

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Julian Parker
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to three young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home is privately owned.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

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

Care planning and childcare practice is personalised to ensure that assessed needs of young people can be addressed by following structured placement plans. When actively engaging with their programme of care, the home provides a safe physical environment with staffing levels sufficient to keep young people safe. Young people are encouraged to participate in making the decisions that affect them on a day-to-day basis, where these will not compromise their safety. Staff operate in a considered and coordinated way with young people, their families, social workers and all other agencies involved in their lives. This helps to ensure that young people receive the specific support they require to help them self-regulate their behaviour. A diverse staff team of trained and motivated staff, demonstrating a varied balance of skills and experience, provide a satisfactory quality of social care for young people.

The provision of education presently takes place in the children's home. This lacks a significant degree of direct tutor-led involvement and any clarity of direction, which actively inhibits academic achievement for young people in placement. Shortfalls in the timely planning, recording and delivery of any education provision for young people in this placement places an unacceptable strain on the delivery of care and progressively discourages young people from making an eventual reintegration into school.

While temporary arrangements are in place in the home, the absence of a Registered Manager comprehensively overseeing the quality and compliance of childcare practice is undermining the effectiveness and delivery of this service. The information monitoring systems, in place to review the quality of care provided, are not presently identifying how outcomes for young people may be improved.

Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
11 (2001)	ensure that each child's placement plan is monitored by a key worker within the home who ensures that the requirements of the plan are implemented in the day-to-day care of the child, specifically relating to actions identified to help children self-regulate their behaviour (regulation 11(1)(b))	08/07/2012
26 (2001)	ensure that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to all members of staff employed in the home , in accordance with Schedule 2 (regulation 26(3)(d))	08/07/2012
7 (2001)	ensure that an individual is appointed to manage the home. (Regulation 7(1))	08/07/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children who have been excluded from school have access to appropriate education and training, so that they are supported and enabled to resume full-time education (NMS 8.8)
- ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action where needed. (NMS 22.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people have yet to gain sufficient insight and understanding to enable them to concentrate upon addressing their problems and make meaningful progress in this children's home; to date, their progress has been adequate. By limiting their engagement with the opportunities provided for them to take greater control of their lives, for example, by engaging in regular, meaningful activities and school attendance, young people are restricting their own potential for developing self-improvement skills and emotional resilience. The unwillingness of some young people to accept the importance of education coupled with their permanent exclusion from school placements compromises their learning and ability to achieve academically.

The interim use of tuition within the home focusing upon engaging young people with practical skills meets with only partial success.

With consistent staff praise, their self-esteem and perception of what goals are important in their lives has however improved when compared to their starting points.

Young people demonstrate through the food and the activities they choose that they understand the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle although often protest for fast food options. They know about the health risks posed by smoking and the misuse of illegal substances, including how this inhibits their ability to make considered safe decisions. The home takes a visible proactive stance against smoking which has a positive effect on young people's health. Acting upon adult guidance about choosing appropriate relationships has practically informed young people how to keep themselves safe from illegal peer group activity and potential physical harm.

All young people are supported and enabled to share their wishes, views and feelings irrespective of how they communicate. Young people know about the home's complaints procedures. They know how to channel any concerns through the home's management, their social workers and families should they need to. Information about external advocacy services have, on occasion, been inappropriately used to express frustrations about the boundaries of their care plan, perceived by young people to be unreasonably restrictive or not responsive to their demands.

Appropriate needs and requests made by young people significantly influence the home's routine. Ongoing dialogue and spontaneous key worker meetings, that recognise the communication difficulties of some young people, ensure that their legitimate views are included in the home's recording and recognised in practice. By being sensitive to those factors that influence acceptable social behaviour, staff are able to construct sensible daily plans designed to maximise the engagement and achievement of young people. Recent evidence suggests that this strategy is beginning to work by the reducing number and frequency of behaviour modifying interventions.

Young people respond positively to the meaningful opportunities for enhancing life skills and developing personal confidence integrated into the home's daily routines such as cooking, cleaning their rooms and helping maintain the large garden. This helps them learn some of the basic skills they will need for eventual independence.

Quality of care

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

Young people say that staff demonstrate a high degree of care and concern about their welfare and that this has helped them keep out of trouble. One young person confirmed that the move to this home had helped him break away from the young people who said they were his friends but led him into trouble. He appreciated how well the staff had helped him settle in and turn it into his home but complained because he found it annoying to be away from the area in which his friends lived.

