

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Shaun Common / Michelle Oxley
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Provision subtype	Secure Unit

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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, education is provided on site in dedicated school facilities.

The children's home can accommodate up to 16 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 **adequate**.

There are areas of strength and good practice that ensure young people receive good quality care. Health care and education are very well promoted and delivered, leading to positive progress and good outcomes for young people. There are some areas for improvement in education, such as refurbishment of the kitchen, further joint working and the introduction of more work-related activities.

There are very good relationships between staff and young people, which is a significant strength of the provision. Young people's views are listened to, taken seriously and acted upon. Young people know how to complain and have confidence in the system, though they do not have free access to complaint forms or a way to ensure written complaints go directly to managers.

Young people are kept safe. Child protection processes are sound and these ensure young people are safeguarded. There are also strong links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) that support practice at the unit. However, a number of areas for development are evident in policy, procedure and recording systems. As a result some aspects that support staff and evidence best practice are

not robust or clear.

There is good information available about the unit and what services it provides. However, the children's guide uses some professional language and jargon that young people may find difficult to understand. Some information that would be helpful to young people is also missing.

Young people are very well supported to develop positive social skills, behaviour and self-esteem, though sanctions used do not always fit the misdemeanour and records contain shortfalls. Physical restraint is appropriately used and monitored; however, young people are not routinely offered the opportunity to see a health professional after every incident. All young people have written placement plans that are delivered in practice to meet their needs, though these lack some detail and individuality.

Management has both strengths and weaknesses. Internal and external monitoring is routinely carried out. External monitoring identifies the unit's strengths and areas for improvement. The monitoring assists managers to make positive changes that improve the care provided to young people. Internal monitoring has good aspects, but lacks sufficient rigour.

Staff are experienced, qualified and well trained to care effectively for young people. Not all receive regular formal supervision to support them in their work with vulnerable children.

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
4 (2001)	ensure the children's guide is produced in a form appropriate to the age and understanding of the children accommodated in the home (Regulation 4(4))	28/02/2013
11 (2001)	ensure the children's home is conducted in line with the regulation; specifically that risk assessments pertaining to suicide and self-harm are formally reviewed at appropriate frequencies (Regulation 11)	31/12/2012
17B (2001)	ensure that sanction records include the effectiveness of the use of the measure (Regulation 17B(3)(f))	31/01/2013
27 (2001)	ensure that all persons employed receive appropriate supervision (Regulation 27(4)(a))	31/01/2013
34 (2001)	maintain the system for robustly monitoring the matters set out in this regulation. (Regulation 34)	31/01/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children can take up issues in the most appropriate way with support and without fear that this will result in any adverse consequences; specifically that young people do not have to ask staff for complaint forms and they have the means to ensure that managers access these forms directly, meaning young people do not have to hand forms back to staff for processing (NMS 1.6)
- 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 varied and reflect the misdemeanour and that the incentive scheme does not include rewarding young people with increased telephone contact with family for good or improved behaviour (NMS 3.8)
- ensure that when any sanctions are used, children are encouraged to have their views recorded in the records kept by the home (NMS 3.18)
- ensure that when there has been physical restraint, children are always given the opportunity to be examined by a registered nurse or medical practitioner (NMS 3.16)
- ensure children's welfare and safety are promoted at the unit; specifically ensure that the unit's child protection procedure sets out clearly the matters in the statutory guidance (Volume 5, statutory guidance, paragraph 2.68)
- prepare and implement as required, a procedure to be followed when any child is missing from the home, having regard to relevant protocols; specifically ensure that the procedure is focused on the needs of young people accommodated at the secure unit (NMS 5.6)
- ensure that children who are able and wish to keep and take their own medication, can do so safely; specifically that a formal and robust risk assessment is carried out, recorded in writing and implemented for any young person who undertakes self-medication (NMS 6.14)
- ensure children have access to a range of educational resources to support their learning; specifically, relating to refurbishing the teaching kitchen (NMS 8.2)
- ensure children are helped by staff to achieve their educational or training goals; specifically, further continue the joint working to develop links and strands across and between subjects to ensure that young people have the best opportunity to enhance their functional skills (NMS 8.4)
- ensure that where appropriate, the unit supports children to participate in further training; specifically, introduce more work related activities that identify potential progress to vocational choice and training (NMS 8.9)
- implement a formalised approach for the assessment, development and

promotion of skills for adulthood (NMS 12.1)

