

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Shaun Common / Graham Robinson
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This secure children's home is managed by a local authority. It is approved by the Department for Education to restrict young people's liberty. As well as the living accommodation, there are facilities for administration and education available on the site.

The children's home can accommodate up to five young people, who are aged between 10 and 17 years. Admission of any young person over the age of 10 but under 13 years of age requires the approval of the Secretary of State.

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

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 **good**.

There are a number of areas of strength and good practice that ensure young people live in a good quality provision. Health and education are very well promoted and delivered leading to positive progress and good outcomes for young people. Improvement is needed in education through further development of the tracking of young people's progress in reading and mathematics.

There are very good relationships between staff and young people. Young people speak highly of staff and managers and feel they make good progress at the unit. Young people's views are listened to, taken seriously and acted upon.

Safeguarding systems are robust and effective ensuring young people are kept safe. Strong links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) ensure transparency and support practice at the unit.

Young people, parents, professionals and others have access to good information about the unit and what services it provides. However, the children's guide does not

advise young people how to contact their independent reviewing officer (IRO) or the Children's Rights Director if they need further advice or guidance.

Young people are very well supported to develop positive social skills, behaviour and self-esteem. They have clear and well written plans that are delivered in practice and this ensures their needs are effectively met.

Staff are experienced, qualified and well trained to care effectively for young people. They are well supported through regular formal supervision. However, records of supervision are not always sufficiently detailed to support this good work.

Internal and external monitoring is good and this ensures that strengths and areas for improvement are identified. The home is well led and managed leading to positive progress and improved outcomes for young people.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure children are helped by staff to achieve their educational or training goals; specifically by further developing the tracking of young people's progress in improving their reading and mathematics ages (NMS 8.4)
- revise the children's guide to include how a child can contact their independent reviewing officer and the Children's Rights Director (NMS 13.5)
- ensure the written supervision records kept by the home are sufficiently detailed; specifically that they show the quality of the supervision staff receive to determine the support, advice and guidance provided. (NMS 19.4)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are achieving good outcomes in all respects. They receive high levels of intensive support in a safe environment, which allows them to move forward emotionally, socially and educationally. The culture and working practices of the unit are supportive and encourage young people to achieve personal goals.

Young people who present risk taking behaviours live in a unit that is both child-centred and nurturing. Their individual needs are identified and these are reflected in the plans and strategies in place for them. Young people are involved in the various decision-making processes that affect their lives, providing them with a sense of direction and purpose. This results in young people developing greater self-esteem, confidence and resilience.

Feedback from young people and other external sources are consistent in their positive responses regarding the levels of progress achieved. For example, in a letter received by the unit, a young person who left recently stated, 'You have helped me and I am so sad to leave you all but happy to be going with a stronger head and as a much wiser person.'

The arrangements to promote and improve young people's health are good, with all aspects of their health being positively addressed. The unit has well established links with community based services that provide for young people's day-to-day health needs. A designated looked after children's nurse and consultant psychologist are commissioned to visit regularly and they provide oversight and input into young people's health needs. These arrangements give young people access to specialist health care that may be required, ensuring young people's physical and mental health needs are well met and improve throughout their stay.

A greater emphasis in healthy eating has been introduced recently. For example, fresh produce is purchased locally twice a week, rather than relying on bulk ordering. As a result young people are eating meals prepared with fresh produce with more regularity than before which is beneficial to their long-term health needs. Special dietary requirements are noted on admission and catered for. Attention is paid to nutrition and healthy eating when menus and choices of food are being considered.

Young people are encouraged to improve their lifestyle through exercise and diet, with their general health and fitness closely monitored. The unit has long-standing links with specialised services that provide direct support to young people to encourage them to modify certain aspects of their previous lifestyle. This includes areas such as sexual health, tobacco, drugs and alcohol. As a result young people enjoy improvements in their general health and fitness levels.

