

Children's homes inspection – Full

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| Inspection date | 20/07/2016 |
| Unique reference number | 1226757 |
| Type of inspection | Full |
| Provision subtype | Children's home |
| Registered provider | Potton Homes Ltd |
| Registered provider address | Potton Homes, 1 Cresswell Park, London SE3 9RD |

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| Responsible individual | Susan Potton |
| Registered manager | Claire Sowden |
| Inspector | Joanna Heller |

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| Inspection date | 20/07/2016 |
| Previous inspection judgement | N/A |
| Enforcement action since last inspection | None |
| This inspection | |
| The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are | Good |
| The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good. | |
| How well children and young people are helped and protected | Good |
| The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers | Requires improvement |

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Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- Young people and staff benefit from a well-maintained, decorated and comfortable environment.
- The young people are very positive about their experiences of living at the home and always feel well supported.
- The young people establish strong relationships with staff in a very short time, which they value highly. These relationships help them to reflect on their experiences, situation and what they want in life.
- The young people identify how the support offered by staff has helped them to feel more confident and mature and, as a result, they make good progress in the time they live at the home. All of the young people say that they enjoy spending time with staff whom they describe as 'brilliant' or 'excellent'.
- Staffing levels are exceptionally high, facilitating time and attention to be spent with the young people and keeping them safe.
- Partner professionals and young people's families have confidence that their child's individual needs are well met by caring and nurturing staff.
- The provision of consistent boundaries, balanced with a strong ethos of listening to the child, helps young people to feel valued and accepted. They are helped to understand the reasons for and impact of their behaviour. As a result, young people in most cases do not display the levels of unsafe or antisocial behaviour anticipated.
- The staff provide a non-stop programme of fun and stimulating activities, which means that the vast majority of young people want to be at the home rather than go missing.
- Staff are successful and resourceful in promoting contact and helping young people to rebuild positive relationships with their families.
- The young people are safe and feel safe. Any conflict within the group is identified and well managed.
- A number of requirements and recommendations have been made in respect of record-keeping, staff training and quality assurance, but these have not impacted negatively on the care that young people experience.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that must be taken so that the registered persons meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'. The registered persons must comply within the given timescales.

| Requirement | Due date |
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| After consultation with the fire and rescue authority, the registered person must ensure that the requirements of the regulatory reform (fire safety) order 2005 and any regulations made under it, except for article 23 (duties of employees), are complied with in respect of the home. In particular, they must ensure that all fire doors are maintained in a suitable condition. Furthermore, they must ensure that a night-time drill is conducted and that each child receives documented instruction on fire procedures in the home. (Regulation 25(2)(b)) | 15/08/2016 |
| The registered person must ensure that all employees undertake appropriate continuing professional development. In particular, they must ensure that all staff undertake suitable training in safeguarding, child sexual exploitation, administration of medication, self-harm and any other training that reflects the needs of the children placed. (Regulation 33(4)(a)) | 19/09/2016 |
| The registered person must maintain records ('case records') for each child which include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child, and that these are signed and dated by the author of each entry. In particular, they must ensure that consents for medical treatment include details of the child to whom they relate. (Regulation 36(1)(a)(c)) | 22/08/2016 |
| The registered person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the quality of care provided for children, the feedback and opinions of children about the children's home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it, and any actions that the registered person considers necessary in order to improve or maintain the quality of care provided for children. (Regulation 45(2)(a)(b)(c)) | 12/12/2016 |

