

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Rosemary Chapman
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home offers long-term care for up to seven children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. A private company operates this home alongside its other home.

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 **outstanding**.

Young people achieve outstanding outcomes as a result of the exceptionally high quality of individualised care and staff support provided. The child-centred approach ensures the views of young people are taken seriously in all aspects of their care. Leaders and managers are ambitious for the young people in their care and want them to have as many positive experiences as possible so that their life chances are significantly improved. This is evident in the way staff act as advocates and challenge the status quo so that young people are full participants in the community.

Young people like living at this home. They get on extremely well with the staff and know they want the best for them. They feel safe and protected from harm, and as a result their self-esteem and self-confidence have improved significantly. Thorough risk management strategies protect young people and keep them safe so that risk-taking behaviours are significantly reduced without compromising young people's participation in an extensive range of community activities. Effective partnership working ensures that young people benefit from access to a range of services to meet their needs.

Rigorous monitoring systems ensure that leaders and managers are fully apprised of the strengths and shortfalls of the home. They are ambitious for improvement, and although no requirements or recommendations have been made as a result of this inspection, the development plan has targets to further improve practice and outcomes.

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Young people make exceptional progress in all areas of their lives. One social worker commented that the young person for whom she was responsible was 'a totally different child.' Young people grow in confidence, have significantly improved self-esteem and develop a thorough understanding of, and insight into their backgrounds. This enables them to have meaningful and positive contact with their families.

All the young people have exceptionally good attendance at school or college. Unauthorised absences from school do not occur and young people arrive punctually and well prepared. They make exceptional progress, given their histories and starting points. For example, young people who have previously been excluded from school and spent a number of years out of mainstream education now attend local schools on a full-time basis and are doing very well.

Young people no longer engage in risk-taking behaviours or offending. They have exceptionally positive engagement in the local community. For example, all the young people have extensive involvement in activities within the community. This includes being members of local rugby and football teams, attending dance and drama classes, the scouts and having paper rounds. This results in the young people improving their social skills, developing positive friendships with a variety of local young people as well as improving their self-confidence because of their achievements. Additionally, the activities are such that they promote and improve their good health.

Young people are all in good health. They develop an excellent understanding of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle by for instance preparing framed posters which address various aspects of healthy living, such as healthy eating and the dangers of smoking. They engage well with the nurse who visits the home on a regular basis and seek her advice on all aspects of their health.

Young people play a very active part in decision-making, both about their own care and support and regarding how the home operates. They have all been involved in choosing colour schemes for the home, not just their own bedrooms. They all have a significant input into the menus and have also changed staff practice in relation to the use of mobile phones. They feel listened to and know their views are important and taken into account. Young people take part in their reviews, and with the support and encouragement of staff, have been able to significantly influence important aspects of their care plan such as contact and education.

Young people are very well prepared for independent living. They engage in semi-independence programmes when they are of an appropriate age, which includes learning how to budget as well as shop, cook, do their laundry and keep their room tidy. They express confidence in their abilities to move on to the next stage of their lives.

Quality of care

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

Young people have excellent relationships with staff and get on well with each other. They feel that staff really care about them and have their best interests at heart. Young people can talk to staff about any worries or concerns and know they will be taken seriously. There have been no formal complaints because when young people express their views, they are listened to and acted upon. Regular young people's meetings are just one forum where they voice their opinion; they also do this in key worker sessions or by informally talking to the staff or manager. They can give many examples of where their wishes and feelings have influenced the running of the home.

The manager and staff have extremely high aspirations for the young people in the home and are prepared to challenge other professionals to achieve the best possible outcome for the young person. Examples include: challenging a statement of educational needs; seeking out effective advocacy and challenging a local authority on its plans for a young person. A young person commented that staff 'worked really hard' and 'fought my corner' so that the young person's wishes were realised.

Despite being challenging when partners do not deliver to the expected level, the manager and staff have excellent and effective relationships with all agencies including the police, health, children's services and education. A stakeholder commented: 'The manager has worked hard to turn things around and tried to build positive relationships.'

Young people receive excellent support to meet all their identified needs including those relating to religion and culture. Although the home is located in a rural area which is predominantly white, staff are effective in addressing the needs of children from other cultures. For example, a suitable hairdresser's is within a reasonable distance, as are shops which sell foods from a variety of cultures. Staff also sourced a youth club in a more ethnically diverse area which is more appropriate for one of the young people. Staff support is underpinned by very comprehensive care planning and thorough and individualised risk assessments which ensure consistency of care. Young people are involved and contribute their views through key working meetings and statutory reviews.

Young people have good access to a range of external services to meet their needs. For example, the safeguarding nurse is a regular visitor to the home and provides guidance and support in relation to all health needs including smoking cessation and sexual health. Staff support young people to engage well with this and provide encouragement so they access the services they need, such as appropriate vaccinations. The home also has access to a dietician to advise on healthy eating. Young people benefit from a healthy diet and plenty of exercise. Medication is generally well managed and securely stored. However, a minor shortfall in recording, which had no impact on the well-being of young people, was identified during the inspection and was immediately rectified.