Outcomes for children in education are good. Levels of accreditation are high, given the often very short periods young people are resident in the unit. Virtually all young people gain awards during their stay. Young people gain qualifications in a very wide range of subjects including aspects of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science as well as in geography, history and French. Qualifications are also gained in practical subjects such as art and design, agriculture and horticulture, home economics and child development. Last year some 270 qualifications were gained in these subjects. Those young people who were studying for GCSEs on their admission were able to continue with their studies during their time in the unit. The broad range of qualifications gained will be of help to those young people returning to mainstream school. In addition, young people continued to have their work mapped against national curriculum sub levels which will be helpful to mainstream schools who may be receiving young people from the unit. Qualifications are available only at one level and older and more able young people would benefit from qualifications being available at higher levels.

Young people's behaviour in lessons is outstanding. They are polite and respectful towards teachers and other adults and also towards each other. Young people's attitudes to learning are outstanding and they demonstrate consistently, great

enthusiasm and a determination to do their best. On the very rare occasions young people began chatting in lessons, they always apologised quickly and sincerely. They spoke articulately and enthusiastically to inspectors about their work and were justifiably proud of their achievements. Young people's work is presented well in very neatly kept exercise books for each topic. Teachers place an appropriate emphasis on helping young people to improve their handwriting and good progress in this was being made.

Punctuality to education, including after breaks, is outstanding and all lessons begin promptly with young people arriving on time and, importantly, being ready to learn. From discussions with teachers and care staff, attendance in education is good and unauthorised absences are very rare and always followed up but no aggregated attendance data is maintained.

Young people actively contribute to certain aspects of the unit's daily operation. For example, they participate fully in short daily meetings and longer young people's meetings held weekly. The excellent levels of communication between staff and young people ensure young people's views are taken seriously, allowing them to make a positive contribution to daily life in the unit.

Young people benefit from contact with family and other appropriate visitors. Staff are prepared to work flexibly to facilitate the sometimes complex and demanding contact arrangements that are in place. This is recognised and appreciated by young people. Visitors are made welcome, which contributes significantly to making contact visits a pleasant experience for those involved.

Preparing young people for the transition into adult life is not formalised for the current group of young people due to their young age. However, specific programmes linked to transition and independence are in place and available. The development of basic skills, such as cooking, is encouraged and promoted effectively with young people of any age, forming part of the normal routine developed by the unit. This gives young people opportunities to develop specific skills that should serve them well in future life.

Quality of care

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

The quality of care provided for young people is good. This view is supported by all the young people at the unit and from the various external sources contacted. For example, an email received last month from the parent of a young person who has just left, compliments staff on the care given to her child and goes on to say how the young person has developed 'better control over her feelings and reasons things through better.'

Staff are skilled at developing and maintaining positive relationships with young people, allowing them to settle quickly after admission. The relationships that have developed between staff and young people are excellent, allowing young people to

work through anxiety and difficulties positively with excellent support from staff. As a result young people develop trusting relationships with appropriate role models, giving them a more positive view of themselves and others.

Young people understand how to make a complaint and are confident to do so. The visiting advocate and local authorities' independent complaints officer both confirm they support young people in making complaints if requested to do so. Complaints are taken seriously and responded to in a timely manner ensuring that all concerns raised by young people are addressed.

A range of detailed planning documents identify and address the needs of young people. Plans are individualised to cover all areas, which includes identity, religious and cultural needs. Young people are provided with their own copy of their care plan produced in a child-friendly format. This helps them to understand their future plans and gives them insight and a reminder of the areas being addressed. This in turn gives them a clear sense of direction regarding their progress and future. This is recognised as good practice.

Teaching and learning in education are good. Lessons are planned well and consist of a range of activities that interest and engage young people. Young people's individual needs are catered for well. Most tasks provide challenge for young people and they respond positively, displaying great enthusiasm and a determination to succeed. Most lessons move on with good pace and young people make good progress. In a very effective creative writing lesson, the starter activity consisted of an oral word game which young people engaged with extremely well. This activity linked very well to the main body of the lesson on how to link ideas and themes when writing creatively. Young women gain confidence in their abilities and make good progress during lessons, producing writing of a very good standard. Young people are very keen to put ideas forward and discuss topics. In geography, young people were very keen to explore and discuss the causes of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. A minority of tasks were less challenging and interesting.

