

Inspection report for children's home

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This local authority children's home provides care and accommodation for up to four children and young people who may have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The primary task of the home is to provide short to medium-term care to prepare children and young people to live in a foster family.

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**.

Since the last inspection the function and the staffing structure of the home have changed following a review by the local authority. Although the changes have presented challenges, the manager and staff continued to provide a good quality of care and support young people to be safe and achieve positive outcomes in all aspects of their welfare and development, including in education, building relationships, social skills, health and emotional well-being.

Staff are caring, qualified, skilled and very experienced. The staff have changed very little as a result of the reorganisation. Familiar adults provide young people with consistency that enables them to maintain positive relationships with key adults in their lives. Staff are fully committed to promoting young people's safety and welfare. Young people are safe and are protected from harm. Staff actively support young people who occasionally continue to struggle with their feelings. Overall, young people have very good relationships with staff and feel positive about the staff and the care they receive. Young people's social workers and parents are also positive about the staff's commitment to young people and standard of care and support they provide.

The manager and staff contribute fully to the planning for young people's care and support. They work effectively in partnership with young people, social workers, schools and support services to ensure that young people get the help, guidance and advice they need on a daily basis. Their approach ensures the support young people receive is personalised and tailored to meet their individual and diverse needs.

The management and leadership arrangements are strong. The manager is trying to achieve continuous improvement and positive outcomes for young people. She uses monitoring systems to measure young people's progress, identify the strengths of the home and areas for development, including the development of staff's skills and knowledge through training and additional support from psychologist.

Overall the home shows a good capacity for continued improvement, but there are areas for further development. The monitoring reports completed by elected members do not always provide a clear picture of the running of the home to support the manager to make further improvements. There is a lack of contingency plans to ensure monitoring visits take place every month, if an elected member is unable to carry out the visit. Although the manager and staff are generally well supported, formal professional supervision and team meetings are not taking place frequently enough. This means they are missing regular opportunities to discuss young people's progress and care, the running of the home and their own professional development.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children's risk assessments explicitly show the specific measures staff should take to manage and reduce any potential risk to children's safety and emotional well-being (NMS 4.5)
- ensure suitable arrangements exist for the regular professional supervision of the registered manager (NMS 19.3)
- provide staff with regular professional supervision and opportunities to meet as a team for support and guidance about their roles, to discuss children's progress, and the running and the development of the service (NMS 19.4)
- ensure that Regulation 33 monitoring visits always take place at least once a month to scrutinise how the home is supporting children; and the written report showing the findings of the visit is of a consistently high quality to assist the service to secure improvements and better outcomes for children. (Volume 5, statutory guidance, paragraphs 3.12 and 3.13)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people are making very good progress in all aspects of their lives, including their education, health, managing their feelings, and not to take part in harmful behaviour. They are building positive relationships with other young people and staff.

They take pride in their achievements, becoming more confident and emotional resilient. A social worker said, '(young person) is doing very well and really likes it there. She is in education, which we were unable to achieve at her previous placements, and she is starting to make friends with other young people.'

Young people enjoy good health and improved health outcomes. They enjoy a healthy diet and plenty of physical exercise. They understand about the importance of healthy lifestyles and key health risks. As a result they make positive health choices that improve their own health. Young people's emotional well-being has also improved; they are less anxious, sleeping better and more able to deal with their worries and frustrations constructively. Some young people no longer need to take medication to help them manage their anxiety and behaviour.

Young people are making very good progress in education. They are well-motivated to attend school and keen to do well. Their school attendance is very good and their participation in education and learning has significantly improved since moving in. Consequently, they have increased opportunities to achieve, develop their knowledge and skills, pursue their talents and gain qualifications. Young people are meeting their expected targets. Some young people particularly enjoy reading, discussing what they have read and reading to staff.

Young people maintain good relationships with their parents and families through seeing them regularly. Staff work effectively with young people, families, social workers and support services to make sure that contact is a safe and rewarding experience that promotes and builds young people's relationships with important people in their lives. A social worker said, 'staff work really well with (young person's) mum and manage contact very well.' They also ensure that the arrangements for seeing their families are consistent with young people's care plans.

Young people are developing their social and life skills appropriate to their age, abilities and level of understanding. Young people are successfully taking on more responsibilities and have every opportunity to build confidence in their skills. They routinely plan, shop and cook meals, and enjoy baking with staff. A young person said, 'we all learn independent life skills, mine are cooking, doing my washing and spending money wisely.' Staff enable young people to develop their confidence in new skills, for example making porridge on the hob, understanding and using money, and dealing with shopkeepers. Young people routinely take part a full range of enjoyable activities, including playing and socialising with friends, going to the gym, swimming, sports, music and singing, trips to the seaside, going out for meals and to the theatre, and Halloween events. Activities in the community have helped young people feel more confident and comfortable around other people and develop a clearer understanding how to act appropriately. A social worker said, 'going to football practise has really improved (young person's) social skills and his confidence around other people.'