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- The registered person should ensure that prescribed medicines are only administered to the individual for whom they are prescribed. Medicines must be administered in line with a medically approved protocol. Records must be kept of the administration of all medication, which includes occasions when prescribed medication is refused. Regulation 23 requires the registered person to ensure that they make suitable arrangements to manage, administer and dispose of any medication. These are fundamentally the same sorts of arrangements as a good parent would make, but are subject to additional safeguards. In particular, they should ensure that children have suitable access to emergency pain relief. Furthermore, they should ensure that medication is stored at a suitable temperature and that staff only administer medication when their competency to do so has been assessed. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 35, paragraph 7.15)
- Staff should continually and actively assess the risks to each child and the arrangements in place to protect them. When there are safeguarding concerns for a child, their placement plan, agreed between the home and their placing authority, must include details of the steps the home will take to manage any assessed risks on a day-to-day basis. In particular, they should ensure that individual risk assessments for each child are sufficiently clear as to the risk and actions to be taken to reduce risk. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 42, paragraph 9.5.)
- The registered person should ensure that all incidents of control, discipline and restraint are subject to systems of regular scrutiny to ensure that their use is fair. In particular, they should ensure suitable overview of any restraint by a person independent of the incident. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.36)
- The registered person should actively seek independent scrutiny of the home and make best use of information from independent and internal monitoring (including under regulations 44 and 45) to ensure continuous improvement. In particular, they should ensure that records maintained in the home are sufficiently accurate and reliable to demonstrate the actions that staff have taken and the training they receive. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 55, paragraph 10.24)
- As set out in regulations 31-33, the registered person is responsible for maintaining good employment practice. They must ensure that recruitment, supervision and performance management of staff safeguard children and minimise potential risks to them. In particular, they should ensure that dates of employment are sufficiently clear to robustly enable the understanding and exploration of gaps in employment. ('Guide to the children's homes

regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home is one of three children's homes and a school privately owned by this company. It is registered to look after a maximum of three young people with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties or learning disabilities. This is a task-focused unit, the purpose of which is to assess the needs of the young people and identify what type of long-term placement and support services are required.

Recent inspection history

This is the services first inspection.

Inspection judgements

| | Judgement grade |
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| The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are | Good |
| <p>Young people are effectively safeguarded. They experience positive outcomes and really enjoy their time at the home. Despite some improvements being required in leadership and management, the overall experiences of young people are very positive.</p> <p>The building is homely and provides suitable accommodation, which meets young people's needs. Staff provide young people with a happy, nurturing environment in which they flourish. One young person said that being at this home has meant that, 'I've really cleaned up my act.'</p> <p>The focus of the home is to identify and facilitate future care plans. Good matching of placements and very high supervision levels mean that no placement breakdowns have occurred. In preparation for the end of their stay, young people are encouraged to be fully involved in their future plans and transitions. Staff ensure that their wishes and feelings are communicated to the placing authority. One young person who has moved on said, 'I really liked it. I liked everything: the staff, the way it was run and the activities.' They reflected that, because of the support offered by staff, 'things changed for me. I feel calmer and can talk about my feelings rather than smash things up.'</p> <p>The young people are only placed at the home for a short time and, during their stay, are supported educationally by teachers and staff from the organisation's school. Most young people have some success in beginning to improve their engagement and attendance in education from their starting points. They are challenged by staff to develop their awareness of their place in the world. For example, one young person said, 'We have debates between staff and young people such as the EU: whether we stay in or out. The staff encourage us to engage and form opinions about world affairs.'</p> <p>Staff have boundless energy and enthusiasm, spending each day in a new adventure with the young people: at an amusement park, canoeing, dog walking, high ropes challenge or shopping. One young person said, 'It is always funny to see who wins when the staff participate, especially since we always seem to beat them. In between these adventures, the young people really enjoy the down time that staff spend with them playing board games and cards. One said, 'I love the time we do on unpaid activities in the house. We had a domino marathon the other day.'</p> <p>It is the ability of staff to build such positive, supportive relationships, which help young people to feel safe and able to open up to staff. This, in turn, enables staff</p> | |

to have good insight assessment of the young people's needs. The young people trust the staff and believe that they want only the best for them. They feel listened to and valued and have confidence that staff will communicate their thoughts, wishes and feelings on their behalf. They reflect on their developing maturity and ability to communicate their needs within the short time they are placed, which indicates improved emotional well-being and, for some young people, a significant reduction of risk. The young people refer to staff as 'fantastic' and said, 'I love the staff... They are all really nice'. One young person showed the inspector a gift they had bought for a member of staff, stating, 'She is always been there for me.' They described how this person had supported them through a particularly difficult experience.

