

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Debbie Foster
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The children's home is run by a local authority. It is registered to accommodate up to six young people. The home provides long-term residential care to 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 was judged inadequate at the last inspection. However, a number of improvements have been swiftly implemented to address the concerns raised. As a result, young people now live in a home where the overall effectiveness and impact on young people are judged to be adequate.

A core team of staff is committed, child-focused and has sound quality of care practices. This is enabling young people to make some progress. As a result, young people's behaviour is more settled, the majority are making good educational progress, and they are gaining more independence and life skills in preparation for leaving care. Young people are positive about the care they receive at the home.

Care planning and care practice are individualised to meet young people's specific needs. In the main, staff work in a coordinated way with young people, their families and relevant professionals to ensure they get the right help, guidance and advice they need. Young people's views are pursued to assist in the running of the home and they are involved in decisions affecting their lives.

Safeguarding practice is improved and young people say they feel safe. Sound systems and effective care practice ensure the welfare and safety of young people are promoted. Staff demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of the risks young people face and always take positive action to ensure risks are minimised and safely managed. This means young people's safety is promoted.

The leadership and management of the children's home are built on sound

foundations. The manager, along with the staff team, has addressed the majority of shortfalls found on the last inspection in July 2013. Although the local authority has made improvement to the deficiencies in the staffing complement, these arrangements are temporary until permanent staff are recruited. The recruitment process has not been fast tracked to address the long-standing staff vacancies and long-term sickness. This is having a negative impact to further improve the overall standard of care delivered to young people at the home. As a result, this is affecting on some levels, the ability to provide continued consistency of care and the building of sustained relationships to ensure all young people trust those adults who care for them, enabling them to work with them more positively.

Further shortfalls identified during this inspection relate to staff recruitment files and damaged bedrooms carpets. Although monitoring systems have been reviewed and changes made to assist in making them more robust, these are not yet embedded in practice to ensure all deficiencies will be immediately addressed.

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
26 (2001)	ensure that he does not employ a person to work at the children's home unless that person is fit to work at the children's home. In particular, ensure that all staff files include a full employment history, confirmation that staff are medically fit and that references are verified. (Regulation 26 (1- 3))	28/10/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the home provides a comfortable and homely environment and is well maintained and decorated. In particular, that all bedroom carpets are in good order, marks are removed or carpets replaced (NMS 10.3)
- take action to address, in a timely manner, any issues of concern that they identify or which are raised with them. (NMS 21.9)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Young people are encouraged to develop their own identity and a positive self-view through individualised care planning and are making suitable progress. Most young people engage with key staff members. This helps young people gain a good understanding of their background. Some young people are still on the journey to achieve this. Staff are committed and persevering in attaining positive attachments with young people. This supports appropriate relationships to ensure staff promote the young people's identity, and encourage social and emotional development.

Young people live in an environment that promotes their health and emotional well-being overall. They are supported to develop healthy lifestyles and this includes young people attending routine health appointments. This has brought about some improved health outcomes for young people. A social worker said: 'My young person had a real phobia of going to the dentist; the staff have worked hard with him on this, and he has now been for check-ups and treatment, which is a great success.' Staff have an understanding of young people's specific health needs to ensure young people's needs are met. Young people continue to benefit from open and honest discussions with staff about the detrimental effect of smoking, drinking and drugs. Staff respond appropriately, offer sound support and monitor health issues. However, some young people still engage in activities which could affect their health, including smoking and substance misuse on occasions. As a result, this does affect the overall health outcomes for some young people.

Education is recognised as highly important in the home. Staff understand that this will improve the life chances for young people. Staff work tirelessly to ensure that young people attend their education provision. Where barriers exist within education, staff work closely with professionals to address these. Young people have access to suitable facilities, including a computer, to undertake their homework. This approach and commitment have brought a tremendous improvement in school attendance and attainment for the majority of young people from their starting points. This will have a positive impact on available opportunities in further education and in their life chances as adults. Staff continue to persevere to engage young people where they struggle to attend their education provision, to bring improved outcomes. Most young people understand the importance of a good education and show great learning potential, with expectations to achieve GCSEs.

Young people have positive and meaningful contact with family, friends and significant others. This promotes their identity needs and sense of belonging. A young person said: 'I see my mum every week.' Staff understand the benefits of contact and build positive relationships with parents and others. Where young people have limited contact with their family, the provision of independent visitors has been pursued. This ensures young people have important links with family and significant others that provide them with positive support networks.

