

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Rebecca Sharp
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The children's home is provided by a private company and cares for up to five young people of either gender. The home is registered to care for young people with emotional and 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 **good**.

Young people placed in this home make exceptional progress in all aspects of their development. The progress they make is largely attributed to the highly personalised and nurturing care that staff are able to deliver. Individual needs are extremely well met and young people thrive in a consistent and respectful environment in which staff are extremely child centred, attentive and responsive to their needs.

Staff have a robust knowledge and understanding of safe working practices and young people say they feel safe in the home. Boundaries are consistently and reasonably reinforced by staff. Staff are extremely competent and imaginative in managing the behaviour of young people, using verbal de-escalation, positive praise and their sound relationships. Young people are clear about the expectations of the home and have a considerate approach to the staff.

All staff are highly committed to the young people in their care and create an environment which is caring and encouraging. Staff have high aspirations for young people and social workers give an indication of the high regard in which they hold the home by saying; 'I give the home ten out of ten.'

Although there are a number of outstanding features within this service, there are however weaknesses which have affected the overall judgement. There is currently no Registered Manager in post and there are shortfalls in the recruitment procedures of the home. These impact on the leadership and management of the home, and the safeguarding of 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 all people working in the children's home have references verified by telephone to assess their suitability and this information is recorded clearly on file (NMS 16.1)
- ensure there is a record of all recruitment and vetting checks including the level of CRB disclosure (NMS 16.3 (b))
- ensure children are actively encouraged to add personal statements to records. This is with particular reference to recording their satisfaction with the outcome of complaints. (NMS 22.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

From their point of admission to the home, most young people have made remarkable progress. They develop emotional resilience and gain confidence in their skills as a result of the support and stability the home provides. One young person stated that, 'I like all the staff and have nothing bad to say about things. I get lots of help with school and get to do loads of different things.' As a result, young people develop their sense of identity and self-view through positive and consistent attachments formed with staff.

Young people develop both socially and educationally through the abundant support of a child focused and energetic staff team. Young people succeed in their stable education placements and accomplish regular, improved attendance in order to achieve their academic potential. For those who are of school leaving age, staff are proactive in planning for potential further education placements and attend college open days and interviews with individuals.

Young people enjoy good health and benefit from solid support from the staff team in ensuring all individual health needs are met. Not only do all young people attend their statutory health appointments to ensure they are physically healthy, they have access to a wide range of other agencies in order to meet their emotional well-being. As a result, young people are holistically healthy.

Young people play an active role in the local community by taking part in activities, holidays, and a range of hobbies and leisure pursuits. Through these activities they become confident and cement relationships with the staff, each other and their peers. Young people know how to access independent advice and support if they want to, especially in relation to their rights as a looked after child. Relationships between staff and young people are extremely positive and behaviour is generally

good. Young people do not place themselves at risk by going missing regularly or offending. They enjoy a healthy lifestyle and take responsibility for some of their own medical health needs.

Young people are very settled in the home and are supported to move towards adulthood at a pace with which they are comfortable. Care is taken to ensure this is done sensitively around the time of exams. Staff are considerate in ensuring no additional pressure is placed on young people at this stressful time. A social worker for one young person said, 'They are being mindful of the transition into independence while the young person's exams are going on – I am really impressed.'

The quality of contact that young people have with their families and peers has improved, over time as a result of the proactive and sympathetic way in which staff manage these arrangements. Young people enjoy going on outings with their friends and are able to stay over at their homes. Staff build positive relationships with the families of friends to enable age appropriate activities.

Quality of care

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

Staff have consistently high aspirations for all young people in the home. Their well-being is considered paramount and is constantly placed at the forefront of staff practice. The committed, child-focused approach of staff is clearly evident in their attitude and interactions with young people. A social worker for one young person stated, 'The staff have supported the young person both practically and emotionally when they have experienced difficulties.' Young people recognise that staff care about them and say, 'I have a good relationship with my keyworker's. I feel able to talk to them if I was unhappy with anything.'

They consistently challenge barriers in order to create social and educational opportunities that enable young people to develop confidence and skills and compete on the same footing as their peers. A particular strength of the home is their commitment to ensure young people achieve academically. For example, a number of external tutors have been brought in to offer additional support to young people in preparation for their GCSE exams. This not only promotes academic achievement but shows the young people the genuine care and investment the staff have for them. This is another facet which promotes young people's self-esteem and their development of a positive self-view.

Young people are aware of how to make a complaint and identify staff and external professionals they say they can talk to. When individuals raise concerns, they are handled competently and swiftly. However, young people's comments on their satisfaction of the outcome of a complaint are not routinely recorded. This makes the monitoring of the outcome of complaints difficult for managers and those monitoring the service. Although, as part of the complaints process, keyworker's discuss the complaint with individuals and ensure they are happy with the outcome of their grievance which is recorded.

Care planning is highly individualised and most young people recognise the contribution and involvement they have in the service. Their ability to influence the care planning and statutory review process results in young people expressing high levels of satisfaction with the care they receive. One social worker stated, 'I am really happy with the home and I am very confident that the young person is happy.' Similarly the views of young people significantly influence the daily running of the home. Weekly meetings take place and there are also plenty of informal opportunities for their views to be heard as it is a natural and instinctive part of staff practice to consult with young people. A member of staff said, 'Everything is run past the young people before a decision is made.' Consequently young people demonstrate a high investment in the home and have a positive regard for staff.

