

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Joanna Heller
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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

This is a registered care home for five young people of either sex aged between 12 years and 18 years old. The home provides 24-hour care for young people with emotional or behavioural difficulties. The home is part of a small private organisation which provides residential childcare, leaving care services, fostering services, family outreach and a residential family centre.

Overall effectiveness

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

This is a well resourced and very well managed home where very little placement breakdown is experienced. Staff are competent, caring and well trained. Young people demonstrate strong individual growth and progress during their time at the home. The one recommendation at the previous inspection relating to the recording of sanctions has been effectively addressed.

Young people comment that they are more able to make positive decisions about their lives. Young people enjoy living at the home and spending time with staff. The relationships built between staff and young people make young people feel safe and well cared for. These relationships underpin the home's success in nurturing young people. Young people say 'Its like living in a family, we all get on pretty well'.

Areas for improvement

Outcomes for children and young people

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

The home is welcoming and provides young people with a stable, secure and nurturing environment. Young people grade the home as good to outstanding. Professionals involved in the care of the young people feel that the care provided is outstanding. It is clear that most young people's experiences of the home are highly positive and that they experience significant personal growth. Young people enjoy the time they spend with caring staff who provide strong positive role models. Young people receive highly individualised care and support centred on their thoughts, wishes and feelings. Young people are encouraged to celebrate their cultural and spiritual heritage, establishing a clear identity as a young person growing up in Britain today.

All of the young people are healthy and are provided with the support to develop good emotional resilience and increase their maturity and coping mechanisms. This is demonstrated through young people turning their back on gang membership and

offending behaviour. Young people comment 'staff are excellent.'

Family members are made welcome and young people are able to welcome their family into their home. All of the young people are enrolled in some form of education or employment. Staff are proactive in discussing with young people their options and developing strategies to motivate them to engage in some form of education. Young people arriving at the home with little interest in education and poor attendance have made significant progress. Some young people achieve excellent school attendance, gaining recognition for not having missed any school days this term. Young people enjoy weekly one-to-one activities of their choice with their key workers in addition to the planned group activities. Young people also enjoyed two annual holidays in the past year.

Staff support young people to develop self care skills from the point they move in, such as getting involved in cooking, as well as managing their own laundry. Young people are able to identify their personal emotional growth and what this individually means for them. As young people get older, more formal support is offered through the home's independence programme, which is tailored to link with their pathway plan. Young people who have moved on to independent living, maintain links with the home and are engaged in education. They comment positively on the support they received, and continue to receive, from staff.

Quality of care

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

Staff and management display an outstanding commitment to ensuring young people have the best life outcomes possible. Young people experience significant personal growth since coming to the home. This is individually demonstrated through areas such as the reduction in gang membership, commitment to education and the building of confidence and self esteem. Young people and staff enjoy positive relationships with each other. Young people refer to staff as caring, people they enjoy spending time with, who are funny and make them laugh through their anger, but who are also serious when they need to be. Key workers are viewed by most young people as strong role models and important people in their lives. Young people, ex-residents and placing authorities comment on the competence, friendliness, professionalism and caring nature of staff.

Staff ensure clear, consistent boundaries are in place. Staff seek to talk through issues with young people to understand why they act as they do. Staff then work with young people to help them through these issues and seek to equip them with the anger management skills they need. For example, young people spoke about how staff helped them write a very difficult letter to their family. Other young people are benefitting from a mentoring type of relationship. Young people are helped to develop maturity and learn appropriate ways to express themselves rather than resorting to negative behaviour. Systems are in place to reward achievements and positive behaviour.

Young people say they feel respected by staff and that staff expect respect back, and young people emphasise that this is underpinned by staff having a sense of humour. Young people refer to staff as being people who make young people feel as if they really are cared for, and that staff work at the home because they want to be with them. Young people say that staff are always available and happy to help them through any crisis. Young people are fully aware of their care plans, which, are sufficiently detailed to as guide staff effectively in the day-to-day support needs of the young people. Staff ensure that young people are educated about and supported to celebrate their faith and heritage as they wish. Young people are encouraged to discuss their feelings and issues regarding their individual needs and aspirations in a sensitive manner, ensuring that their individual needs are met. Staff consult young people on all aspects of their lives and ensure that the care and support provided is highly child focused. Staff ensure that young people know how to complain and have confidence in the home to effectively respond to any issues they raise.

Education is positively promoted and young people are rewarded for regular attendance and commitment. This is evidenced for some young people by an increase in school attendance from 8% to 70%. Staff have established relationships with young people's schools, colleges and the virtual head teacher. Staff are aware of the educational abilities and goals of each of the young people. Staff are proactive at advocating for young people where alternative educational opportunities are required. Staff talk to young people about their aspirations and academic strengths, ensuring education is viewed as a way to improve their life chances. Staff ensure reading material of young people's choice is purchased, for example, autobiographies of successful entrepreneurs and age appropriate fiction. Relevant employment and apprenticeship opportunities are actively sought to ensure young people have the best opportunities of entering the world of employment. Young people continue with these placements once they have left the home.

All of the young people are healthy. Staff ensure that they are nurtured to develop good emotional resilience and increase their maturity and coping mechanisms. Young people are supported in developing their independence and managing the bookings of their own appointments as they move towards independence. Children and young people are encouraged to enjoy healthy lifestyles and are supported to access medical professionals such as doctors, dentists and opticians as appropriate. Staff attend sessions such as 'stop smoking clinics' with young people. The home privately engages counselling services to help young people. The organisation is moving towards being accredited as a therapeutic setting. Some young people choose unhealthy convenience foods, however, staff continue to discuss with young people the importance of healthy eating. Staff ensure that nutritious meals are available and fresh fruit and healthy snacks are actively encouraged. Discussions also take place with young people about issues such as giving up smoking and the use of drugs, with outside agencies involved as appropriate. Staff are well trained and competent, having received training in key areas such as first aid, food handling, emotional wellbeing and other issues which affect young people.