The marking and assessment of young people's work is frequent and young people appreciate feedback. Not all assessment provides advice on what young people need to do to improve or move to the next level as some marking consists solely of ticks and stamps and contains little constructive criticism.

Young people benefit from good support and encouragement from teachers. Care staff that are present in lessons also provide good support without being overly-directive with young people. On the few occasions young people were off-task for a short period of time, care staff were very skilled at supporting their teaching colleagues in getting young people to re-focus on the task in hand.

The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) provides good operational and strategic support to the centre. They oversee young people's personal education plans (PEP) and annual reviews (AR) and ensures social workers are informed of young people's educational progress and of any issues they may be facing. They have also provided specific training on the barriers that may be faced by young

people with learning disabilities, together with strategies to help overcome them.

Target setting and the tracking of young people's progress is good. Initial and baseline assessment is good. Short term and daily targets are understood well by young people and are referred to frequently by staff. Short term and daily targets for behaviour are also included appropriately. Longer term target setting is less effective as all young people are set a progress target of two national curriculum sub-levels regardless of their length of stay. This is not achievable for too many young people. More work is needed to be done on tracking young people's progress in improving their reading and mathematics ages.

Young people enjoy the range of activities taking place, speaking positively of the recent programme implemented during the summer break from school. Activities and leisure pursuits are well planned and enhanced by the creative use of individual mobility programmes, which are visits out into the local community. Activities as well as being enjoyable are designed to develop skills such as team work and enhancing group dynamics and self-esteem. These support young people to develop practical skills which they can use positively on release.

The unit is well decorated and furnished and has a homely feel to it. It is conducive to the positive and safe care of young people. However the design of the building and facilities are dated. This was recognised some time ago and at the time of inspection a new secure unit is being built on the same site. This will be completed and ready for use in the very near future.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people stated that they feel very safe and have no worries or concerns. They are comfortable telling staff about any worries they have and feel they will be helped and supported. One young person spoke at length, explaining in great detail about how staff make sure that no young person can be bullied and how young people are kept safe. There is a bullying policy in place that is understood and implemented by staff that assists them to safeguard young people.

There have been no child protection matters since the last inspection. Staff are trained in safeguarding procedures and fully understand how to implement them to protect young people. There are clear links with the local authority designated officer (LADO) who meets with staff to advise them of the role of the LADO and to update them on changes and best practice in safeguarding.

There are strong links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) that assists in improving the safety and wellbeing of young people. The unit is transparent with the Board about its practices. They provide the LSCB business manager any information requested, such as all incidents of physical restraint of young people and include the business manager in restraint training so there is a clear understanding of how staff operate. The Registered Manager is a member of an LSCB sub-group.

This multi-agency group meets regularly to discuss and share new developments in safeguarding and other matters that promote better practices and understanding. The Registered Manager utilises this information to improve the safety of young people at the unit.

Young people's needs relating to vulnerability are fully assessed on admission, using relevant background information. A risk assessment and plan is developed that addresses these needs and this is implemented immediately. Where a young person is at risk of self-harm, very close monitoring takes place and this monitoring is increased or relaxed according to the risk and the outcomes of regular reviews. There have been no incidents of self-harm since the last inspection.

Staff have excellent relationships with young people that are based on mutual respect. Staff are good role models for young people and encourage the development of positive social skills and behaviour. Young people speak very highly of staff and observation during the inspection showed that there are warm and positive relationships.

There is an incentive scheme in place that is fully understood by young people. Young people stated that they think the scheme is good and provides good rewards. They also said they feel it helps them to improve their behaviour. There have been no sanctions imposed since the last inspection, which directly correlates to young people's views and indicates that the incentive scheme assists young people to develop positive behaviour and social skills.