To influence changes in young people's behaviour, individualised strategies, underpinned by recorded plans, practically assist young people to work towards set goals. Where their behaviour falls short of expectations, they receive help to evaluate the consequences of their actions. Set boundaries, clear expectations and age-appropriate interventions have resulted in some improvements in behaviour by highlighting less desirable alternative consequences. Conflict is consequently minimised rather than eliminated. It is appropriately managed by the strength of relationships with staff that enable diffusing, meaningful dialogue, rather than reliance upon the use of sanctions or the application of physical restraint.

Young people know how to make their concerns known and how to use both the providers and placing authority's complaints process. Practical support is provided by access to external advocates, social workers and ongoing familial contact. Concerns raised about staff members receive transparent and, where necessary, external independent investigation that includes appropriate levels of feedback for young people. By actively listening to concerns raised by young people, the former manager and service provider have introduced staffing changes for the delivery of care within the home to safeguard both young people and staff from unfounded allegations.

Placement plans for young people confirm that the home identifies and addresses measurable outcomes for young people. These promote their holistic well-being, offer protection from all forms of harm and recognise the importance of any cultural background. Optimistic objectives cited within some plans are not however always being fully implemented through defined key work sessions. Plans, made with and for young people, confirm that staff communicate proactively with other agencies and professionals to promote positive outcomes for young people. For example, there is positive liaison with the local police and community support officers to assist in all safeguarding matters both in the home and in the local vicinity. One social worker reported that she 'had no concerns about the quality of care being delivered by the home' to 'the quite challenging' young person in placement.

Young people in placement benefit from the home's proactive stance for promoting their health and psychological needs. Addressing ongoing, dental, optical and medical conditions through regular GP and clinic visits ensures that the medication needs and the medical well-being of young people are actively and safely promoted. Specialist appointments with CAMHS provide the review for young people with emotional and psychological health needs.

Active liaison with placing authorities endorses the present alternative package of educational provision; however, these measures are not sufficiently robust or supported by up-to-date statements of educational needs and lack the necessary structure and timescale to confirm their full compliance with minimum standards.

Staff support and encourage young people to focus their recreational interests and abilities wherever these are safe and possible. Access to a vehicle and good public transport systems enables unrestricted access to a broad range of local and regional recreation facilities introducing meaningful legitimate experiences and variety to

young people's lives.

This urban home is generally well maintained with any shortfalls being repaired promptly to keep it safe. Young people are encouraged to choose the decoration of their bedrooms and enjoy the privacy of their own lockable area. The home provides a useful variety of comfortable communal areas and formal administrative areas for staff.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

There are robust procedures in place to ensure young people feel safe and stay safe at this home. The effectiveness of these systems have been recently tested by some very challenging behaviour leading to an increase in the use of physical restraint and allegations about the unsafe use of this method of behaviour management by some staff. Normal staff practice promotes positive behaviour including the use of incentives and positive reinforcement with the deployment of physical intervention used as a last resort to prevent injury or harm. All staff have had their British Institute of Learning Disabilities accredited physical intervention training refreshed to facilitate the safer handling of the increase in some young people's unsettled behaviour. All concerns about practice have been referred appropriately for independent investigation. During inspection, young people expressed no concerns about the rewards and sanctions used by the home.

The incidence of unauthorised absence from the home has been significantly reduced by changes in the home's occupancy. There are effective procedures in place, understood by all staff, put into practice should young people go missing. These are compliant with national police and multi-agency guidance. Young people are aware of the actions staff will take should they go absent without permission encouraging them to inform staff where they are going and for how long, when they leave the building. These measures work in practice.

The home is proactive when a safeguarding concern arises. Meetings between the home and social workers review care plans and existing risk management measures following incidents. Police liaison with the home is strong affording young people the opportunity to discuss personal safety and staying safe in the community in a supportive environment. This practically promotes their well-being and safety. Allegations against staff members are effectively responded to by adherence to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board procedures.

Young people are cared for in a safe environment. Staff training and access to home's procedures ensures that they are knowledgeable about safeguarding issues and can act decisively to report any potential safeguarding concerns.

