

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Malcolm Stannard / Michelle Oxley
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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 unit is registered as a secure children's home, operated by a local authority and is approved by the Secretary of State to provide secure care and accommodation. Education is provided on site in dedicated school facilities. The unit provides secure accommodation for up to 24 young people.

Overall effectiveness

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

This approval inspection has the purpose of informing the Secretary of State of the continuing suitability for this provision to operate as a secure unit to restrict children's liberty.

The unit provides care for a high number of young people who display a range of particularly unsettled behaviour. The comprehensive assessment and planning in operation ensure that individual needs are identified and the work required to address these is carried out. There is a clear emphasis on seeing each young person as an individual and ensuring that they develop emotionally, socially and educationally.

Particular strengths of the unit are: resettlement processes; the highly resourced intervention work; an excellent enrichment provision and the safeguarding of young people's welfare. There is effective leadership and support for staff and quality monitoring is undertaken robustly. There is comprehensive training available for all staff. All of these strengths ensure that young people receive a high quality of care with positive outcomes.

There is a clear vision for education, focused on gaining the best possible outcomes. Managers have been asked, however, to consider improving the access to good quality Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and increasing the attainment of meaningful and substantial qualifications.

The Registered Manager has also been asked to consider providing training for staff in autistic spectrum needs to provide them with additional skills in working with young people. Additionally, a recommendation has been made that sanctions used are relevant to the misdemeanour and the effectiveness is recorded.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of the children and purpose of the setting, specifically that the staff team receive training in autistic spectrum needs (NMS 18.1)
- ensure sanctions and rewards for behaviour are clear, reasonable and fair and are understood by all staff and young people. Specifically, ensure that sanctions issued are effective and reflect the misdemeanour (NMS 3.8)
- ensure young people are provided with appropriate education in the unit. Specifically, enable all young people to have access to good quality ICT (NMS 23.11)
- ensure young people are provided with appropriate education in the unit. Specifically, enable, where possible, young people to gain more meaningful and substantial qualifications. (NMS 23.11)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people receive good support and help to regain stability, develop emotional resilience and a positive self-view. They benefit from a staff team who have good knowledge and understanding. They have a sympathetic approach to young people's backgrounds and experiences and take account of these in their practice.

Interactions between staff and young people serve to enhance young people's self-confidence, with good use of praise and positive reinforcement. Schemes of work are widely used as a means of enabling young people to develop a good level of self-awareness, confidence and identity. Young people on the whole participate willingly and are engaged in activities such as emotive debate and understanding aggressive and offending behaviour. These help them to develop an understanding of their interactions with others and their emotional responses.

Key worker sessions are used to good effect to address individual issues on a one-to-one level. Additional support is offered by the psychology team who also work with individual young people to support identified needs.

Good arrangements are in place to assess, review and provide support to the health requirements of young people on admission. Ongoing medical support is good and includes appropriate access to a range of medical professionals.

Young people receive good support to maintain contact with family members and others important to them. Visits are encouraged and telephone calls can be made in private. Staff at the unit endeavour to have regular contact with parents and keep

them informed of a young person's progress.

Young people's views of the food are generally positive. The menu operates on a five week rolling programme. The menu is well balanced and has been devised with the assistance of a dietician. Young people are consulted about the food they eat. There has been a recent survey to obtain young people's views about the food available for supper.

Young people benefit from a good standard of education. Achievements and standards are good. Young people make good progress in literacy and numeracy, given their starting points and prior attainment. For example, young people who are in the centre for one year or more, on average, make 16 months progress in mathematics and 23 months progress in English. Many of these young people also gain National Open College Network (NOCN) and/or GCSE qualifications in these key subjects. Last year all young people with this length of stay gained GCSEs in mathematics and/or English. Young people who are there for shorter periods also make good progress in literacy and numeracy, although progress in literacy is stronger and more rapid than that in mathematics.