- revise the children's guide to include how young people can find out about their rights, how they can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director and Ofsted (NMS 13.5)
- ensure the secure children's home has clear and appropriate policies and practice, agreed with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), which effectively safeguard children from harm; specifically devise and have agreed by the LSCB, policies and procedures for individual searches of young people and routine searching of communal areas of the unit; policies and procedures must include the requirement to record all searches and that those relating to searches of young people's rooms and communal areas must include frequency that varies according to risk (NMS 23.3 and 3.20)
- keep an accurate record of all uses of single separation (23.12)
- ensure that young people are offered the opportunity to read and add permanent comments to the record of their separation (NMS 23.12)
- ensure management regularly and frequently monitors education; specifically, develop a more objective procedure for lesson observations that involves a team of qualified staff independent of the secure unit (NMS 23.17)
- ensure each child's Placement Plan is monitored by a key worker within the home; specifically ensure that plans are suitably detailed and robustly set out young people's individual needs. (NMS 25.2).

Outcomes for children and young people

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

The secure unit offers a good nurturing environment. Young people present as calm and confident and they are learning to cope with and understand their circumstances.

Young people undertake sessional work in the form of work booklets. These cover a range of subject areas, for example, anger management and coping skills. With support from staff, young people have begun to gain an understanding of their history. They learn how to develop relationships with other young people and the adults around them. As a result young people interact positively and calmly with others and begin to develop a deeper level of personal understanding and self-awareness.

Young people's achievements in education are good. Most young people make good progress in relation to their starting points. The volume of accreditation achieved in education is high for those young people who stay at the centre long enough to complete their programmes. Young people value the opportunities they have to gain qualifications and most work hard to achieve them. The range of vocationally related opportunities is limited with too few work-related activities for young people to

sample to help them make choices about their future training needs. The achievement of relevant vocational-related subjects is low. Staff do not share their lesson plans sufficiently to ensure the best opportunities for assessing literacy and numeracy.

Punctuality and attendance to education and work-related lessons are good. At the end of each lesson a progress card is completed by the tutor with input from the young person to agree progress and attitude. Behaviour management is generally good. The management of young people who are reluctant to participate in lessons is effective. When a young person is unable to attend any lesson or has to leave, the current work task is taken to them for completion.

There is a good focus on enabling young people to improve their abilities in English and mathematics. Those that stay at the centre for a longer period of time make good progress, particularly in single word reading and spelling. Progress is monitored frequently and individual progress is impressive. Learners receive good feedback in lessons and know what they have to do to improve their work. Some spelling errors are not consistently corrected.

Young people generally behave well in education and relationships with staff are professional and mutually respectful. In class most young people engage with tutors to agree their learning objectives and work diligently and stay on task. Tutors and learning support assistants use high-level skills to negotiate with young people to help them to complete their work. A small amount of inappropriate language heard in lessons is not always challenged.

The provision of health care at the unit is good. Young people confirmed that when they are ill they feel well cared for by the staff team and that their health needs are well catered for. They have access to the nurse or a doctor as required and good support is offered around substance misuse and emotional care. This ensures young people make good progress and have good health outcomes.

Young people are supported to keep in touch with their families and others important to them through visits and phone calls. Staff recognise the importance of promoting positive relations between young people and their families and carers, particularly in developing a support structure for when they leave the unit. Good work is carried out to support young people to rebuild important relationships which may have been previously difficult.

Staff work with young people to help them to develop skills for adulthood. Many young people enjoy cooking and are able to produce good quality meals. Young people also learn how to manage their own laundry and are responsible for keeping their rooms clean and tidy. Following each meal, young people help to clear up and vacuum the dining room. Therefore, young people are routinely supported to acquire some of the essential skills required for independent living. However, the approach lacks formality without detailed, targeted assessment or recording planned work to ensure that support is provided where it will be of best use to the young person when they move on.