The building provides young people with welcoming homely accommodation that meets their needs. Each young person has their own personalised bedroom which

they are able to lock and keep private. Young people are given a budget to personalise their rooms and are able to take these things with them when they move on. Young people benefit from a home which is homely, clean, well maintained and decorated.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Staff continuously monitor group dynamics within the home, swiftly addressing any issues of conflict. Young people emphasise that living at the home is like living in family style setting where they are able to raise issues which are worrying them, immediately ensuring young people feel safe and supported. Bullying is not an issue of concern and young people are confident that staff will address any issues swiftly to ensure they remain safe.

Placing authorities comment positively on the ability of staff to effectively introduce structure and boundaries for young people who have not experienced these before. Staff ensure that young people know the behavioural expectations and rules, and enforce these rules fairly. House rules are fair and appropriate to the age group of the young people, reflecting good parenting standards. Positive behaviour reward systems are in place, which formally recognise young people's individual targets and achievements each week. These targets are broadly set around education, self care and behaviour. Systems for managing negative behaviour are applied consistently and remain child focused. Young people refer to staff enabling them to talk through their anger and become more aware of themselves and the impact their behaviour has on others. The young people see this as a strength of the home. Restraint is used rarely; however, all staff are trained in control and restraint and de-escalation techniques. Staff are competent in managing difficult situations and minimise the involvement of the police to prevent the criminalisation of behaviour. Sanctions applied are appropriate and relevant to the negative behaviour displayed. The consistent and robust approach to managing behaviour, as well as high expectations, ensures that young people learn to accept appropriate boundaries. The therapeutic approach to behaviour management ensures that young people feel that staff are 'there for them'.

Comprehensive risk assessments are in place for young people, which identify their vulnerability and any risks they may pose to others. Activity based risk assessments are also in place. Young people highlight their increasing age and desire for freedom as the reason when they go missing. Young people acknowledge that this causes friction as they do not wish to share details of where they are going. Staff regularly discuss with young people about the risks they face when going missing; however, this is an area where some young people continue to push boundaries. Staff ensure their safety as best as they can, and notify them as missing to the appropriate agencies, in line with local guidelines, having first tried all avenues to locate them.

Young people are safeguarded from unsuitable people gaining employment in the

home through robust vetting practices. Management ensure no member of staff is employed at the home unless checks have been undertaken to ensure their suitability to work with vulnerable young people. Checks on the continuing suitability of staff are undertaken periodically.

Any issues of a child protection nature are managed appropriately, ensuring the safety of the child remains paramount. Staff are aware of what to do should an issue of a child protection nature arise having received regular training on safeguarding young people.

Management maintain the safety and security of the building and therefore the safety of young people, staff and visitors through robust monitoring systems. Staff also ensure hazardous chemicals and sharp knives are stored securely. Fire precautionary arrangements in the home ensure young people and staff are safeguarded from fire in line with current good practice.

Leadership and management

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

This is a well resourced and well managed home. Management and staff consistently demonstrate high expectations of, and aspirations for, the young people in their care. Little changeover occurs in the staff team, most of whom have worked at the home for several years, ensuring continuity for young people.

The owner/manager leads by example and has high expectations of staff as well as young people. The manager and senior staff reinforce the good parenting role and expect staff decisions to be based on the principle of 'if this was your child, what would you do?'. Staff consistently demonstrate reflective practice, always trying to understand what worked or did not work in a particular situation and why. Staff work solidly together as a team to ensure good outcomes for young people. The management team as a whole are approachable, flexible and supportive. Regular staff meetings and supervision ensure that staff are aware of key issues within the home. The management team meeting reviews any new legislation and changes in best practice, ensuring they remain at the forefront of good child care. The one recommendation from the last inspection regarding the recording of sanctions has been addressed.

The organisation demonstrates an excellent commitment to staff training. Core training such as child protection, first aid, food hygiene, medication, behaviour management, restraint and health and safety, is provided to all staff and updated appropriately. Staff also undertake a comprehensive variety of relevant training in areas such as Sexual Health, Self Harm, Autism, Learning Disability Awareness, Cultural Awareness, Key Working, Care Planning and Risk Assessments, equality and diversity and Every Child Matters. Staff are competent, having completed training in working with children and young people to diploma level. Staff are also planning to undertake formal training in the therapeutic approach. This is to support one of the management team's aims to be a recognised therapeutic setting.

Management ensure information about the home is made available to young people in formats which they can easily understand. The welcome pack provided to all young people includes a copy of the young people's guide. Management ensure that complaints are effectively responded to, investigated and managed. Young people know how to complain and have confidence in the management to respond to any issues of concern which they may raise.

The home is well staffed, enabling the staff team to provide highly individualised and child focused care. Staff are competent in the role they perform and establish genuine and positive relationships with young people and other stakeholders. Young people benefit from strong role models of both sexes and from a wide variety of backgrounds.

The organisation has effective systems in place for monitoring the standards of care within the home. These include good quality assurance feedback systems from young people and other stakeholders. Any issues identified are swiftly addressed and staff, under the guidance of the manager, are continually striving to improve.

Feedback from young people and placing authorities is highly complementary regarding the competence, interpersonal skills, and commitment of staff. Professionals refer to their experiences of working with the home as excellent, highlighting the ability of staff to work well in partnership with young people and their families, as well as placing authorities, in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for young people. Young people refer to staff as being caring people who are always there for them. This is very well managed and resourced home, with a team of staff who consistently demonstrate that they place the young people at the centre of everything they do.

Equality and diversity practice is **outstanding**.