

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspection date	10/05/2012
Inspector	Gillian Walters
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Residential special school (>295 days/year)

Date of last inspection	22/03/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a privately owned residential special school, which is also registered as a children's home. It provides a service to 59 young people, between the ages of 11 and 17 years, who experience emotional or behavioural difficulties.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality 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**.

Young people make good progress in this environment from their starting points, both in terms of their educational achievement and social development. Young people are encouraged to participate in the many activities and clubs on offer within the provision, and other activities within the wider community.

Young people benefit from having staff that are familiar with their needs and committed to encouraging them to achieve their goals, develop their confidence and build self-esteem. Young people share good relationships with staff and treat them with respect. Most young people say they feel safe and protected in this home. However, during this inspection, some raised issues concerning bullying and the use of physical intervention that has made them feel less safe.

A recent internal appointment has been made to the vacant post of Registered Manager. This has been viewed positively as he is familiar with both staff and young people. He is supported by an experienced management and leadership team who are committed to further improvement and development of the provision.

The home has reasonable systems in place for managing information to support staff practice and keep other stakeholders informed. However, some documents and records do not sufficiently reflect recent changes in regulation and best practice. Other areas for improvement have also been identified as a result of this inspection. These include safer recruitment practice, and the assessment of young people's individual risks.

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
34 (2001)	ensure that the registered person shall supply to the HMCI a report in respect of any review conducted by him for the purpose of paragraph (1), observing guidance that such reports are completed at six monthly intervals, sent to Ofsted within 28 days of its completion and identifies any trends and issues of concern arising from monitoring of matters set out in Schedule 6 (Regulation 34(2))	31/07/2012
5 (2001)	update and revise the Statement of Purpose, specifically addressing the issue of incidents where a child goes missing from the home rather than unauthorised absences and the promotion of behaviour as well as control, restraint and discipline. (Regulation 5)	31/07/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the children's home does not restrict the liberty of any child as a matter of routine or provides any form of secure accommodation unless that home is an approved secure children's home. This relates specifically to the practice of routinely restricting young people walking unsupervised within the grounds following admission without this being initially risk assessed and recorded as part of their individual plan (NMS 3.19)
- ensure staff working within the home know and implement the local authority and home's policy in relation to children going missing and their role in implementing that policy. This relates specifically to updating the policy which currently refers to children absconding and implementing local protocols (NMS 5.2)
- ensure that all people working in or for the children's home are interviewed as part of the selection process and have references checked to assess suitability before taking on responsibilities. This relates specifically to ensuring that references are thoroughly checked as part of the verification process (NMS 16.1)
- encourage children to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up. Children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe including outside

the home and when using the internet or social media. This relates specifically to establishing policy and guidance that is understood and followed by staff and young people with a focus on individual risk assessment (NMS 4.4)

- ensure there are clear and effective procedures from monitoring and controlling the activities of the home, with particular regard to bullying. (NMS 21.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Most young people in this home have developed good and trusting relationships with staff that have enabled them to explore often difficult and sensitive issues. Young people living in this home have been supported by staff to gain good insight and understanding of their backgrounds. Young people have been encouraged to successfully reflect on their behaviour and are able to communicate the changes they have made as a result of being placed in this provision. Many of the young people are clear that the home and school have provided them with both structure and routine, which they recognise was often missing before coming to the provision. This has helped them develop confidence in their environment and their own abilities.

Social workers of children placed at this home comment positively on the impact that the provision has made with a number of young people their local authorities have placed there. One social worker commented that for one young person the provision has 'turned her life around; her grades are excellent; her behaviour exemplary; a model student and mentor to other young people'. Another commented of the provision that 'this is the best residential establishment that I have had to deal with'.

Young people benefit from having a range of health services that they can access that cater for both their routine and more specialist health needs. The availability of a registered nurse at the home supports good oversight and regular monitoring of young people's health care needs.

Young people have good attendance at school, which is part of the provision. A recent education inspection in January of this year found the quality of education to be good. Young people were viewed to be making good, and in some cases outstanding, progress in their educational achievement from their starting points. Parental feedback obtained by the home is positive and complimentary about the provision and achievements their young people have made.

