement.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the home only carries out searches of a child, their room or their possessions in accordance with the home's guidance (NMS 3.20)
- extend the support and encouragement offered to young people to read their files and correct errors and add personal statements. (NMS 22.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **outstanding**.

Young people are making exceptional progress towards a positive self-view, emotional resilience, and knowledge and understanding of their background. They are able to explain confidently how they have changed their behaviour and priorities since coming here. They can explain with insight the circumstances which led to their placement and the dangers and vulnerabilities that they have been exposed to. They express a personal commitment to gaining the self-confidence and qualifications which will enable them to achieve a better future.

Young people are all taking a full part in education which is individually tailored to their needs. They each enjoy a full programme of classroom education and outdoor education and trips. These are provided by qualified teachers, outdoor teaching instructors and care staff. Some young people are also enabled to access mainstream school and college courses as appropriate. As a result, young people are making significant progress towards closing the gap between them and their peers.

Young people talk enthusiastically about their achievements in rock climbing, biking, caving, outdoor swimming, kayaking and camping. Young people also enjoy a full range of individual choices and activities in their leisure time, including cinema, bowling, theme park trips and meals out. They feel valued and supported and are making excellent progress as a result.

Young people's health has improved significantly while in placement. Some of them have given up smoking and others are reducing their smoking. They are choosing and eating a balanced, nutritious diet. They are undertaking regular exercise and are delighted to find that they are good at sports and outdoor pursuits which they have never previously tried, such as climbing. They feel nurtured when they are ill, because staff are attentive and kind to them and make sure that they receive medical attention. Young people's progress in health and education is considerable, given their starting points and the brief time that some of them have been in placement.

Young people's emotional health is also much improved. They have all established

good sleep patterns and daily routines. They are motivated to get up and take part in the activities of the day. They benefit from appropriate contact with family, friends and other people who are important to them. They understand the basis of all their telephone and face-to-face contact arrangements, including the reasons why their wishes cannot be acted upon in all cases. This is because staff, managers and placing authorities work consistently together. They are open and clear with each young person, making sure that they are included and considered in all the planning and decisions which are made about them.

Young people are being extremely well prepared for adult life or for their next steps towards independence. This is because the plans and support offered to each young person are individualised and aim high. All young people are assisted and supported to be competent and independent in taking care of themselves and their personal space. They are encouraged to be involved in the running of the home and to take personal responsibility alongside their peers for their environment. There are clear and realistic pathway plans in place for older young people. Each young person knows what they want to happen next and what they have to do to achieve it.

Quality of care

The quality of the care is **outstanding**.

Staff and managers are proactive, skilled and imaginative in finding ways to support young people to make progress. They all have consistently high expectations of young people and place the well-being of each one at the centre of their practice. This is evident both in the quality and the quantity of time which staff and managers spend with young people. They are seen to actively listen, guide, and support them through the normal routines of the home. Placing social workers talk about 'the perfect balance of toughness and gentleness' provided by staff. Staff act confidently and consistently as would a good and responsible parent. As a result, young people are making excellent gains in confidence and self-worth. They are able to reduce and stop previous unsafe behaviours, such as going missing, self-harm, and getting arrested for various crimes.

The home is appropriately located, designed and well maintained to provide a homely, yet safe environment. All areas are kept clean by staff and young people together. Young people feel comfortable and spend quality time with staff in the lounge, games room, kitchen and dining room. They know who is on duty and who is looking after them and enjoy the security of familiar, caring staff working with them. There are regular meetings and young people are routinely listened to, formally and informally. There is not an institutional feel to the home despite its size. This is because modern decorations, homely furniture and domestic effects are in place. In addition, young people understand the boundaries of the offices and know that staff spend as much time with them as possible. They are confident to ask questions and seek explanations about decisions. They can make complaints, and express satisfaction with the way that these have been dealt with.

Staff celebrate young people's achievements and shower them with positive

attention. They foster their personal identity, helping them to feel valued as they shop for clothes together, or arrange special leaving school 'prom' celebrations. They ensure that young people's gender, sexual orientation, and cultural preferences are identified and met, both in daily living and care planning. Photographs, certificates and mementos are gathered and presented to all young people to celebrate their time in the placement. Young people's rooms are highly personalised and decorated to reflect their hobbies and preferences. Individual possessions are valued and kept safe, and young people understand when and why risk assessments dictate that items, such as telephones, sharp items and aerosols might be held in the office.

