

Inspection report for Children's Home

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Inspector	Helen Walker
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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

This home provides care and accommodation for up to five young people of either gender, aged from eight years to 17 years old. The home is a detached property in a residential area in the town. It is close to schools, shops and leisure facilities. There are good public transport links to neighbouring towns and cities.

The home has individual bedrooms used by young people and two of these have en-suite bathroom facilities. A house bathroom is on the first floor. On the ground floor there is a lounge, a games room and dining kitchen. The staff and manager's offices are also on the ground floor. The two bedrooms used by staff who sleep-in are on the first and second floors. To the side and front of the house is a patio with an established garden and shrub area.

There are five young people resident in the home at the time of the inspection. Three of the young people talked to the inspector.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

At this full, unannounced inspection, the key national minimum standards in the all outcome areas are considered. The recommendation made at the previous inspection was followed up and details of this are outlined in the improvement section of this report.

The home is effectively managed and young people benefit from being looked after by staff with a good understanding of their needs and how to meet these. Some young people have lived here for a number of years which evidences stability and continuity of their placement. This is achieved through the support and help of staff.

Staff have a good understanding about keeping young people safe from harm and they know how to respond, in the event of any allegation or serious concern about a young person's safety. Young people are encouraged to develop appropriate and acceptable behaviours and to take responsibility for their actions.

Young people's health needs are well-promoted. Education is seen as an important part of young people's life. Staff are keen to help young people make suitable choices in relation to education and their career. Staff recognise young people as individuals and support them to achieve their ambitions.

The home is comfortably furnished and provides homely accommodation for young people.

One action and four recommendations have been made to further promote the well-being of the young people. These relate to the young people's access to snacks, room searches, staff training and qualification.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection one recommendation was made. This was for guidance to be available to staff and young people about when it may be necessary to search a young person's possessions. The guidance is now in place and gives relevant information about this matter.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people are significantly involved in menu planning and choice of food for meals. They learn skills, to prepare them for independent living and this includes good advice from staff, about eating a balanced and varied diet. Young people's specific dietary needs are well-met, for example, their individual preference to have a vegetarian diet. All staff have a food hygiene qualification so that they are aware of safe food handling practice. More specialist support is sought for health professionals such as the looked after children nurse in respect of the young people's dietary needs.

Fresh fruit is readily available to the young people. However, there is limited opportunity for young people to help themselves or prepare snacks in the home. Foods, other than fruit and instant soup, are kept in the pantry to which young people do not have free access. Young people said they want to be able to help themselves to things such as toast and cereals, as they would in a family home.

A wealth of health information is available in the home and contact with health professionals and agencies provides young people with good advice and guidance to promote their well-being. This includes information about sexual health and smoking cessation to increase young people's knowledge and understanding in these areas. Staff also promote young people's physical health through activities such as horse riding and use of the gym.

Staff have a good awareness about the administration and storage of medication. Staff are qualified to administer first aid treatment as needed. Medication is securely stored in the home and records are monitored to confirm appropriate practices are in place.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people's privacy and confidentiality is maintained in the home. However, young people are unclear about why staff carry out room searches when they are away from the home. There is now guidance available to staff and young people about searching young people's possessions. The Registered Manager said they will make sure young people are aware of the guidance. All young people have access to a telephone in the home and their own mobile phone. This means they can make telephone calls in private without reference to staff.

Complaints are infrequent and young people are fully aware of the complaints process. The ethos of the home allows them the opportunity to raise any issues they are unhappy with. The complaint procedure is effective and the Registered Manager ensures a quick resolve. The weekly house meetings provide a forum for young people to have their say. They also have regular contact with people they can talk to who are independent of the home, for example, advocacy service and health and education professionals.

Staff have a very good understanding about keeping young people safe from harm and they know how to respond in the event of any allegation or serious concern about a young person's safety. Staff receive training and are familiar with safeguarding guidance, which assists them to care for and to promote the welfare of young people.

Young people are made aware that bullying is not tolerated in the home. At this time young people say there is no bullying and they get on well together. Staff know and follow the home's procedures when young people are missing from the home. Staff record unauthorised absences fully, with details of the action taken written in a designated book.

Staff encourage young people to develop appropriate and acceptable behaviours. Staff promote a positive culture within the house, which includes rewards and incentives for young people. Young people have different views on the fairness of sanctions but these present as appropriate and in line with agreed disciplinary measures. Staff training includes the management of challenging behaviour and the appropriate use of physical restraint. Strategies for managing behaviour are sound and minimal use of sanctions evidences the effectiveness of this approach.

Systems are in place, to enable young people to be cared for in a safe, physical environment. Checks, such as those that relate to fire safety, the use of electrical equipment and gas appliances, occur routinely to ensure the safety of people in the house. In addition, thorough recruitment and employment procedures help to confirm staff are suitable to work with young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people have a high level of support from staff. This includes the benefit of designated key workers, which allow young people the opportunity to talk about a diverse range of issues on a one-to-one basis. Topics include smoking cessation, and sexual and social relationships. Additionally, more specialist support is regularly available with access to therapeutic professionals.