Levels of accreditation have improved since the last inspection, as has the type of qualifications that young people gain. Young people now gain more substantial and meaningful qualifications, such as NOCN awards, that are of value on their return to the community. Though still high, the number of very short qualifications has declined over the last year. These are now beginning to be used more appropriately, mainly when length of stay or other factors mean there is little opportunity for young people to gain other more substantial qualifications.

The centre has enabled young people to gain Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) awards. Last year 41 young people gained the Bronze award and eight gained the Silver award. The achievement of GCSEs has improved significantly. Last year 23 GCSEs were achieved by 15 young people, mainly in mathematics and English, with some high grades.

Many young people come to the centre with histories of very significant behavioural difficulties. Few have experienced any educational success and have not attended school regularly. Many have very negative perceptions of education and there is evidence of considerable underachievement amongst the group. A significant number have special educational needs and many present difficult challenges. Given these barriers, young people's behaviour in lessons is at least acceptable and, in some instances, good. During the inspection little confrontational behaviour towards teachers was seen and most, though not all, behaviour was satisfactory and enabled learning and progress to take place.

The headline figure for overall attendance is satisfactory, although this does not reflect the real figure as it does not always take unavoidable absences, such as legal visits or court appearances, fully into account. When these aspects are considered, attendance is good. Punctuality to lessons is satisfactory and most movements between lessons are relatively calm and efficient.

Standards of work are good in design technology (DT), very good in food technology and art and are outstanding in motor vehicle. Standards of young people's written work are less good but are at least satisfactory.

Quality of care

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

Young people benefit from a staff team who are competent and supportive. They are knowledgeable about the young people and enthusiastic in their work. There are highly positive and appropriate professional relationships in place, with staff acting as role models and clearly setting out the expectations of behaviour to young people. There is a joined-up approach to working with young people ensuring that they receive consistent and individualised good quality care.

Young people have excellent opportunities to contribute to the day-to-day running of the unit and make their views known. They are able, by way of the unit representatives, to pass on any thoughts and suggestions to the Registered Manager. Unit meetings are also held and there is a praiseworthy culture of staff seizing the opportunity to informally seek the views of young people during conversations.

Young people benefit from a robust complaints process. They say that their voices are heard and that staff take their views seriously. The management team address all matters raised by young people, whether formally or informally, and fully investigate each aspect. Young people receive a personal written response from the Registered Manager. These responses are proportionate, fair and understood by young people. Where shortfall in practice and approach are identified, the management team respond swiftly and rigorously to rectify the situation.

The assessments of young people's needs, and the subsequent care plans devised at the initial planning stage, are of extremely high quality. The plans are individual, devised with the input of the young person, contain details of all objectives and are regularly updated to include an in-depth chronology. There is regular auditing of the plans by a manager which ensures all work for that period has been completed. Young people benefit from monthly key worker meetings which help them to understand their plan and progress they have made.

Young people are able to undertake a range of individual and group work packages which help to address individual behaviours and develop their understanding of relationships and lifestyle. There are comprehensive, high quality offending behaviour and citizenship packages available, which ensure all assessed needs and learning styles are accommodated. Young people benefit from well prepared, organised and delivered sessions. Key workers receive excellent guidance and support from the responsible manager in their work with young people, meaning that effective interventions are received.

The enrichment and activities provision available to young people has developed further since the last inspection. Motivated staff use their individual skills and interests to ensure young people have the opportunity for participation in a range of leisure sessions. A skills audit has helped to ensure that all staff are able to share their individual knowledge of recreational pursuits. Young people are able to develop interest in physical, craft and skill learning activities. Young people also benefit from enhanced engagement following the introduction of additional links with community groups. Football and table tennis coaches and a charity bike scheme have all been positive additions, utilising community resources.