The home promotes a strong anti-bullying message and measures to ensure that bullying not occurring. Young people are encouraged to talk to their carers whenever

they have worries or concerns about this type of behaviour. Staff also reflect upon and challenge how young people may present themselves as being oppressive to adults particularly by using racist or sexist language. Social workers say that the staff team liaise very regularly and effectively with them and other agencies to ensure vulnerable young people are suitably protected. Staff have access to a whistle-blowing policy should they have any concerns about professional colleagues or the effective implementation of safeguarding practice.

Young people live in a physically safe environment, protected by an established routine of environmental health and safety procedures, risk assessments and preventive checks. Regularly conducted fire drills and precautionary tests ensure the premises are safe and confirm that young people know what to do in case of an emergency.

The recruitment and selection of people working at the home follows company procedures and checks that should ensure young people are looked after only by safe, experienced and knowledgeable adults. All appointed staff are required to possess or work towards acquiring the relevant skills, competencies and qualifications to meet the needs of looked after young people. The former thoroughness of this process has been compromised in the recruitment of recent staff in so far as interview findings confirming the suitability of applicants for senior positions have not been recorded.

Appropriate, rigorous systems are in place to ensure that any visitors are properly checked and receive supervision while on the premises. Applying these precautionary measures improves the safety of young people.

Leadership and management

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

Young people live in a satisfactorily managed home that ensures they are safe and that promotes their best interests. Although subject to some current revision, the home meets the aims of its Statement of Purpose. Social workers, young people and their families are helpfully informed about the nature of the services and support provided by accessing this document. The young person's guide is readable and provides them with useful information about what the home expects and provides, in a friendly tone.

Following the recent resignation of the Registered Manager, an acting temporary manager and the existing staff team continue a strong commitment to delivering sensitive childcare practice tailored to address the individual, challenging and complex needs of the young people looked after. One social worker said that the home had a good understanding of the challenges presented by children presenting specific emotional and behavioural difficulties like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and had no concerns about the care provided.

Ongoing external and internal monitoring of the quality of care being provided is

used to inform any practical changes required to ensure young people get the most appropriate, individualised service possible. Emphasis on the sustained improvement of the provision by the home, based on its previous performance, has been an aspiration of the home; however this has stalled in parts as evidenced by time-dated shortfalls in the home's recording. The requirements from previous inspection reports have been addressed and a provisional development plan is in place.

A competent, committed staff team, with a wide range of skills and experience, look after the resident young people. Staff turnover has increased since the last inspection adding to the home's instability by making it more difficult for young people to develop trusting relationships with consistent carers. All established staff possess relevant qualifications for working with young people. Staff receive a formal induction and training programme that addresses the particular needs of young people in placement. Training provides staff with the statutory input, skills, qualification and knowledge to carry out their jobs efficiently and take on additional special co-ordinator roles for areas such as health and safety, activities or health promotion.

The team skills and abilities complement the needs of young people living in the home. However, staff numbers have at times been depleted and insufficient to respond sufficiently quickly to emerging needs, resorting to the use of temporary bank staff. Staff are effective in dealing with the diverse needs of young people and excellent at maintaining meaningful contact with their families. One social worker complemented the home's assistance and input in this delicate area.

Staff meetings include emphasis on understanding aspects of equality for looked after children and about specific needs such as disability, mental health-related behaviour, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and sexuality-related issues. This dialogue helps to inform their practical and sensitive understanding of young people from all backgrounds. In practice, this openness to difference and focused sensitivity on particular young people's needs and attitudes towards difference appears to be working effectively.

Staff are very well supported by the company operations manager and the temporary acting manager. The core staff team have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the high expectations placed on them for providing informed, good quality childcare practice. Very good levels of practical support and 'on the floor' guidance are provided by the manager. An understanding of behaviour is provided through feedback from social workers and CAMHS team consultation.

Staff regularly receive one-to-one supervision. Team meetings take place monthly involving the whole staff team considering the general operation of the home, reflecting on young people's progress and to consider ways in which the service may be improved.

The home's written records are securely stored and provide a comprehensive evaluation and confirmation of individual young people's needs, diversity, development and progress. Young people's records contain up-to-date information

about them, including the relevant documents from placing authorities and in-house assessments of behaviour and progress. The departure of the previous Registered Manager has generated some obvious gaps in the home's records, its monitoring and the case records of young people.

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.