Medication arrangements in the home require some improvement in order to comply with statutory guidance. Medication is securely stored in a room that can become rather hot. This has the potential to impact on the efficacy of the medication. Not all staff have completed the medication e-learning, and those that have not been subject to assessment of their competency to administer medication. Some young people are not prescribed emergency pain medication, nor is there a home remedy protocol in place, rendering staff unable to administer emergency pain relief should this be requested.

Staff provide highly individualised care, and equality and diversity are firmly embedded into the service. Young people are helped to have an understanding of their life experiences and the impact these have on who they are, providing an emotionally safe and supportive environment where they can explore their identities and who they want to be. Effective partnership working with families and prospective foster carers promotes positive future relationships. The young people and their families are able to receive further family support through the organisation's other support services.

The young people consistently rate the home as excellent and grade it 10/10. One said, 'I love this place. I love everything about it. All of the staff are lovely. Amazing activities. It's fantastic.' Another said, 'Even though this is only a short-term placement, it's definitely more of a positive respite and, although young people may be apprehensive about coming here (much like I was), I think they will turn out to enjoy their time here.'

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| | Judgement grade |
| How well children and young people are helped and protected | Good |
| <p>Safeguarding is at the forefront of staff practice. High staffing levels and exceptionally positive relationships with staff ensure that young people significantly reduce their levels of risk. Antisocial behaviour, self-harm, and offending, as a result of staff support, are now rare. Young people say that they always feel safe. One said, 'Staff try the utmost best to be supportive when I'm feeling low.' Another said, 'The staff here are lovely – as is the home. I feel as though the staff do try hard to make us feel comfortable and keep us safe, although sometimes we don't make it very easy for them.'</p> <p>Parents and partner professionals have absolute confidence in the staff to keep the young people safe. Comments include, 'They have been fantastic. They've really supported him. They always go and look for him and bring him home.' Another said that staff are 'excellent at reading situations and changing plans' to respond to young people's changing needs. For one social worker, their experience of the home means, 'I have been able to sleep at night as I am not worrying about my young person.' One parent said that their child always felt safe and well protected. 'We had absolute confidence' in the home.</p> <p>The staff provide an environment where the vast majority of young people have a higher desire to stay than to go missing, which means that missing-from-care incidents drastically reduce while they are at the home. The manager has established positive partnerships with the local police missing person liaison officer ensuring a co-ordinated approach to missing-from-home incidents. Staff have a good understanding of why individual young people go missing and have clear response plans in place, which are consistently and effectively implemented. For example, each young person has one-to-one support, and this staff member follows the young person wherever they go until, in the majority of incidents, they successfully persuade them to return to the home.</p> <p>The strong relationships with staff who provide consistently clear boundaries while maintaining a calm and relaxed atmosphere help young people to articulate and express their worries. As a result, they feel much more in control. The young people say that the responses to negative behaviour are fair. Staff are confident and competent in the use of physical intervention, and are clear about the threshold for its use. Young people understand the reason for restraint being used and said that it is only ever used to keep them or others safe. One said, 'At the time, I was so angry and could not understand, but then, when things calmed down and we talked it through, I did understand.' However, there is not a system in place to provide appropriate independent review of incidents of physical restraint, in which the registered manager is involved. This potentially undermines the ability for reflection to contribute to meeting the ongoing and changing needs</p> | |

of the young people.

The regularly reviewed risk assessments and management plans are, on occasion, not sufficiently detailed and lack clarity, undermining their effectiveness in guiding staff in how manage risks, such as self-harm and substance misuse. There has been no direct impact for young people, as the team has good knowledge of the individual risks presented, and the very high levels of supervision and interaction mean that potential triggers and/or opportunities for such events to occur are significantly reduced.

There has been one potential safeguarding concern in the home, in relation to an incident in which physical restraint was required in the community. The manager, who is fully conversant with local procedures and their safeguarding responsibilities, ensured a robust and transparent review of the incident.