Young people's health needs are assessed upon admission, including a screening process to identify areas of vulnerability; this triggers the involvement of health professionals from the outset. Young people have access to support from visiting and on-site psychology and drug and alcohol advisors throughout their stay. They benefit from a joined-up approach of health professionals working alongside care staff to develop specific support programmes. The staff team approach each young person with care and sensitivity, enabling the unit to accommodate and care well for a broad range of need. However, care staff have not received training in autistic spectrum needs in order to equip them with the necessary knowledge to underpin their positive approach.

There are robust systems in place to ensure that medication storage and administration are carried out safely. All staff receive training in the safe handling of medication and the procedures are overseen by senior staff. There are good links through the nurse practitioners with the local pharmacy, helping to ensure a consistent approach to the acquisition of prescribed medication. Following risk assessment and authorisation from medical practitioners, some young people are able to retain their own medication. The procedures and practice in place ensure that the welfare of young people is protected.

In education, there are some variations in the quality of teaching and learning, although overall they are good. In the better lessons, teachers and instructors have planned tasks and activities that provide good challenge to young people who understand the purpose of the activities and why and how they will achieve their objectives. Young people in these lessons enjoy what they are doing and generally remain on task and make good progress. In a very successful art lesson, young people produced charts of varying shades and tints of colour that would enable them to improve the standard of the high quality and complex projects they were working on. In motor vehicle lessons, young people were provided with excellent opportunities to produce work to a professional standard and to gain extremely high levels of skills in a complex and technical vocational area. Successful lessons have good pace and young people are able to experience a range of teaching and learning activities through a variety of tasks. They receive constant feedback on how well they are doing. In these lessons, behaviour is usually good due to teachers/instructors understanding young people's behaviours and working to manage them well.

In the less successful lessons, young people spend too long off task and not working.

Tasks are too simplistic and hence fail to provide sufficient challenge and young people often fail to see the relevance of the work they are doing. Their concentration lapses, as does the standard of their behaviour, which is not always managed successfully.

The curriculum on offer meets the needs of young people satisfactorily. There is an appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy, and science is now provided, along with art and food technology. Design technology is also provided, although there is a lot of emphasis on woodwork and too little on areas such as resistant materials. Although some DT related work is covered in the excellent motor vehicle facility, it does not meet the requirements of the national curriculum. Physical education makes a good contribution to young people's healthy lifestyles. Music is also available. Vocational provision has developed. Hairdressing and construction courses are available, although hairdressing is in the early stages of development. Personal, social and health education and citizenship are not part of the education curriculum, but these subjects are covered through group work sessions on the residential unit.

At present there is no provision for humanities-based subjects. Although young people have some access to ICT through the use of laptops in some lessons, the lack of formal ICT requires urgent attention.

Support for young people is good. Young people receive a thorough induction to the school and an extended induction to the educational programme which is delivered flexibly to meet the needs of individual young people. Particular emphasis is placed on enabling young people to acquire the necessary interpersonal and social skills to engage with staff and other young people in the unit. A full assessment of young people's abilities in literacy and numeracy is completed using a recently established online assessment instrument which provides detailed information. Each young person has a detailed individual learning plan which is used to record targets and achievement. Progress is also monitored using a very effective points system to assess general behaviour as well as engagement and progress in education. Importantly, the points system is understood well by staff and young people and points are awarded fairly and consistently.

Each young person has a personal tutor who meets with the young person at the beginning of each day. This meeting enables discussion of any issues as well as reviewing the young person's points' record. The tutor also carries out a detailed monthly review of progress where achievement is recorded and targets set. Staff also provide a very good level of support to young people who are experiencing particular difficulties. There are monthly meetings between tutors and key workers so as to gain a picture of how well a young person is doing overall.

Young people are encouraged to provide feedback on education and staff are receptive to this feedback. Success and achievement are celebrated within the school through displays of art and craft work and weekly assemblies. The end of day educational handover meeting provides a very useful forum to discuss issues that have arisen during the day and it is focused very clearly on the needs and welfare of individual young people.