Young people are supported in maintaining appropriate contact with parents and other family members in accordance with their care plans. Staff promote good practice in establishing and maintaining regular communication with relevant family members. This ensures that young people retain and develop positive family relationships that are important to them.

Young people participate and enjoy their involvement in a wide range of clubs and activities. They are excited to learn new skills and take pride in their achievements.

Young people currently participate in activities such as archery, football, music, drama, biking and camping. Some young people assist with caring for chickens and other animals in a small farm area on site. This has enabled those young people to learn more about the animals, their care needs and provided a sense of achievement from their efforts.

Young people develop good independent living skills that prepare them for their transition to independence and adult life. Young people are routinely encouraged to take responsibility for a number of household tasks that are age appropriate. Tasks include helping with tidying up after meals, taking care of their own laundry, shopping and preparing meals. Young people learn to travel safely and unsupervised as their programme for independence progresses.

Quality of care

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

The recently appointed manager has a sound knowledge of the young people at this home and has regular contact with them. This enables him to maintain an effective overview of their care and well-being and assists his contribution to their care planning and review.

Young people understand why they are living in this home and are helped by staff to make good sense of their backgrounds and histories. Young people benefit from having individual care and placement plans that adequately detail the support they require. Young people are involved in contributing to their plans, reviewing and updating these in one-to-one sessions with staff. All young people attend statutory reviews of their care and education and are encouraged by staff to contribute to these meetings. This provides young people with the formal opportunity to voice their wishes and feelings and influence their plans. Each young person has an identified key worker who has a clear understanding of the objectives and targets young people are working towards. This ensures that young people are provided with sufficient support and encouragement to enable them to reach their goals. Most young people value time with their key workers and identify this as a good opportunity to have their views heard. An Independent Reviewing Officer commented that one young person had told her: 'I love it here; they are like your parents'. This was considered good testimony to the life experienced by young people in the home. The home promotes an ethos of respect and politeness that encourages young people to be well mannered and to have understanding of the needs and expectations of others in their immediate and wider community.

Young people receive clear structure from the home and school environment and all say that they understand the rules that are in place. This ensures that young people are clear on behavioural expectations and understand the occasions when discipline and sanctions are required. The home uses a point-based system to promote positive behaviour, enabling young people to accumulate points in line with their individual targets. Young people say that they clearly understand the system, the incentives in place and that they are achievable.

Most young people in this home share positive relationships with staff that enable them to develop trust and feel that staff care for them. Staff show commitment and engage well with young people, encouraging them to become involved in a variety of after-school clubs and activities. Staff have a variety of interests and skills that they bring to the home and share with the young people. This means that young people are able to experience new opportunities, and learn and develop new skills.

Young people live in houses and bungalows on the site that are generally maintained to a good standard. However, this is variable, with some of the older bungalows occupied by boys showing signs of wear and tear, such as tired décor and loose shelving. These living areas tend to lack the more homely touches that can be seen in other bungalows and houses occupied by girls. Progress on improving the living environment is proceeding well, managers acted promptly to design and implement an improvement plan following the last Ofsted inspection in March 2012. Most young people have their own bedrooms although some do share, and this is with their agreement. Young people's rooms are mostly personalised with their own belongings, posters and photographs of family. However, some young boys' rooms appear rather basic and sparse and lack the personalisation and homeliness of others. Staff perceive the boys to spend more time out of the home on activities than young girls and therefore believe they are less interested in their immediate living environment. As activities are planned and available for both sexes and girls do take part in activities traditionally thought to be of greater interest to boys, this seems to be a questionable assumption. Young people are familiar with the home's routines and work together with staff and their peers to care for their home and environment. Young people share household tasks such as cooking, helping at meal times and tidying up. This encourages them to have a sense of belonging and to take a pride in their home.

All young people in this home know how to complain but some say that they do not always feel able to do so. This means that for some young people they do not feel confident that their views are important or would be fairly listened to if raised in this way.

Young people participate in weekly house meetings that provide them with the opportunity to raise general issues about daily living arrangements. Young people also have regular circle time meetings that are facilitated to promote information on specific issues, such as bullying. These meetings provide a forum for young people to share their thoughts and feelings and gain information relevant to their daily lives.