Young people talk about the strong support they have from staff and that they listen to them when others fail to do this. They consider staff try to ensure changes that are in their best interests, for example the improvement in family and friend contact arrangements.

Education is actively promoted and young people have the support to achieve their potential. Excellent dialogue exists with educational professionals to enable young people to make suitable choices in relation to further education and employment. The routine of the home is for young people to receive formal education and wherever possible, to attend educational establishments of their choice. Some of the young people are currently in-between college placements. However, this is not left to drift and firm arrangements ensure education and work experience placements are available and taken up by the young people.

Personal education plans are drawn up with the relevant professionals and show the home's awareness of young people's educational achievements and needs. Staff encourage young people to have aspirations and support them to find suitable college placements and work experience opportunities.

The home has facilities to support the young people's education, for example, a variety of books, a computer with internet access and quiet areas for study.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people have their needs assessed effectively prior to admission to the home which means good consideration is given to the appropriateness of the placement. Staff are well-informed about the young people's diverse range of needs. However, not all young people have a written placement plan to show how the home meets their needs on a day-to-day basis, including the arrangements for health care and education.

Young people contribute to their statutory review so that their future care needs are considered and their views taken account of. Staff provide a comprehensive report for the review meeting to fully inform the placing authority of the young person's progress in the home. Contact is actively promoted in line with young people's care plans. Staff have an excellent understanding about the significance of contact

between the young people and their family and friends. This means the young people maintain links with those that are important to them outside of the home.

Young people are able to move into and leave the home in a planned way. However, on first admission there is nothing to show how staff inform young people about what is expected of them at the home. The Registered Manager says staff do talk to young people about the routines and expectations of the home but will develop an induction list to confirm this. Staff try to ensure young people are adequately prepared for leaving the home and that this is through a planned ending to the placement.

Young people are asked their opinions about issues that affect their daily life and future. This includes their views about aspects of the running of the home, for example, through weekly house meetings, choice of decoration for their bedrooms, menus and activities. This level of consultation helps to improve young people's quality of life.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Staff encourage young people to learn and develop skills to help them as they move towards leaving care. Good advice and support is given about educational opportunities and practical matters, such as housekeeping, cooking meals and the use of a bank account. Young people are supported to understand the advantage of good health and to arrange and maintain contact with health professionals.

Opportunities in the home allow young people to undertake household tasks and to gain an understanding about looking after themselves. Young people who are of leaving care age are involved in the home's independence plan and most have a comprehensive local authority pathway plan that clearly outlines the transition process from care in a children's home to independent living.

Young people benefit from the provision of well-maintained and comfortable accommodation in a home with character. The decoration and furnishings in the home are of a good standard and the environment is homely and welcoming. Young people have their own bedroom and the option to personalise them, which reflects their individuality. Communal and private areas in the home allow young people the opportunity to spend time with others or by themselves.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The home is well-managed and offers a good level of stability to young people. Some young people have lived here for a number of years and made friends in the area. This has been with the help and support of staff.

Young people said they are very settled in the home and attribute some of this to the stability of their care and the home environment.

The home's Statement of Purpose has recently been updated and reflects what the home offers and the care provided. Young people have a useful information guide with details about the routines of the home and how they are to be looked after.

Young people are cared for by a consistent, competent and caring staff team who support the young people very well and provide them with a consistency of care. There are adequate levels of staffing to supervise and take account of the young people's known needs. Any additional duty shifts are covered by permanent staff and on some occasions by bank staff. This means agency staff are not used in the home.

The management team provides regular supervision to staff, so that they are properly supported in their work with the young people. Staff meetings occur on a regular and discuss in detail the work of the home and care of the young people.

An ongoing programme of training is in place for the recommended 80% of staff to achieve an appropriate childcare qualification. Staff undertake mandatory training such as first aid and food hygiene. Additionally, other training is available to increase staff skill levels in relation to their work, for example, neuro-linguist practitioner and working with traumatised children. However, training to support the more specific needs of the current resident group is not in place, for example that of drug awareness.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Young people are treated as individuals and their assessed needs are well considered. Staff take the opportunity to improve the life chances of young people, particularly through the promotion of education and health. Young people are well supported in the home and staff encourage them to develop friendships and use the local community facilities.

Systems are in place to monitor the performance of the home against its Statement of Purpose. They include the manager monitoring the necessary records and thorough monthly visits to the home by an independent person. These systems give the manager an overview of how the home is running and help to maintain good standards of care.

Young people's progress is appropriately and permanently documented. Records are securely stored and contain good evidence of their history and development.

What must be done to secure future 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 Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
2	prepare a written placement plan setting out how on a day-to-day basis the child will be cared for and their welfare safeguarded and protected by the home. (Regulation 12.1)	24/05/2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure young people have access to and are able to prepare snacks and drinks for themselves at reasonable times (NMS 10.8)
- ensure young people are made aware of the home's expectations of them and what they can expect of staff prior to or on their admission to the home (NMS 5.2)
- provide staff with training and development opportunities that equip them with the skills to meet the needs of the children, in particular drug awareness (NMS 31.1)
- ensure a minimum of 80% of care staff have the appropriate National Vocational Qualification at level 3 care award or equivalent qualification. (NMS 29.5)