Staff provide an exceptional level of support in relation to education. The home has a registered school on site which can provide education to the young people accommodated there. However, the staff want young people to experience schooling in the community if this is at all possible. To this end they have worked tirelessly to achieve this for young people in their care. A social worker commented that this was, 'a very good piece of work.' A representative from education was extremely positive about the home and how well staff have worked with the school to support young people's integration back into mainstream schooling. Comments included, 'I have been really impressed, they are really on the ball, I have nothing bad to say.' Of particular note is the high level of effective communication and partnership working in relation to providing advice and strategies to assist the school staff in dealing appropriately and consistently with any challenges. Staff are also very supportive with homework.

Staff are exceptionally proactive in ensuring young people have access to appropriate, extensive and individualised leisure pursuits. All young people are engaged in a number of different leisure interests which they really enjoy. Participation in these enables them to make friends, keep healthy and use their time in a positive and constructive manner.

The home is well maintained and provides a very comfortable and homely environment in which young people thrive. It is personalised with many photographs of young people engaged in their activities; this shows them how proud staff are of them and further improves their self-esteem.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say they feel safe and are safe in this home. Their safety and well-being are promoted to a very high standard through comprehensive risk management strategies which recognise the young people's individual vulnerabilities while supporting their engagement in positive pursuits in the community. This results in young people safely taking part and enjoying activities commensurate with their age, interests and abilities, and in which their peers in the community also engage.

Young people do not go missing; on a small number of occasions they may not return home at the right time, but staff know where they are and they are safe. Staff have an excellent understanding of the risks involved with each individual young person and address these through thorough risk assessments which are implemented in practice. No young people are engaged in any form of risk-taking behaviour. This has been achieved through proactive strategies which engage young people in positive behaviours. For example, young people have been involved in developing a framed poster which has a significant amount of information about the risks and consequences of child sexual exploitation. They are also positively engaged in activities which they enjoy with appropriate staff supervision.

Young people report that there is no bullying in the home. If young people are unkind to each other, staff address this appropriately to young people's satisfaction. Young people's behaviour is improving significantly as a result of positive behaviour management strategies. There is a clear system of rewards and consequences which young people consider to be fair. Young people also recognise that their behaviour is much better as a result of living in this home and through staff support. They know how to avoid situations escalating, for example, by going to their rooms of their own volition when they recognise they are becoming angry. The manager has worked hard to ensure that staff are not punitive but recognise the reasons underlying the behaviour and respond accordingly and proportionately.

Physical intervention is rarely used and only in appropriate circumstances. Staff are trained in an approved technique so they know how to respond in a way which does not cause injury to a young person. The use of physical intervention, although low in any event, has decreased further in the last two months.

The manager has a very robust understanding of safeguarding practice. Although there have been no incidents of concern, staff receive regular training to support their knowledge and ensure they know what to do if they are concerned about the well-being of a child in their care.

The company has a robust recruitment and selection procedure for new staff and is in the process of strengthening this further, taking into account new guidance. All staff have been recruited and checked appropriately. This ensures that only those people who are suitable to work with children and do not pose a risk to their safety are employed.

A safe and secure environment also contributes to children's safety and well-being. All health and safety issues are addressed thoroughly. For example, young people know what to do in the event of a fire as this is covered when they first come to the home, and underpinned by regular fire practices during the day and at night time. All the equipment, including gas and electrical installations, is checked and serviced at appropriate intervals.

Leadership and management

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

The home is extremely well managed by an enthusiastic, committed and knowledgeable Registered Manager. His input in improving outcomes for young people and the quality of their care has been commented on by a number of stakeholders, including comments such as, 'he has turned this home around.' His understanding of the needs of vulnerable children and his ambitions for them to achieve as much as possible are communicated very effectively to the staff team, who are thoroughly committed to the same outcomes. He and the staff team have been tenacious in pursuing the best possible outcomes for all the young people so their life chances are significantly improved.

Staff are very well supported so that they in turn support young people very well. Staff have regular supervision, access to a variety of high quality relevant training, both externally and internally provided, and regular team meetings. Their practice is challenged in a supportive way which enables them to reflect, understand and develop their ways of working with young people. There is a sufficient number of staff on duty to meet the needs of the young people at any time, including supporting them to access community facilities.

Quality assurance monitoring, both internal and external, is rigorous and effective in driving improvements. Consultation systems have been developed to include formal consultation with young people, parents, and stakeholders. Issues raised through these consultation mechanisms have been used to inform the development plan for the home. The monitoring reports which the manager undertakes have been developed to provide a more qualitative analysis to inform improvements, as he felt the previous reports did not provide sufficient challenge. This is indicative of a service which wants to continually assess, develop and improve its practice so that young people have better outcomes.

Although there were no requirements or recommendations for improvement from the previous inspection, the manager has improved young people's participation; developed staff confidence; provided a more personalised homely environment and encouraged a more constructive approach to rewards and consequences. There are plans, which are in their early stages of implementation; to develop memory boxes and life story work so young people have an excellent record of their time at the home, for example, photographs and other memorabilia on memory sticks and in high quality books.

Partnership working is very positive. A number of stakeholders comment on the very good communication and positive relationships. A social worker said they have a 'great relationship', and another that staff are 'proactive in contacting me, they are extremely good at communication, and I get weekly reports.'

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.