All aspects of young people's health are considered. Health needs are well met on a day-to-day basis with the provision of a healthy diet, opportunities for exercise and, dependent on need, access to appropriate medical interventions. Arrangements for the administration of medication are safe and effective.

Young people have access to a variety of positive experiences and purposeful activities. Activities include going to theme parks, drama club, figure skating lessons and music concerts. Some young people have grown measurably in confidence since taking up a hobby while living at the home. Internally, staff and young people take part in playing board games and weekly theme nights. Young people choose a subject or country for the theme night, study its culture, religion and history; then cook a traditional meal. Afterwards, they participate in a quiz about what they have learned. Not only do young people enjoy these opportunities for pleasure, their experiences are enhanced by gaining knowledge and an appreciation of different lifestyles and cultures.

Staff are well informed of the managements vision for the development of the service and stated that, 'The staff team are happy and feel supported with the routine and structure of the home. Each month you can see something new and the progression of the young people.' The enthusiasm of long-term staff is quickly conveyed to those who have only been in post for a short while.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people are protected by the knowledge that staff have of the home's policies and procedures and their consistent application of these in practice. Young people do not regularly go missing but staff are aware of the action to take to protect young people should such instances occur. Staff understand the procedures to follow if safeguarding concerns arise, including working effectively with external agencies, such as the police, social workers and the Local Authority Designated Officer to minimise risk and safeguard the welfare of young people. They work to the agreed strategies and at the same time give young people the emotional support they need.

All young people feel extremely safe and protected in the home. The home provides a safe environment in which risks are carefully considered and reduced. Staff support young people to take age-appropriate risks while taking the suitable precautions to keep them safe. This helps them to develop and mature into responsible young adults. Young people know about how to keep themselves safe as a result of the guidance they receive from staff. There is a wealth of information available for young people displayed in the home. Posters include information on internet safety and the negative effects of substance misuse.

Young people are protected by the proactive approach taken to behaviour management. Staff are trained in behaviour management techniques and consistently apply these in practice. Staff value young people and treat them with respect. The use of praise and incentives together with the celebration of achievements provides young people with the additional incentive to behave appropriately.

There have been incidents of challenging behaviour necessitating physical restraint. This is completed safely and in line with current legislation. Records kept in relation to sanctions and physical restraint contain all the detail required by regulations and include an evaluation of the effectiveness of any measure of control or discipline used.

There have been a number of new staff since the last inspection. This means that young people are now cared for by a stable and consistent staff team. Recruitment procedures are thorough and are completed centrally by the Human Resources department. However, the recording of these procedures was found to be inconsistent. Some files did not include the start date of staff, nor were the dates of reference verification logged for all new staff. In addition, the level of individuals Criminal Records Bureau disclosure was not detailed on their file. As a result, it is difficult to determine if all necessary safer recruitment checks have been carried out effectively, and in line with statutory guidance, prior to the commencement of employment for all staff.

Leadership and management

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

The home has been without a Registered Manager for a number of weeks. The company have been proactive in ensuring the home is adequately supported in the absence of a manager, and also in the timely recruitment of a replacement manager. The assistant manager has been supported by an experienced manager from within the company and, between them; they have ensured the home runs effectively and efficiently. This period has not had a detrimental effect on the quality of care the young people receive.

There have been a number of significant improvements made by the current management team which have had a positive impact on the staff's attitude and practice. One member of staff said; 'It's like a completely different place. The

support from management is a lot better.' New staff have been recruited and training is organised in order to ensure all staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills to provide a high standard of consistent care. This meets the recommendations from the last inspection. Recording systems have improved and new procedures have been implemented to ensure all records are clear and meet legislative requirements.

The management team have set high standards of care and aim to continually improve the service. These aspirations are conveyed to the staff team through consistent communication in supervision and team meetings. The management and staff have excellent working relationships with key professionals in other agencies. One social worker commented; 'Their communication is great.' Monitoring of the service is regular and robust with both internal and external checks being carried out on a monthly basis. Any shortfalls found during these checks are rectified promptly by the staff team. There is a development plan in place for the home with realistic goals for future development in improving outcomes for young people.

Young people say that they are well cared for and they themselves show high levels of investment in the home. Parents also share this view. One parent stated; 'I am happy with the care my child receives. My child gets everything they need and more.' The Statement of Purpose is clear, accessible and comprehensive. Young people are clear about what the home sets out to achieve. They have recently devised a handbook for young people new to the home; written from their own perspective, including information which they feel is important to know before coming to live at the home. This shows the positive investment they have in their placement.

Although there have been some recent changes in the composition of the staff team, a core team of adults remain who provide continuity of care. There has been minimal use of agency staff, or staff from other homes, since the interim inspection. The staff team is well-balanced in terms of age, gender and life experience which provides young people with a richness of experiences and relationships. New staff are familiarised with their role and develop the required skills and competencies through induction training. Most staff are well experienced and suitably qualified. This translates into the delivery of good, safe care.

The home is well resourced to meet the needs of young people and high staffing levels are provided on each shift. Lone working procedures are adequately risk assessed when the need arises ensuring the safety of young people and staff.

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 the inspection of children's homes.