Resettlement is excellent. A dedicated member of staff facilitates the contact with Connexions across the country and assists young people with job applications, information about disclosure and practice job interviews. Young people also have the opportunity to practice independent living skills, such as cooking and washing clothes, in a purpose-built unit. They are followed up at regular intervals after leaving the unit and a significant number of young people have entered into sustained education or employment.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

There are exceptionally good systems in place which serve to protect and support young people's safety. Young people receive positive support as well as security. Measures are in place to safeguard and promote their rights, over and above what would be expected in a non-secure setting. Without exception, young people state that they feel safe and well supported in the unit. All said that there is at least one or more staff members who they could approach with concerns. In addition all were aware of the advocate who visits weekly and feel that she is approachable and responsive.

Young people receive additional protection through the experience of the Registered Manager who is a member of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and chairs the safeguarding secure subcommittee. His work in this area has served to raise the profile of safeguarding in a secure setting and has helped other professionals to gain an understanding of secure provision and the needs of young people living there. As a result, the home's process to raise concerns is robust and transparent, ensuring that concerns for young people's welfare are externally scrutinised by the correct agencies without delay.

Excellent, well established and effective procedure is in place to protect young people from bullying. The system operates on three escalating levels, to which young people respond well. Young people say that staff are vigilant in identifying bullying and that incidents are always addressed quickly. Staff are effective in preventing incidents from developing through their willingness to intervene at the earliest point possible.

The number of physical interventions fluctuate, influenced by the severity of behaviour exhibited by individual young people. However, the statistical information demonstrates a drop in the number of restraints for individual young people from the time of admission. This was supported by young people who said that, 'Since I first came here my behaviour has improved, I can talk to people now and hardly ever get restrained'. Restraints are clearly recorded and are scrutinised as part of the monitoring process. This information is used to develop individual management strategies and behaviour management plans to the benefit of young people by reducing the number of physical interventions used.

There are excellent links with other child protection professionals. For example, the local area designated officer (LADO) is a regular visitor to the unit. She is highly involved in the monitoring of restraint and reviews practice and approach with senior staff. This serves to identify any areas for practice development which are promptly addressed. Good practice is also identified and staff are praised accordingly. Young people benefit from this measure of external scrutiny which serves to improve the team's approach and reduce physical restraint wherever possible.

There is a structured approach to behaviour management, based around an incentives scheme. Young people understand the scheme and believe it to be effective. The system enables young people to earn rewards for positive behaviour. Where young people do not respond to the scheme, the psychology team devise individual behaviour management plans to ensure that positive behaviour is promoted for all young people.

Individual risk assessments are regularly updated and staff are aware of the associated actions required in relation to each young person. Increased levels of risk are used to determine the frequency of room searches. Young people said that these are conducted sensitively and usually when they were at school. Young people have been involved in the risk assessment process. Some excellent work has been carried out involving young people's views of the risks associated with different areas within the units. These differed from the adult perspective and have been utilised to good effect, ensuring that enhanced safety measures have been introduced in the areas causing young people concern.

Robust, well organised staff vetting processes protect young people. Each application is scrutinised and any anomaly investigated, ensuring a very thorough process. The Registered Manager conducts a Warner interview with every new applicant following receipt of all satisfactory information, relevant documentation and vetting checks.

The restorative justice programme has continued to develop; all staff are now trained in its use and it is used much more frequently. This enables young people to take responsibility for their actions. There has been a reduction in the number of sanctions used. However, many of those which are implemented tend to involve similar measures and do not always relate to the young person's behaviour. The log for recording sanctions on occasions does not include the explanation of the effectiveness of each sanction.

The health and safety of everyone at the unit is robustly addressed. Risk assessments are in place and continuing work is undertaken to ensure that the unit is safe and secure. There are servicing agreements in place for all utilities and any maintenance required is carried out promptly. Excellent links are in place with local emergency services.