Vetting practices for new staff are in the vast majority of cases robust. However, on one occasion they fell below that dictated by best practice. In this instance, an application for a new member of staff detailed only years of employment rather than dates, and this was not further scrutinised to identify potential employment gaps. While there is no suggestion that this applicant was not appropriate, such failure to identify and explore gaps potentially provides less scrupulous applicants with opportunities to be less than transparent in their employment history and to hide information, which may impact on their suitability.

The manager ensures that good systems are in place to ensure the safety and security of the building. However, there is no record that each of the young people currently resident has received fire instruction, and no night-time fire drill has been completed. This means that staff and young people may not have a full understanding of how to evacuate the home effectively in the event of an emergency. Suitable fire precaution arrangements in the home effectively minimise the risk of fire. However, one intumescent smoke strip on one fire door required repair. The provider confirmed, following the inspection, that this had been repaired the next day.

One significant person for a child said, 'I know she feels safe. In the previous home, she would ring several times every day. Now she only rings for chats.' A young person said, 'The fact that staff are this caring makes me feel safe and comfortable.'

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| | Judgement grade |
| The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers | Requires improvement |
| <p>The leadership and management of the home is not yet good. This is the suitably qualified registered manager's first manager post, and it is the first inspection of this new home. The manager has rightly ensured that the primary focus has been prioritising the needs of the young people. As a result, the children make good individual progress in relation to their behaviour, personal safety, confidence and emotional stability within a short time. They feel cared for and valued by all the staff, including the manager. For example, one young person said, 'The manager even took me out for lunch once to listen to my views. I found this reassuring and felt comfortable discussing things I was not previously able to discuss.'</p> <p>However, the manager has not effectively utilised quality assurance systems to identify shortfalls in the home in order to enable them to develop clear action plans. On occasion, basic records have not been kept to a suitable standard and the actions of staff cannot be evidenced. For example, records of staff training were inaccurate and out of date, the consent for medical treatment for one young person did not state their name, the manager has not arranged for an independent review of any physical interventions in which they are involved, and the actions which staff say they take in relation to advising young people of fire evacuations are not documented.</p> <p>The organisation provides a selection of relevant training for staff in order to enhance their professional development, and all but one staff member who has been working with young people in a children's home for over two years have completed their level 3 diploma. The remaining member of staff is due to complete this training shortly, and all new staff have been enrolled. However, a number of staff have yet to complete training in prevention and management of self-harm, medication, child sexual exploitation and safeguarding. Staff professional awareness and competence has the potential to be undermined when key training has not been undertaken. This is particularly important when the placements are short term and therefore young people's needs are regularly changing.</p> <p>This is a well-resourced home, which despite shortfalls in staff training, has been able to deliver a high-quality, highly individualised caring experience to young people in accordance with the statement of purpose. Staffing levels are high and exceed the individually assessed needs of each young person. For example, in addition to the individually allocated member of staff to support each young person, there is an additional member of staff throughout the day. The young people benefit from an enthusiastic and committed staff team that enjoys its work. Professionals and parents refer to staff who are 'fantastic' and very child focussed commenting, 'It's all about the young person and what she needs.' As a result, 'she's happy building positive relationships with staff she loves'.</p> | |

Staff have received a thorough induction process, which has helped new staff to gain skills and confidence prior to taking on their new roles. They benefit from regular supervision and team meetings and feel well supported by a strong team approach and a very 'hands on' manager.

Staff have developed good partnership working with families and other agencies, ensuring that young people gain access to appropriate levels of support. Parents, placing authorities and schools rate the home as good to excellent. The manager feels confident to challenge these other agencies if they feel that they are not acting in the young person's best interests.

The home is in its infancy having only been open for four months. The manager and staff have been focussed on ensuring that all of the young people receive the care and support they need and that they move on in planned way, with fond memories of their time at the home. In order to be a home the leadership and management of which is good, some improvements are needed in relation to staff training, record-keeping and quality monitoring. Although some requirements and recommendations have been set at this inspection, these do not significantly undermine outcomes for young people or the high-quality, individualised care that they receive. One young person summed up their thoughts as, 'It was not what I expected, and I think all children's home should be like this.'

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of children looked after is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place. However, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or that result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference that adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This 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 Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'.

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