Quality of care

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

Young people live in a very supportive home that promotes their welfare and enables them to achieve better outcomes. Staff have aspirations for young people to do well. They are committed to enabling young people to lead happy and fulfilling lives, regardless of the challenges young people may present. They provide a consistently good standard of care, structure and routine in a caring atmosphere. Young people are very positive about how well they are being looked after. They feel that staff are interested in their lives and concerned about their welfare. Young people said, 'staff always help us with our problems and look after us.' Parents and social workers are also very positive of the quality of care and staff's ability to meet young people's needs and make a positive difference to their lives. A social worker said, '(young person) has good relationships with staff and staff provide him with appropriate affection. He takes part in excellent activities, enjoys healthy food, he looks forward to tea, and lives in very appropriate accommodation.'

Staff develop constructive relationships with young people. They spend time with young people. They make every effort to find out what is important to individual young people, understanding their needs, culture, circumstances, talents and interests. Young people who moved in more recently are still getting to know staff and the other young people. However, there are encouraging signs that they are starting to make friends and are beginning to build trust in staff and willing to accept their support. Young people's views and wishes significantly influence the running of the home and the decisions affecting their lives. They feel that the staff always listened to them, take their complaints seriously and help sort things out. Staff help young people understand when it may not be possible to act upon their wishes. Young people also know how to contact their social workers, independent visitors, Ofsted and advocates if they have concerns. A social worker said, '(young person) has trusting relationship with his key worker and able to express his feelings about important decisions about the future.' A young person said 'my key worker always takes me to my meetings so I can tell people what I think.'

Young people know their placement plans and are involved in writing them. The plans are detailed, set out all of their individual needs, and the support to promote and safeguard their welfare. Staff have a detailed knowledge of the young people they work with ensuring that young people receive very good individual support and guidance. Staff put young people's placement plans into practice effectively. Staff's day-to-day practice recognises young people as individuals with different needs, backgrounds, interests and views. They ensure that young people receive an individual service designed to meet their diverse personal needs. Staff routinely monitor and review young people's plans and their practice to make sure they continue to meet young people's needs.

Staff work in partnership with parents, social workers and the key people supporting young people. They appropriately share information about young people's progress and experiences. They contribute effectively to plans for young people's future; making sure that young people are comfortable with the plan, it is moving at the right pace for them, and they have the right support and guidance now and in the future to make their move successful.

Young people live in a healthy environment that actively promotes their physical health and emotional well-being. They have very good access to a full range of health services. Staff have a very good understanding of young people's specific health and emotional needs. They provide excellent advice on health issues, including diet, sexual health and relationships and ensure young people's needs are met on a daily basis. They also ensure young people get suitable medical advice and treatment when they are feeling poorly or have an accident. The arrangements for medication are safe and effective.

Staff actively promote young people's education and are successful in developing young people's opportunities to learn and achieve. Staff ensure that the daily routine supports young people's participation in education and school attendance. Young people said, 'staff always try their best to make me go to school and to help me with my school work.' Staff fully support young people with their homework and this has helped young people to make very good progress with their reading. Young people have good access to plenty of books, art materials, games, computers and other educational resources. Staff have established strong links with schools and work effectively with teachers when young people are experiencing difficulties. The manager and staff work tenaciously to challenge any barriers to young people's full participation in education.

Young people live in a comfortable family house. It is clean, decorated, furnished and maintained to a good standard and meets young people's individual needs, personalities and tastes.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people live in a safe environment and are protected from harm. They generally feel safe, but said sometimes they do not feel safe when other young people's behaviour is aggressive.

Overall young people get on very well with staff and each other and their behaviour is usually good. Young people benefit from a nurturing and structured environment where positive behaviour is actively promoted through praise and rewards. Staff apply fair and consistent boundaries to help young people understand what is expected of them. Occasionally young people struggle to manage their feelings and resolve conflicts positively and sometimes their level of distress and frustration results in aggressive behaviour that has impacted negatively on them and other young people. Staff are vigilant, diffuse difficult situations, and effectively deal with bullying. A young person said, 'staff try their best to deal with the situation.' Staff tackle unacceptable behaviour through clear communication and the effective use of mediation. This has helped young people understand the impact of their behaviour on others and apologise. A social worker said, '(young person) presents some behaviour issues, but staff are managing her behaviour really well. They spend time talking through what happened and she can see where things have gone wrong and

thinks with staff about how to deal with problems better.' A young person said 'when I get upset, staff say what's wrong let's talk it through.'

Staff are developing a really good understanding of the times and factors that contribute to young people becoming upset. The manager and staff reflect critically on young people's behaviour and devised positive strategies to support individual young people's to deal with their anxieties and frustrations more constructively. The manager has taken active steps to develop staff's competences and knowledge in understanding young people's behaviour. Additional training has been arranged in attachment disorders and self-harming behaviour, and with guidance from clinical psychologists.

Staff give young people's safety the highest priority and they are well trained in safeguarding. They are able to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse and risks relating to child sexual exploitation. They know exactly what they need to do when they have concerns about young people and take decisive action to protect young people. Staff work effectively with young people and the safeguarding agencies, including the police, to promote young people's safety. The manager and staff report all serious incidents that may impact on young people's safety to the relevant people and agencies. They are good at sharing information with other agencies to identify specific risks and develop effective plans to keep individual young people safe.