There has been no use of physical intervention since the last inspection. Staff are trained in the use of physical restraint and undertake regular refresher training. The Registered Manager stated that training has included the use of pain compliance, though he was very clear that this has never been used and staff have been instructed that it is never to be used. The Registered Manager stated that refresher training due shortly for all staff will make it clear and reinforce his directive that that pain compliance is no longer a part of physical restraint techniques.

Single separation is not used often, but is used appropriately when required. Young people stated that they have no concerns about the use of single separation. All matters are recorded fully, including when young people choose to spend time in their rooms. Young people's comments are recorded about any events. When single separation occurs there is very regular engagement with young people or close observations take place to ensure they are safe and well.

Routine searches take place of all areas of the unit in order to locate any item that may be harmful to a young person. Individual searches also take place of young people on admission and on return from any visits into the community to reduce the likelihood of illicit or dangerous articles being brought into the unit. Young people stated that they had no concerns about searches and felt these were carried out in a dignified and appropriate way. The unit's policies support staff practice, which determine the use of an electronic wand and 'pat down' searches.

No young people have absconded since the last inspection. There is a clear policy and protocol relating to children missing, which is known and understood by staff to assist them to keep young people safe.

There have been no new staff recruited since the last inspection. The unit has a clear process for recruiting new staff with robust checks to be undertaken that ensure the right people are employed to work with vulnerable children.

Leadership and management

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

A development plan is in place for the unit. However this was being appropriately reviewed at the time of inspection. It is focused on the building of a new secure unit that is well underway and the transition for young people and staff when the building is complete and ready for use in April 2013.

The home's Statement of Purpose provides good information for parents, professionals and others about the range of services provided by the unit. The document is reviewed regularly. Young people are provided with good information in a children's guide that tells them what the unit is like and what to expect. This information is available in different formats. For example, as an audio CD or in different languages for those whose first language is not English. However, the document does not include information for young people about how they can contact their independent reviewing officers (IRO) or the Children's Rights Director, for support, advice and guidance.

Staff are very experienced and knowledgeable about the unit's processes and systems. They are all qualified with the exception of one new staff member who is undertaking a relevant qualification. Staff are well trained and well supported and sufficient in number. This means that they are able to deliver good quality safe care to young people. Although formal supervision is regular and of a high quality, which was confirmed by staff members, the recording of supervision lacks some detail and does not always evidence the good work being undertaken.

Leadership and management in education are good. The centre has been very effective in maintaining good outcomes for children despite much of the accommodation and resources in education being unfit for purpose and the pressures of planning for the move to new premises. Relationships between education and care staff are very good and young people see them as a coherent team. For example, care staff, who have received basic training from the SENCO, carry out one-to-one reading with young people on the residential units in the evenings.

Good use of external expertise from other schools in the federation has been made, for example in the deployment of the SENCO and in staff training. Given the inevitable constraints of the accommodation for education and the very small numbers of young people in the centre, the curriculum is planned well, although no vocational courses are available. It enables young people to maintain their studies in

virtually all national curriculum mainstream subjects, which will be of great value to those returning to secondary schools. Other partnerships, such as those with voluntary sector organisations are developing well. Further developments are required in the use of progression data with regard to reading ages and in the gathering and analysis of aggregated attendance data.

Overall management of the secure unit is strong. Two recommendations for improvement identified at the last inspection have been fully addressed. Staff have completed training in self-harm, which helps them to keep young people safe and care for them more effectively. Additionally, the unit has in place a system to remind placing authorities to provide required documentation that staff need to effectively plan for young people's care.

Internal monitoring is effective and takes place regularly by the Registered Manager and covers all required matters. Records are examined and signed and areas for improvement are identified and acted upon. A six monthly summary report is compiled by the Registered Manager of monitoring that takes place and this is sent to Ofsted so that independent oversight of the care and wellbeing of young people can take place.

External monitoring of the unit via an independent person is good and takes place through regular monthly visits. Reports of these visits are completed and provided to the unit and Ofsted in a timely manner. These visits assist the Registered Manager and staff by identifying strengths and areas for improvement that are acted upon and benefit 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.