Young people are adequately supported by staff to practise independence skills, including domestic tasks, cooking and managing money, appropriate to their age and understanding. Young people are at the start of this journey, which will assist in preparing them for leaving care and being able to look after themselves. A young

person said: 'I do some cooking and chores; I keep my bedroom clean and tidy and do my own laundry. I am now planning a menu and food shopping more.' Young people who are over 16 years old have a pathway plan. The plan includes suitable detail to support the young person. Since the last inspection most recommendations made in the plan are being implemented. This is starting to prepare the young person for a forthcoming move to live independently, although individuals still have to acquire a number of life and independence skills to ensure they can care for themselves successfully.

Quality of care

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

The home provides an encouraging environment for young people. Relationships have formed or are forming between staff and young people. This enables staff to work more effectively in a relaxed manner while still maintaining consistent professional boundaries. The staff team demonstrates a good understanding of young people's individual personalities, needs, interests and strengths. A young person said, 'It's okay here, it's more settled, I get on with most of the staff.'

The permanent staff team takes responsibility for supporting the young people, and regular team meetings include discussions about all the issues pertinent to the young people to support their continuity of care. Young people can read their files, which helps them understand their histories and plans, and they can attend their statutory reviews. Placement plans have all been reviewed and updated; these outline the young people's individual needs and show the journey of the young person. In most areas, placements plans provide suitable guidance for staff on how young people should be cared for. Improvement has occurred in undertaking regular direct work sessions with young people. This enables young people and staff to explore and address relevant care need areas.

Staff recognise the importance of promoting positive behaviour and that this is essential to the quality of care that they provide. The staff team is striving to manage negative behaviour through building positive relationships and ensuring that consistent boundaries are maintained with young people. Staff are clear on the individual behaviour strategies that are in place for each young person. Positive behaviour is being more consistently sustained. Young people have commenced a period of positive behaviour and there has been a noticeable reduction in incidents and risk-taking behaviour.

Young people influence decision-making through a range of avenues. Daily discussions, house meetings, key-work sessions and statutory reviews provide an opportunity to express their opinions. Young people know how to complain. No complaints have been made since the last inspection.

Young people live in a well-maintained property, which is close to local shops and accessible public transport. The home provides a modern comfortable environment for young people. Staff have worked tirelessly to improve the environment in recent

months. Since the last inspection, a number of areas in the house have been decorated, repairs have been made to furniture and the conservatory has been personalised, including the fitting of new blinds. The garden fence has been painted, removing graffiti, improving significantly the first impressions of the home, while fitting in with neighbouring properties. Young people have their own bedrooms, which they can personalise to reflect their individuality. A young person said: 'The house is looking nice but some of the bedroom carpets have cigarette burns; this is not so good.' A young person said: 'I've chosen the paint and wallpaper to have my room redecorated; staff are just doing this now, it's going to look great.' This ensures young people are living in a pleasant home with good facilities to meet their needs.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people's safety and welfare are well integrated into care practices and taken seriously by the home. Staff have regular discussions with young people and talk through any identified safety or other concerns. Most young people engage and take on board safety matters which assist in them keeping themselves safer. Staff receive safeguarding training and have a good understanding of their duties in promoting young people's welfare. All risk areas are assessed. Young people have detailed risk assessments to manage identified risks. These have been reviewed and updated. As a result, risk assessments adequately detail the precautions to take to enable staff to assist them to keep young people or others safe.

Police attendance at the home has significantly reduced. The majority of staff are trained in physical intervention and behaviour management techniques. This has been improved by the reduction in use of agency workers. As a result, this ensures safe practices can be used when circumstances arise. This supports the safety of young people and others.

Personalised behaviour plans are used. They contain individualised details for staff to follow when managing young people's behaviour. These have been reviewed and are assisting staff in reducing young people's presenting challenging behaviour. Staff demonstrate that they know young people well and the strategies to manage behaviour are more successful. Staff engage positively and sensitively with young people to recognise and support them in working through their anxieties. Young people have positive incentives to encourage them to behave in a socially acceptable way. Sanctions are appropriately used, proportionate to young people's age and understanding and the use is minimal. Staff and young people confirm that physical intervention is only used as a very last resort and that young people's behaviour is managed in a calm and supportive manner. There have not been any physical interventions used since the last inspection. Relevant records now include all the required information. This ensures that sufficient information is maintained to assist in the monitoring of these practices to protect young people.

