

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Jennifer Reed
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a local authority children's home, providing residential care for up to six 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 **adequate**.

The home provides individualised care plans and strategies to meet young people's identified needs. Staff support young people to achieve regular school attendance, to maintain their good health and to develop their independent living skills. However, the care and support young people receive is not always effective in helping every young person to achieve improved outcomes. Some young people are making poor choices and increasing risk-taking behaviours while others are not engaging with the support offered.

Staff regularly consult with young people to gain their views and they are involved in decisions about their daily care and the development of the home. The quality of relationships between young people and staff are variable. The recent changes in the leadership of the home impact on the stability and predictability of the operation of the home and on young people's feelings of security and attachment. Interim management arrangements for the home are in place, pending the appointment of a new manager for the home.

The areas for improvement identified at this inspection include: the continuing implementation of the home's action plans to improve the quality of care; to further review care practices to increase young people's self-esteem; to ensure young people know how to make a complaint; to undertake the regular review of records and risk assessments; to improve the quality of supervision records; and to be more proactive in looking for missing young people.

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
7 (2001)	notify HMCI, when the registered provider appoints a person to manage the children's home, of the name of the person so appointed and the date on which the appointment is to take effect (Regulation 7(2))	31/05/2013
28 (2001)	maintain in respect of each child who is accommodated in the children's home, a record in permanent form which includes the information, documents and records specified in Schedule 3 relating to that child and ensure they are kept up to date; in particular with reference to points 19 and 24 of Schedule 3 (Regulation 28(1)(a)(b))	31/05/2013
33 (2001)	ensure the person carrying out the visit shall interview parents and relatives of the children accommodated there as appears necessary in order to form an opinion of the standard of care provided in the home (Regulation 33(4)(a))	31/05/2013
29 (2001)	maintain in the children's home the records specified in Schedule 4 and ensure they are kept up to date; in particular with reference to point 5 of Schedule 4, that is, a record of the disposal of any medicine. (Regulation 29 (1))	31/05/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children know who they can contact directly or in private about their problems or concerns and how to contact the Children's Rights Director (NMS 1.5)
- support children's social and emotional development and enable children to develop emotional resilience and self-esteem (NMS 2.2)
- ensure staff actively search for children who are missing (NMS 5.5)
- progress the action plans in place to provide young people with access to services providing advice on sexual health and alcohol use (NMS 6.9)
- continue to develop a stimulating environment within the home and support young people to take part in community based leisure activities which develop their emotional, intellectual, social, creative and physical skills (NMS 7.1)
- continue the refurbishment and redecoration of the home to provide a

comfortable and homely environment for young people to live in (NMS 10.3)

- ensure the risk assessments of the whole children's homes environment are regularly reviewed to identify any potential sources of harm to children (NMS 10.8)
- review the lone working risk assessment on a regular basis to ensure that it identifies any likely risks to children, staff and members of the public. (NMS 17.9)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Young people are helped to keep in contact with their families, friends and wider support networks. They benefit from the support and advice they receive from staff to sustain and reinforce their appropriate relationships with others. However, some young people choose to make their own decisions about the suitability of friendships and use of free time. This has resulted in some poor outcomes for young people.

Some young people continue to engage in risk-taking or offending behaviours and their safety and welfare has not been secured. Although young people are helped to gain a good understanding of key health risks, some still continue to smoke and to drink alcohol.

Young people are involved in day-to-day decisions within the home. Their views are listened to and this has resulted in some changes being made to routines and resources within the home. This involvement helps young people to build confidence and self-esteem and to develop a sense of belonging. However, young people's feelings of self-worth are reduced during school hours when they are discriminated against by their peers for having free school meal tickets.

The home is developing an improved range of activities for young people to enjoy. Those young people who are taking advantage of these available opportunities are increasing their belief in their own ability to achieve something. This contributes to their development of a positive self-image. The home supports young people to pursue their own leisure interests and this develops their skills and builds their confidence within the community.

Young people are making good progress in learning practical and self-care skills and this helps prepare them to move successfully into independent living situations. Young people are supported to take up voluntary or part-time employment opportunities to help them increase their understanding of the world of work. However, not all school leavers are engaging in further education, training or employment opportunities. They are less likely to make good progress in their personal development and to move successfully into adulthood.

Not all accommodated young people know who they can contact outside of the home about any concern they may have. This lack of knowledge impacts on their ability to express their feelings and views about the care they receive and reduces the

safeguarding of their welfare.

Recent changes in leadership and care practices have impacted both positively and negatively on how young people feel about living in this home. Some young people are unsettled by the changes; they have feelings of loss and insecurity and they are no longer happy in their placement.

Some staff interventions lack consideration or are poorly organised. This leads to specific dialogue or interactions having a negative impact on individual young people, resulting in them becoming angry or disengaging. Staff referring to the home as 'the unit' undermines young people's belief in this children's home being 'their home'. This use of this terminology reduces their feelings of security, belonging and self-worth.

Quality of care

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

Staff are beginning to develop a wider range of stimulating activities, both within the home and the community. These opportunities will encourage young people to make more positive use of their leisure time. The recent overnight trip shows clear evidence of how new experiences have enriched young people's personal and social development.

Young people are being involved in decisions about the refurbishment and redecoration of their home. The collaborative improvements being made contribute to young people feeling valued and helps them to feel some ownership of their home. The quality of the accommodation is improving to provide a more comfortable and homely environment for young people to live.