Staff ensure risk assessments and plans for young people's safety are consistently put into practice and fully address young people's needs, including direct work about dealing with feelings, personal safety and the risks of sexual exploitation. However, risk assessments do not always clearly show how to reduce risks; for example one risk assessment states 'staff to support young person in using safe self-harming techniques and alternatives', but does not specifically show what these techniques are and how should be used. Nevertheless, staff have a very clear understanding of young people's particular vulnerabilities relating to a level of understanding and emotional maturity. This enables them to ensure young people are safe at home and in the community. Staff effectively balance the need for protection with enabling young people to take reasonable risks as part of their growth and development.

Young people currently do not go missing from home. Staff are fully aware of the factors that may lead young people to go missing and have taken effective action to reduce the risk. When young people have gone missing in the past they have been found quickly and have received the reassurance and support they needed to be welcomed home safely. Staff have recorded young people's views about what happened and why they went missing. This has helped staff to understand young people's reasons and provide appropriate support to encourage to not go missing.

No new staff have been appointed since the last inspection. As part of the reorganisation of the home since the last inspection, staff have had suitability interviews to ensure they have the necessary competencies. The selection of staff has been very thorough to make sure young people are protected and staff have skills, experiences, qualifications and motivation to work with vulnerable young

people.

Young people are protected from any hazards by a comprehensive range of detailed health and safety procedures and risk assessments. Staff carry out regular health and safety checks, including fire drills, to ensure the premises are safe and young people know what to do in case of an emergency.

Leadership and management

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

Since the last inspection the local authority has reviewed its provision of residential services for children and young people. As a result the function of the home and staffing arrangement and structure has changed. The home now focuses preparing and supporting young people to move into a foster family. The home now looks after four young people instead of five. The home is being effectively run to reflect the changes and to meet the objectives of the revised Statement of Purpose. Staff are clear about the new purpose of the home. They feel positive about impact of the changes on young people's care. Some staff are still adapting to their new roles, but feel supported to take on new responsibilities. The changes have been challenging and stressful for the manager and staff, but they have remained committed to promoting young people's safety and welfare. The home continues to be effectively run in young people's best interests.

The Registered Manager is experienced and suitably qualified. She provides effective leadership and sets consistently high expectations for staff to provide high standards of care and safety. Despite the challenges she has faced around the reorganisation of the home, she has made sure that the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been addressed. Consultation with young people about their experiences has improved. Young people and staff's views are now taken into account more consistently as part of the local authority's monitoring of the running of the home. Young people are encouraged to have their views recorded when they have been involved in any disciplinary measures or been missing. This means that young people opinions are sought more routinely about the care and support they receive. In addition, staff are making every effort to develop young people's skills in sustaining positive relationships and resolving conflict constructively; for example staff are using mediation and direct work with young people to enable them to develop strategies for managing their feelings in ways that work for them. The manager is not complacent. She uses good monitoring systems to understand the strengths of the service and areas for development. She is enthusiastic to develop staff's skills through reflective practice. She aims to enhance the quality of support to young people by bringing in psychologists to provide further insight into young people's needs and the strategies to help them.

Elected members from the local authority carry out monitoring visits. These usually take place every month, but due to ill health no visit took place in July 2013. The local authority did not have a contingency arrangement to make sure a monitoring visit took place; consequently there was a lack of oversight of the running of the

home at the time when the organisational changes were put into practice. Overall the quality of the monitoring is very good and the reports produced by elected members show effective scrutiny of the performance of the home. However, the quality of the reports is not of a consistent high standard; some reports do not do not provide a clear picture of young people's experiences and the quality of the care. This lack of thoroughness does not assist the home to secure improvements and better outcomes for children.

Young people are looked after by very experienced, skilled, appropriately qualified, and compassionate people. The numbers of staff on duty are sufficient to meet the needs of young people. Despite the reorganisation of the home and changes to some staff's roles, there have been very few changes to the people working with young people. This has maintained the continuity of care for young people and not disrupted their attachments with important people. The staff team are experienced and used to working together in a consistent way that promotes young people's best interests. Staff's skills complement each other and match young people's needs well. Staff have the opportunities for good quality training to develop their individual skills and knowledge relevant to the young people they are caring for. In addition, staff have opportunities to gain more advanced qualifications, including in management, working with young people, and medication.

Staff feel very well supported by the manager. Their performance has been has been recently monitored through formal appraisals. The manager and staff receive professional supervision, but this is not taking place frequently to provide them routine opportunities to discuss their performance and development with a senior person. Furthermore, team meetings do not take place routinely to provide staff with the chance as a group to review and reflect young people's progress, the running of the home and how best to develop and improve the standard of care and support.

Young people's written records provide a detailed picture of young people's progress and experiences. As a result the records provide accurate information that contributes to an understanding of young people's lives and informs the plans for their care. The records clearly show the difference the home is making to young people's lives and development.

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.