Staff follow anti-bullying policies and procedures. Staff challenge any bullying

behaviour and speak to all young people involved individually, to try to stop this happening. Recently a staff member has been designated as the anti-bullying officer. Additional work is being undertaken on bullying with the young people. As a result, since the last inspection, young people's views on this matter have changed. Young people say that there is no bullying at the home. Staff continue to monitor this area closely. This is to ensure young people do not experience bullying which affects their daily life negatively, reducing their self-esteem. This makes them feel safe and secure within their own home.

Safer and more suitable recruitment checks are undertaken before agency staff commence working at the home. The home has the details of the disclosure check, identification information, references, employment history, training and experience for all agency workers working in the home. This is to prevent unsuitable people from having access to young people and ensures their well-being and safety. However, omissions have been found in some of the recruitment files of permanent staff. These include gaps in employment history, verification details of references, proof of qualifications and documentation to verify that individuals are physically and mentally fit to work. This does not ensure full recruitment checks and information are in place. This could impact on the well-being of young people and their safety.

Staff follow and implement suitable protocols when a child goes missing. Staff take appropriate action, including liaising with the police and discussing with young people the risk involved when staying out late at night. The action taken tries to reduce such events and safeguard young people's welfare. The majority of incidents are where young people are reported missing and result in late returns home. These incidents remain at a constant figure, not reducing.

Young people live in a physically safe environment in which health and safety issues are suitably managed to protect them. Staff undertake routine health and safety checks around the home. Fire safety risk assessments and regular safety checks protect young people from fire. Routine evacuation procedures and practices ensure that young people have awareness of what to do in the event of an emergency and staff know how to protect them.

Leadership and management

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

Suitable leadership and management are demonstrated within the home. The manager understands the strengths and weaknesses of the service and is committed to meeting the needs of the young people.

The majority of shortfalls found at the last inspection in July 2013 have been addressed. Action has been taken to address requirements and recommendations. These include: safe recruitment information is held for agency staff; the use of agency staff has significantly reduced; and supervision for agency staff is provided. Each working shift has staff that are adequately trained to meet the needs of young people, particularly in physical intervention. This ensures that suitable and safe staff

care for young people. Omissions from records have been rectified to ensure they include the required information. Risk assessments have been reviewed. This ensures that staff are clear on how to reduce or eliminate the identified risks to young people. Further work has been undertaken to address bullying, bringing positive results; bullying has reduced significantly and young people think it is no longer affecting their daily life.

Regular direct work with young people is undertaken, relating to their care and pathway plan aims. This demonstrates young people's care needs are being supported to bring positive outcomes in the areas they require support, care and guidance.

Improvements have been made to the environment, repairs have been made to furnishings and blinds have been installed to the conservatory. This provides young people with a home that is furnished to a good standard, giving them a positive environment in which to live.

Significant events, such as allegations made about people working at the home, child protection enquiries and serious incidents necessitating calling the police to the home, have been consistently notified to Ofsted, as required. Concerns have been investigated, and although not always in a timely manner, have now been suitably concluded. This demonstrates that the home is implementing safeguarding responsibilities to ensure that matters have been appropriately addressed.

The permanent staff are trained in a wide variety of safety and childcare matters. An on-going programme of regular refresher training is provided. The agency staff currently in use now have the majority of essential training including safeguarding, and health and safety. Agency staff are to undertake physical intervention training in the next month. As a result, this ensures the staff can consistently deliver a suitable and safe standard of care to young people.

Staff say they are well supported and confirm that the management team is approachable. All staff benefit from receiving regular formal supervision. This consistently provides suitable support to all staff to access continuing advice and guidance in relation to their care of young people.

Monitoring of the home is suitable. There are regular unannounced visits from the provider to monitor the quality of care and monitoring is undertaken by the manager. The monitoring systems of the service are starting to be more evaluative but this is work in progress. Since the last inspection a review of the monitoring system has taken place. There are plans to make changes to the format of the Regulation 33 report and how it will ensure that the identified deficiencies and areas for improvements will be addressed. Action has been taken to address a number of previously identified areas for improvement. However, some have not all been fully addressed. For example, the local authority has taken some action to improve and provide suitable staffing arrangements in the home. Immediate action has not been taken to recruit staff to permanent vacancies. Although there is a core of permanent staff, this does not yet fully ensure a stable staff team is in place. Therefore, this

does not enable all young people to build strong attachments, trusting relationships and to provide a secure environment in which they can fully thrive.

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.