Staff are committed to supporting young people well and the home works closely with other agencies, social workers and families to keep young people safe and to promote their welfare. Young people are cared for in accordance with their individualised placement plans, which are regularly updated to meet their arising needs. Due consideration is given to young people's cultural background and personal identity. However, the home is not rigorous in obtaining a copy of review minutes of statutory meetings to ensure that young people's plans are promptly updated to ensure coherency and reflect planning decisions.

The home is yet to identify effective strategies of help for all accommodated young people. Some of the home's operation lacks sufficient consideration; for example, young people taking free school meals and the over-use of the staff office. These practices adversely affect how young people feel about their care and themselves. Not all young people think that staff are consistently concerned about their welfare. Some young people say they feel ignored and disregarded by staff. Some social workers report that young people are unhappy in their placement.

Staff encourage and support young people to regularly attend schools or alternative

learning opportunities, with varying levels of success. Staff also make sure that young people's good health is promoted. Staff support young people to seek medical attention when they need it and to have regular health checks. During the inspection, young people met with a smoking cessation worker, to help them to understand the dangers to their health from smoking. The home has plans in place for sexual health and alcohol use advice to be provided to young people by specialist agencies.

Medication records are not updated on a regular basis to contain current health information. This shortfall could lead to error in the administration of medication to young people. All medication is securely stored in a locked cabinet; however, individual storage boxes are not used to reduce the likelihood of giving a young person the incorrect medication. Although the home's records show evidence of a system in place for the safe disposal of unused medication, this has not been implemented since 2011. It is unclear what arrangements are currently in place for the safe disposal of medicines and the impact this may have on the protection of young people.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Staff demonstrate a good understanding of child protection issues and know how to work collaboratively within local safeguarding protocols to keep young people safe. Care plans identify risk and protective factors and staff take account of young people's differing abilities and vulnerabilities. The home has strategies in place to keep each young person safe from harm. The home works proactively with other agencies to draw up individual plans of action, which are known to young people, to reduce the likelihood of known risks and safeguard young people. The staff's vigilance in monitoring and checking out the suitability of friendships in the community also contributes to protecting young people.

The home takes a positive approach to behaviour management. Suitable sanctions are given to young people which fit the misdemeanour and help young people to reflect on their choices and actions.

Some young people are engaging in risk taking and offending behaviours. There is also evidence to show that the frequency of some young people going missing is increasing, despite the individual care plans in place designed to minimise such episodes. Staff implement the local missing person protocol and the home works closely with the police to bring about young people's swift and safe return. However, staff are not sufficiently proactive on all occasions in taking steps themselves to find and return missing young people. Staff do not routinely go out to search for young people and the number of attempts staff make to keep in contact with young people on their mobile phones can be minimal. This lack of response leads to some young people feeling that staff do not really care about them. One young person said, 'They don't care about me anymore; they used to but now I just do what I want to and they ignore me.'

At 'missing from home' return interviews, staff give insufficient consideration to the differences in the power and status of adults and young people, the number of staff and other professionals present and the suitability of the venue. Current care practices lead to some young people feeling overwhelmed and interrogated. They disengage from the interview without disclosing their recent whereabouts or talking about any concerns that they may have. The care and support provided by the home at this point is unlikely to minimise the risk of young people going missing and reducing the possible risk of harm.

Individual risk assessments for young people are in place for each young person and are regularly updated to reflect their emerging needs. This rigour contributes to keeping young people and others safe. However, the majority of the generic risk assessments and the risk assessments for the environment have not been updated for several years and do not reflect the current operation of the home. This lapse could mean that some current risks have not been identified within the home. However, regular fire safety, health and safety and utilities checks are completed.

Recruitment and selection procedures are robust.

Leadership and management

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

There have been recent changes in the leadership and management of the home. The home is currently managed by a suitably qualified and experienced interim manager, supported by the home's deputy manager and senior workers. These arrangements have been agreed with Ofsted. A new manager for the home has been recently recruited and the necessary checks are being completed to finalise their appointment.

The home demonstrates capacity for continuing improvements in some areas of its operation. The recent staff 'away day' was used to review care practice and staff identified a number of areas where care practices can be improved. The home has already taken some action to address these issues and the standard of care to young people has been raised, particularly in respect of the standard of the accommodation. The home has met most of the recommendations made at the previous inspection and there are action plans in place to address the outstanding issues.

The home has established positive relationships with local agencies and with families, to provide a holistic response to meeting young people's needs. Social workers report that the home keeps them well informed about significant events in young people's lives and that staff work well with young people's families.

The home has established policies, systems and care practices in place. However, there has been insufficient management oversight and monitoring of the home's records, documents and care practices. Not all documentation is kept up to date to

provide current information that will contribute to promoting young people's well-being. Furthermore, the home does not always take timely action to obtain statutory review meetings minutes to inform placement plans.

The home's staff lone working policy has not been updated for a considerable period of time. It therefore does not take account of the impact of the needs of accommodated young people and the home's current operation.

The home employs a sufficient number of staff; however, there has been a high level of staff sickness over a sustained period. Agency and temporary staff are employed to work in the home to cover sickness, annual leave, secondments and vacancies. Staff receive regular training, supervision and appraisal. Most staff have gained at least a level 3 award in a relevant qualification and training arrangements are being made for the remaining staff to commence studying. New staff are completing the Children's Workforce Development Council's induction standards.

Regular monitoring and evaluation processes are in place, with some past slippage having been addressed. The external monthly monitoring visitor provides detailed reports of their visit. However, the visitor does not take a proactive approach to gaining the views of social workers, parents and significant persons about the quality of care provided to young people. Their views are only sought if they are present in the home at the time of these visits, which is very rare.

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.