The unit ensures that every young person is well prepared and supported in the transition to their next placement. Commendably, staff visit young people in their new placements. The team recognise the significance of the relationships they have developed with the young people during their stay and provide continuity through outreach support. Good information sharing, consultation with young people and a dedicated member of staff to advocate on behalf of young people ensures that some excellent outcomes are achieved in this area.

Quality of care

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

The ability of the staff team to develop positive and supportive relationships with young people is a real strength. The team practice with commitment and an understanding of the importance of nurturing as the starting point for the provision of good care. The team are trained and operate in line with a theoretical approach to child care. This approach emphasises emotional warmth as the basis for practice. Young people are treated with respect and care. As a result they respond positively and demonstrate loyalty to the staff team. One young person said, 'The staff are your family when you can't have your real family.'

Young people's records contain good information about their background and histories. Good work is carried out at the beginning of their stay to define planning objectives and targets in conjunction with the Youth Offending Team and the young person. The unit's own placement plans are accessible to staff and implemented on a day-to-day basis. These plans set out young people's assessed needs, but lack some detail and individualisation. Despite this, the staff team have a very good understanding of individual needs and deliver good quality care.

Young people's diverse needs are met. For example, young people have religious artefacts provided on request so they can follow their beliefs. Needs relating to diet and dietary preferences are taken in to account as are needs around sexuality. There is also a good level of consistency in relation to care practice and approach toward individuals, as a result of effective information sharing and individual case discussions.

The unit has a dedicated, experienced and established staff team in place to support young people and to create a healthy environment. A nurse, physiologist, consultant psychiatrist and a substance misuse worker are located on site. Other health care providers such as a dentist, optician and dietician visit the unit regularly to provide services to young people. The systems to manage medication are robust and overseen by the nurse. The unit ensures that young people benefit from this range of health care services. They ensure that young people are screened, treated and educated in key health areas that are necessary and important to good physical and emotional wellbeing.

In the education provision, the majority of teaching and learning is good. Assessment

is satisfactory overall. The centre has adapted teaching and learning strategies well to take account of the small class sizes, the age range of young people and their individual learning needs in each session. Learning objectives are clear and visible on charts for all learners to see. Tasks and activities are generally designed well to meet young people's individual needs and to encourage enjoyment in learning. Teachers make good use of information-learning technologies. This is used well, for example, for a recap of basic mathematics to start the class. In the best lessons activities are interesting, innovative and challenging and the lessons move on at a good pace. In most lessons young people make good progress. The standard of learner's work is generally good.

One learner delivered a positive, full class on 'tags' in art. This is an example of best practice in embracing learner participation in the provision.

There is an appropriate and successful emphasis on helping young people to improve their levels of English and mathematics as highlighted by the good progress they make in these key areas. There is an appropriate emphasis on health and enjoyment in lessons, and in food technology this is linked to PE lessons. At present there is little provision of relevant work-related activities connected to young people's further choices and opportunities in further education.

In food technology, young people produce good quality dishes and they are able to explain in detail the recipes, ingredients and quantities and cooking methods they use. However, the food technology room is of poor design with a number of inappropriate resources. At any one time, four learners attend the lesson but only two can cook while the other learners concentrate on theory work with a learning assistant. This is not best practice. The tutor has to concentrate on two sets of learners in different parts of the room completing different tasks. The design of the room is not conducive to maintaining safety standards.

Young people benefit from good learning support in lessons from learning assistants who are effective in helping young people concentrate and remain on task. An initial assessment of young people's abilities in literacy and numeracy, together with any additional learning needs, is carried out soon after their arrival. The results of this is shared with relevant staff. Individual education plans contain appropriate targets, including objectives for behaviour as well as academic progress. Subject-specific initial assessments are used well to identify the young person's potential and starting points. All young people are allocated a tutor and some tutorial time each week which is used to monitor progress and carry out other individual work. Weekly progress reports do not always differentiate clearly between learning and behaviours.

Advice and guidance to identify and discuss young people's future education and/or work opportunities is good. Young people receive individual guidance on their options on leaving the unit. Staff are pro-active in trying to assure that young people have an appropriate school or training place when they leave.