Young people have benefited from having a registered nurse on site who has acted as first point of contact for any health care matters. Because of the post holder leaving, the home has recently appointed a new nurse practitioner who will soon take up post. The recent departure of the registered nurse has left a temporary gap in professional oversight and monitoring. However, this has not had a significant impact on young people's health needs being met. Young people are registered with local practitioners for routine health care matters, and specialist health care services are involved on a needs-led basis. Appointments are made as required, followed up

by staff and are clearly documented in young people's files. All young people's health care needs are appropriately identified, monitored and addressed. The home has clear policy and practices in place for the safe storage and administration of medication to promote and safeguard young people's health needs. Staff are also trained in first aid and the safe handling of medication to ensure that they can respond promptly and appropriately when required. The home maintains detailed health care plans for each young person to suitably inform staff of their individual health requirements.

Staff work across the home and school environment and have close working relationships with teaching staff. Staff have developed a positive communication link between the two environments that ensures a continuity of approach for young people between home and school. Staff are made aware of any issues that may have arisen during the school day. This assists them in knowing how to best support and help young people on their return to their home environment.

The home is located in a rural area with local towns accessible by car and public transport. Some young people as part of their plan for independence do travel unsupervised to participate in activities in local and neighbouring towns. These include activities such as swimming, dance classes and air and army cadets. The home and young people have made some positive links with their wider community. Young people are involved in annual fund-raising activities for a local community charity. This has proved to have strengthened acceptance of them and their home within the local area.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Most young people living in this home say they feel safe and protected. However, during this inspection some young people identified specific issues that made them feel less safe. Most young people did not identify bullying as an issue within this home. However, some did raise concerns about bullying behaviour and how such behaviour is dealt with. The home does not maintain a log of all incidents of bullying reported. Although the home does take steps to promote awareness concerning the issue of bullying, there is no comprehensive record available that can be evaluated to detail the number of actual incidents or how well they were dealt with.

Staff receive regular training on behaviour management and safe intervention techniques to ensure that physical intervention is only used as a last resort and when it is required to protect the young person involved or others around them. Incidents of physical intervention have been variable and more frequent in some recent months although the trend is generally improving. Some young people are not always clear about the need for this type of intervention when it occurs. Staff complete records of such events, appropriately detailing the nature of and circumstances surrounding each intervention. However, although young people routinely sign such records they do not record any further detail concerning the incident. The home intends to find ways to increase the number of young people

recording their own views directly rather than relying on staff to record young people's responses on the incident record.

Most young people were able to identify adults that they could speak to if they had concerns. The home has clear child protection procedures in place that staff are familiar with and know how to access to ensure that young people are appropriately safeguarded. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities and have regular training to ensure their knowledge is current and relevant.

The home has appropriately reported two child protection incidents since the last full inspection, engaging with other agencies as was required. Records pertaining to the incidents have been appropriately maintained. However, one matter remains outstanding, as necessary documentation has not been received by the provider. It was not possible to establish at the time of this inspection if this matter had been suitably resolved.

Young people at this home rarely go missing from care. However, unauthorised absences at times do occur when young people do not return to the provision following visits home to family. The home's current policy does not adequately address the differences between young people missing from care and unauthorised absences; instead it focuses on young people absconding from the home. Managers are aware of a new draft protocol which will update the terminology and procedures regarding children missing from care, but this has yet to be formally agreed by the Cumbria Safeguarding Children Board. Once the Board agrees the new protocol, managers intend to implement these new arrangements within the home.

The home operates a policy of restricting young people's movements around the grounds without staff supervision for a minimum of a 12-week period following admission. This is intended to safeguard young people and limit opportunities for them to go missing from the home as many are described as 'persistent absconders' prior to arriving at the home. Young people's individual plans did not sufficiently reflect this as an identified need and this was viewed as a common approach to all young people. The home is not a secure facility that enables young people's liberty to be restricted by such means and this practice is not stipulated in the home's Statement of Purpose.