Leadership and management

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

There is effective leadership of the unit by the Registered Manager and an experienced, competent senior management team. The aims and objectives of the unit are set out clearly in its Statement of Purpose. Staff and managers are fully aware of, and meet, their responsibilities in ensuring the stated aims of the unit are achieved on a day-to-day basis, ensuring a high standard of outcomes for young people.

The guide to the unit for young people has been rewritten since the last inspection and contains all required information. Young people contribute to the design and content and it is informative, covering all aspects of daily life at the centre and their rights and responsibilities. The guide is available in a range of different formats including other languages, ensuring all young people are able to understand the content.

The manager demonstrates an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the unit. He consults regularly with senior managers and there is a comprehensive development plan in place. Extensive monthly internal monitoring covers all aspects of the unit's operation and a yearly position plan is compiled. Senior managers use the information to instigate development of identified areas of practice, as well as setting targets. There continues to be a good record of compliance and all recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed. Young people benefit from a management and staff team who continually strive for improvement.

The Registered Manager receives very good support from an external manager. The unit is adequately resourced and constant evaluation of resources is undertaken to ensure financial viability. External monitoring is undertaken by a visitor in line with regulation. Reports are compiled following each visit and the views of young people, parents and staff are taken into account as part of the process. This allows the collation of a wide range of views regarding the unit.

The unit employs a sufficient number of staff, who all receive regular formal supervision. The training opportunities in place are outstanding. The unit has responded positively to ensure that nationally approved induction standards are fully implemented. Formal qualifications are undertaken by staff, as well as mandatory and other refresher courses, which enhance their professional practice. Some staff members are identified to need specialist knowledge in working with particular young people, including areas such as sexual offending and car crime, and are trained appropriately. Sufficient time is allocated for staff to complete training sessions. Staff meetings are held regularly, enabling dissemination of information and consolidation of practice. All of the above assist staff to carry out their roles with young people proficiently. Managers are clear in their expectations for sustained improvement in staff skills and practice.

Young people's records are of a high quality. They are comprehensive, kept up to date and clearly identify progress. The information available ensures that the young person and staff are fully aware of the assessed needs and plans for each individual.

Managers carry out regular auditing of the files, ensuring that required intervention work has been completed. The unit regularly provides accommodation for young people who demonstrate some extremely disruptive behaviour. The ability of staff members to meet the needs of these young people and work with them to modify behaviour is exceptional. The records of the work undertaken assist in understanding the history and progression each young person makes.

Leadership and management of formal education are very good. The head of the unit and the head of education provide strong and relevant guidance and leadership to staff. The aims of the unit are stated clearly, understood by staff and focus well on the welfare and development of young people. The head of education is very visible within school. Senior staff have a good understanding of the strengths and the areas for development within education and there are well developed plans to implement change. Education staff supervision is in place and staff have access to training, although on occasions not all staff can attend events. Staff work well together and relationships between education staff and care staff are good.

Data is used well to monitor important aspects of the school's work such as achievements, refusals and the number of young people being returned to the residential units for poor behaviour. This data is used to identify any trends and patterns within the school. A good start has been made to improve the tracking of progress in subjects and further developments are in an advanced stage of planning.

Resources are generally good. Most classrooms are bright and airy and some contain interactive whiteboards, although these were not observed in use during the inspection. Facilities for PE are good although some equipment in the fitness suite is out of order. The induction room is very noisy due to the electronic doors and the control room telephone being audible. Facilities for motor vehicles are excellent and other vocational resources are developing well. The teachers' resource room is very small. When young people are removed from lessons for a short period of time in order to reflect on their behaviour before returning to the lesson, there is no appropriate accommodation for them to use during this time out of the classroom. The new science lab is of good quality. Resources for food technology are very good.

The text of the school's self-evaluation, although a little descriptive rather than evaluative in some areas, provided a largely accurate picture of the school, although some grades were over-generous. Internal and external lesson observations, though a little descriptive are carried out and provide a reasonably accurate evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning.

Equality and diversity practice is **outstanding**.