Young people's views, wishes and feelings are actively canvassed by staff, allowing them to make choices and influence certain aspects of the unit's operation. For

example, young people have influenced changes to the food provided and menu construction. Young people are able to put their views forward on a daily basis through discussion and general interaction with staff, as well as more formally at the weekly unit meetings. Young people attend their formal sentence or statutory reviews, which are timely and well attended by relevant professionals. The views, wishes and feelings of young people are treated with high regard.

Young people know how to complain and formal complaints are well managed, ensuring young people's worries and concerns are addressed in a thorough and timely manner. However, young people are required to ask staff for a complaints form and hand this back to a member of staff upon completion. This process may deter young people from making a complaint. After all investigations, young people are seen by a manager to clarify their satisfaction with the outcome or to assist them to escalate their concerns where appropriate. Young people can access an independent complaints service to advocate on their behalf; a representative from this organisation visits the centre on a weekly basis in the capacity of an independent visitor. Young people always sign the complaints record to show they are satisfied with the way their complaint is handled and to acknowledge the outcome.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people stated they feel safe at the unit. They have no concerns over bullying and said that staff address this very quickly and take it very seriously. There is a clear policy about how the centre tackles bullying and keeps young people safe and there is a 'zero tolerance' approach in practice.

Young people are assessed on admission for any risk or vulnerability and specifically for self-harm. Young people who are vulnerable are kept safe with appropriate processes and practice measures in place. A risk assessment is in place however, this is not sufficiently detailed in relation to self-harm or young people who self-medicate. For example, it does not determine the frequency of observations young people need to be under to counteract any concerns about self-harm and to provide appropriate support.

There are strong links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The Registered Manager is a member of a sub-committee of the Board. The Board have oversight of physical restraint at the unit as the Registered Manager regularly provides members with updates on incidents, patterns and trends. This helps to improve practice and keep young people safe.

There have been two incidents of a child protection nature at the unit since the last inspection. Both matters have been managed efficiently. Liaison with the local authority designated officer and other relevant services and professionals has been positive. This has led to concerns being dealt with robustly, contributing to effective safeguarding of young people.

The unit has a child protection procedure. Care and ancillary staff understand well the processes to be followed in order to help keep young people safe. However, the procedure does not fully support staff in their work as it does not contain specific guidance for them. For example, it does not inform staff of how to deal with disclosures from young people, reporting responsibilities, what to do if they feel their concerns are not dealt with by unit managers and the confidentiality and storage of reports and other relevant information.

There are excellent relationships between staff and young people. Young people have positive attachments with staff and are provided with good support. Young people feel the incentive scheme helps them to develop positive social skills and behaviour. The scheme has levels from bronze to platinum-plus that young people progress through by earning points for good behaviour. The higher the level, the more rewards are earned. Young people can earn extra phone calls and phone call time to family and others important to them through the incentive scheme. However, as contact with family is a basic right, this should not form any part of the incentive scheme.

The use of sanctions for inappropriate or poor behaviour have increased since the last inspection. Their use is acceptable but they do not always suitably fit the misdemeanour and there is insufficient variety, with use of one sanction in particular making up over 50 per cent of all sanctions used. This is a 'power ban', which restricts the use of electronic equipment in bedrooms, and is used for most poor behaviour. Records are kept of all sanctions imposed upon young people. However, the effectiveness of the measure is not recorded or monitored. Therefore, it cannot be determined whether sanctions used are having the desired effect of improving young people's behaviour. Young people do not consistently have the opportunity to write their comments on records so they develop understanding and responsibility. Young people confirm that restorative practices are used by most staff, offering them the opportunity to put right what they have done wrong and negate the use of a sanction. This is good practice; however, records do not evidence this positive area of work.

Where physical restraint has been deemed as necessary, its use has been appropriate, though it has increased since the last inspection. This relates to a number of young people with specific needs and challenging behaviours. Staff are trained in restraint techniques and the centre's policy has a clear focus on restraint minimisation through use of diversion and de-escalation techniques. The centre does not use any pain compliance techniques.

Records are kept of all events and these are clear, showing details of attempts to avoid the incident itself and the outcomes. Monitoring by managers identifies trends and patterns and any action taken to improve provision to young people. However, monitoring lacks rigour to show how any deficiencies are being addressed and improvements are being made. Records show that young people are not routinely offered the opportunity to see a health professional after any incident of restraint, to promote their rights and well-being.