Young people have individualised behaviour management plans that provide adequate guidance to staff on promoting positive behaviour and strategies for safely managing some of the challenges young people may present. Risk assessments address specific individual areas of concern, for example, such as dealing with sexualised behaviour. However, these assessments do not consistently address some wider issues such as safe internet use within the home environment and the supervision requirements of young people on admission or while settling into the home's routine.

Young people live in a home that promotes their physical safety and security. Environmental risk assessments are in place and regularly reviewed to reduce risks in and around the home. Fire-fighting equipment and other utilities are regularly

serviced, and safety checks are carried out to ensure that the home remains a safe environment for young people to live in. Evacuation procedures are tested with regular fire drills, so that young people and staff know what to do in the event of a fire.

Young people are protected from those adults that may not be suitable to work with them by generally sound recruitment and selection practices. All pre-employment checks are completed before new staff commence work within the home. However, references are not sufficiently scrutinised as part of the verification process. This is a weakness in the overall recruitment practice. Young people understand that these measures are in place to keep them safe and ensure that they are not exposed to unsuitable persons who may do them harm.

Leadership and management

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

The home has recently promoted an existing member of staff to the vacancy of Registered Manager. The newly appointed manager has already made application for registration with Ofsted and is awaiting interview. The manager has a sound knowledge of staff and the young people, having worked within the home and with the company for many years.

The manager acknowledges that there are areas of management, such as reporting of his regular monitoring within the home and recruitment practice that he has to become more familiar with. However, he is confident in undertaking his role, aware that he has the support of the leadership team and his colleagues. The manager is well known and liked by the young people currently placed at the home. He has a good understanding of the young people and their needs.

The home has recently developed its provision to cater for an increased number of young people. A large number of new staff have been employed at the home to ensure that staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of the young people placed there. New staff confirm that their induction periods have been full and comprehensive, with them receiving training on mandatory issues such as behaviour management, child protection and first aid. The home has implemented and follows the Children's Workforce Development Council induction standards as part of their induction package. This ensures that staff have the relevant knowledge and skill set for working in the setting within the first six months of their employment. Most staff possess a recognised childcare qualification appropriate to their role, and the remainder are currently registered and working towards formal qualification. Staff receive regular supervision and report this to be of good quality, enabling them to feel well supported in doing their job.

Staff have regular opportunities to access training to develop and refresh their skills and knowledge. Recent training events attended by staff have addressed issues such as communication skills, administration of medication, key worker training and risk assessments. An annual appraisal process is in place that enables management and

staff the opportunity to reflect on staff development and identify areas where further training or support would be helpful in supporting and improving their performance.

At the last inspection one requirement was made that has been suitably addressed. Records maintained for physical interventions now clearly reflect that use of a measure of control is only to prevent injury or serious damage to property. Additionally there were two recommendations made, one of which is repeated as a result of this inspection, as the living environment for some boys is still considered not to be as comfortable or homely as it is for other young people within the provision. The young people's guide now includes a summary of what the home sets out to do for young people and it appropriately details their rights and important contact telephone numbers.

The home's Statement of Purpose successfully covers most key areas. However, there are some sections, such as incidents of children missing from care and the arrangements for promoting behaviour as well as control, restraint and discipline that do not address recent revisions in regulations. There is also a minor omission that relates to updating the position of Registered Manager.

The organisation adequately resources the home. There has been development of the provision since the last inspection, with new living accommodation being adapted for some young people. Further work is currently ongoing to develop an activity area for young people on the site.

There are systems in place to notify relevant authorities of significant events that occur within the home and with young people. Records are reasonably maintained to assist the reader in understanding the issues raised and how they have been dealt with. Young people's files are well organised and securely stored, preserving privacy and confidentiality.

The manager completes regular monthly reviews of the service but has not yet established a reporting format that will enable him to easily extract information to provide the six-monthly summary reports required by Ofsted. As yet Ofsted have not received a suitable summary report that meets with regulation or guidance. The provider does have suitable visiting arrangements in place for independent monitoring of the home. This supports the home's internal quality assurance systems and provides an additional opportunity for feedback from young people, parents and other stakeholders.

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.