The home makes high quality contributions to young people's placement plans and subsequent reviews of future arrangements. Managers are proactive to ensure that key aspects, such as education and psychological help, are provided effectively and in a timely manner. Staff and managers work closely with young people, their placing authorities and advocates to correctly identify young people's changing needs throughout their stay. They very effectively ensure that future plans are achievable, in each young person's best interests and understood and wanted by the young person. As a result, young people demonstrate high levels of understanding about the purpose of their placement and their goals for the future. They are successfully and confidently able to state these goals and what they have to do to achieve them. Young people are actively involved in reading and signing records that are made about them, but they seldom add their own comments or design records in more child-friendly ways that make more sense to themselves. There is no adverse impact to this because young people's levels of engagement with their plans is already excellent.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **outstanding** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Young people are exceptionally well safeguarded in the setting. All young people are at considerable risk of criminalisation or exploitation when placed. They require periods of high level supervision and strong boundaries in order to stabilise and reduce extremely risky and unsafe behaviours, including self-harm, violent outbursts, and going missing. Young people have a strong sense of safety and well-being here. They all say that they feel safe here. For example, they know why they cannot presently safely have free time out and access to their mobile telephone. They say that they can now easily settle to sleep because they do not have bad messages being sent to them late at night on their telephones. Young people are taking control of unsafe behaviours and are increasingly able to choose to go to their room and cool off, rather than get into physical confrontations with others. They are proud that they have stopped going missing, hurting themselves or getting arrested. They are proud that they can choose to concentrate on their education and have positive times with their families instead of getting caught up with people who have exploited them.

Staff and managers have a highly individualised approach to each young person's

safety. Risk assessments and care plans are tailored and regularly updated to accurately reflect what each young person can do. These documents accurately balance young people's progress with their original risks, so that realistic risks can start to be taken as they gain increasing control of their behaviour. Young people who have been in placement for some time are progressing, with staff support, towards safely managing previously unsafe areas, such as home contact, relationships with peers in the community, unsupervised spending and mobile telephones. Lapses are few and incidents of physical restraint, allegations, going missing, or calling the police to the home, are rare. Young people are very well safeguarded from harm as a result. There has, however, been one recent instance when room searches were conducted without young people being present. Young people's rights were safeguarded adequately because they discussed the incident with staff and saw and signed the records of the search. However, the home's guidance was not followed in every respect. There was no record of the risk assessment and the decision to conduct the search without informing the young people concerned. Discussion with managers revealed that the impact of the shortfall on young people is negligible. This is because the risk assessment and decision were properly made even though no written record was made to evidence this.

Overall, staff and managers operate highly robust procedures to protect young people fully. For example, all new staff are thoroughly vetted and do not start work until all checks and induction are completed, including obtaining feedback from young people about their impressions of the applicant. Similarly, any investigations into allegations or suspicions of harm are handled effectively to ensure that there is support and protection for young people and adults who are the subject of allegations. The environment is also appropriately secure, for example, there are bedroom door alarms activated at night. These alarms are used according to the home's guidance and young people understand the safeguarding reasons for this.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the children's home are **outstanding**.

Managers provide exemplary leadership and input to the home. They consistently provide a role model for the highest standard of practice and they motivate staff at all levels to perform effectively. They routinely use rigorous monitoring activities to ensure that the home's procedures are effectively supporting consistently high quality care. Responsibilities for leading on training, policy review and education are shared and there is effective and regular communication, both formal and informal, to ensure that the whole staff group is clear about practice and the purpose of any changes. Notifications of significant events are promptly made and with good detail. They provide evidence of robust action and good liaison with appropriate authorities. This is further evidence that young people are safeguarded by the work of the home.

There are high staffing levels underpinning the service. Most staff are well qualified, motivated, and long standing. They are well supervised, appraised, supported and encouraged to obtain further professional qualifications. Rotas are well planned, with time for thorough handovers, and staff meetings are fruitful. Rotas are subject to

few changes and agency staff are not used. All staff work very cooperatively across specialisms in care, education and outdoor education, so that young people receive consistent and seamless high quality care at all times.

The home has its own action and development plans, based on long-standing experience of the purpose and ethos of the home. There is a proven capacity to build on areas of strength. For example, the home's managers and staff disseminate their knowledge and skills to support staff at the organisation's other home. No recommendations or requirements were made at the last inspection and the home has consistently maintained good and outstanding outcomes over recent years. This track record is underpinned by long standing and committed staff at every level. Placing authorities are clear about the home's aims and have high levels of confidence in its track record of success with the most challenging of young people.

Equality and diversity practice is **outstanding**.