There have been no absconding incidents since the last inspection. The unit is managed by a local authority who has in place a joint protocol with the local police force for managing such matters. The unit uses the local authority generic procedure to manage any incidents. However, this procedure does not cater specifically for the needs of young people who are accommodated in a secure children's home.

The use of single separation, although appropriate, has increased since the last inspection and the recording of such matters is inconsistent. Records lack accuracy, with some periods of separation appearing to be very lengthy, when in fact the period of time was appropriate. Records do not provide the opportunity for young people to write their comments about any incident. Records and discussions with young people show that separation is appropriately used. However, monitoring is not robust and does not indicate what measures are being taken to assess and address recording shortfalls and analyse the frequency of the use of this measure of control.

The centre has a policy and procedure in place relating to searches of young people's rooms and for the use of an electronic wand to personally search young people. Searches carried out are appropriate. However, the policy relating to individual searches is not robust and sufficiently detailed to show: the risk-led approach, the different types of searches, how dignity is promoted and the consideration given to vulnerability. Records are kept of room searches and anything found; however frequency is inconsistent, with some lengthy gaps between some searches. The policy relating to room and searches of communal areas does not determine frequency and how these should be carried out. There are no records of any searches of communal areas or individual searches of young people. Young people state that searches they have been subject to are only ever a 'pat down' or a staff member using the electronic wand.

A number of new staff have been employed since the last inspection. There is a process in place to ensure that required checks are carried out so that the right people are employed to work with vulnerable children.

Leadership and management

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

There are some good aspects to the management of the centre that lead to benefits and improvements for young people. However, there are areas of weakness leading to opportunities for improvement not being identified and addressed. At the last inspection, the registered persons were asked to ensure that sanctions and rewards for behaviour are clear, reasonable and fair and ensure that sanctions issued are effective and reflect the misdemeanour. This recommendation has not been addressed and a statutory requirement and a recommendation have been raised in this report.

Management of the education provision is good. The centre has a largely new team who are committed to improving the education and work-related activity learning opportunities. Teachers and learning assistants work together well as a team. The

self-evaluation is largely accurate, although some areas for development are not identified. Lesson observation comments are too generic and observations are carried out by one person rather than a range of observers. Many procedures are in their infancy due to the new staff team and it is too early to judge the impact on young people and their learning. The use of data for analysis and to support improvement is good. Some partnerships with local schools are well developed while others are in early stages but are developing well. The individual 'moving-on plans' for each young person are monitored effectively, although these stop at the point of the young person's departure from the home.

The unit provides parents, professionals and others with good information in the Statement of Purpose about the secure children's home and what services it provides. The document is regularly reviewed and kept up to date.

Young people are provided with information about the unit and what to expect in a children's guide to the secure children's home. There is a DVD for young people and interpretation services available for those whose first language is not English. However, the written guide contains jargon or language professionals may use, so it may be difficult for some young people to understand some aspects of this document. Although it contains some good and helpful information for young people, some information is not included. For example, how to contact their independent reviewing officer, find out about their rights and how to contact the Children's Rights Director or Ofsted.

There are sufficient staff on duty at all times to ensure that young people are well looked after and receive a good quality of care. Staff are experienced, knowledgeable, well-trained and understand the unit's procedures and processes. However, not all staff receive regular, formal supervision to support them effectively in their role of caring for vulnerable young people.

External monitoring of the unit is good. An independent person visits the home each month and provides a report of the visit to the unit and Ofsted, identifying strengths and areas for improvement. This process supports the Registered Manager to improve the care provided to young people.

Internal monitoring of the unit is adequate. Some matters are monitored well, such as trends and patterns in physical restraint. However, there are other matters that are not monitored with rigour and consistency and there are evident shortfalls not identified through this process that could potentially improve provision. For example, there are shortfalls in some policies and procedures and in risk assessments, sanction, search and separation records.

There is a development plan for the centre. This clearly sets out plans that managers have for the development of the service and how improvements to the quality of care of young people will be made.

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* and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.