

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The children's home accommodates two young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is privately owned and is one of three children's homes operated by the provider. The home can accommodate young people with physical disabilities if their primary need is emotional or 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 **outstanding**.

The outcomes for young people are very good. Many young people make excellent progress to develop a positive self-view and to understand their background. As a result, they are able to sustain greatly improved behaviour and enough coping skills for future family life or independent living. The effectiveness of the home in supporting young people's progress is excellent. The quality of care provided by all staff is very high. Alongside this, the responsible individual and manager make an outstanding contribution of direct work with young people. A significant contributor to the success of the home is the consistency of the staff and management group and their long term commitment to individual young people. As a result, young people develop attachments to caring adults and feel very safe and secure.

Young people's needs and views are central to all aspects of how the home operates and develops practice. There is also excellent cooperation and joint work with placing authorities and the team of professionals around each young person. The responsible individual and managers routinely make good use of monitoring activities, training and advice. As a result, young people benefit from a service which is up to date with practice developments and assures high quality. Consultation with placing authorities and parents takes place at times, but is not routinely incorporated into monitoring systems. In addition, there is a very minor omission in that monitoring reports are not sent to the HMCI. These are technical shortfalls which do not impact upon young people directly. They, therefore, do not detract from the outstanding success of the home.

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
34 (2001)	ensure that the system for monitoring the home and improving the quality of care provides for consultation with young people accommodated in the home, their parents and placing authorities (Regulation 34 (3))	03/09/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that copies of Regulation 34 monitoring review reports are sent to HMCI at six monthly intervals. (Volume 5, statutory guidance, paragraph 3.14)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Young people are able to make and sustain appropriate attachments to staff, family members and prospective foster carers. Some young people have made excellent progress in this area. They are more emotionally resilient and can face up to their past behaviours and the reasons for them. As a result, they benefit from spending regular time with their relatives and people who are important to them. Young people can also engage in discussing their background and can work with staff, therapists and other professionals to work through issues and make more positive choices and decisions about their lives. For some young people this increased confidence and personal development has resulted in successful moves to independent living or to a foster family. For others, their aim is to gain enough confidence to make appropriate social relationships in the community and explore their gender identity in safe and appropriate ways.

Young people receive outstanding support to live a healthy lifestyle and to understand their individual health risks. They are able to engage in an active daily routine, getting up promptly, using time purposefully and getting fresh air and exercise. For example, they have mountain bicycles, gym membership, and walking shoes. They are also encouraged to cook for everyone every few evenings. Young people are not always sufficiently motivated to keep going with this, but their

progress to make healthier and more positive choices is good, given their starting points. Some young people are doing very well at maintaining their personal hygiene, cooking with fresh ingredients, and undertaking their own shopping, cleaning and laundry. They are also able to make their own appointments with doctors and attend these at the correct time. Some young people are budgeting sensibly and choose not to smoke or spend food and bus pass money on drug misuse. This represents considerable progress for some young people.

The educational attendance and attainment of young people is generally good, given their starting points and individual needs. Young people are supported to get to school or college and they receive help with homework, research and relationships in school. Young people unable to access school or college at present are undertaking a wealth of educational and active learning experiences with staff. For some, this is closely linked with learning skills for adult life and independent living. For example, young people learn how to navigate around the community and use public transport to visit relatives. They use bank accounts and start to prepare for their driving theory test. Young people have also successfully completed many relevant practical and educational challenges. These include designing a barbeque to build at the home and reviewing the young people's guide to the home for the benefit of future young people being placed. Some young people have found work and show a significant reduction in offending behaviour as well as improved compliance with youth offending programmes. As a result, young people are confident about their readiness for independence.

Quality of care

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

Staff have consistently high aspirations for all young people in the home. Social workers say, 'where would we be without them?' Staff say, 'we all have young people's best interests at heart'. 'It works well and young people achieve best outcomes'. This is because all staff consistently keep on challenging the barriers to young people's participation. For example, they help young people to produce a good curriculum vita (C.V.) and ensure that they have suitable clothing for interviews. Similarly, staff research, advocate and support young people to give them the best chance of being able to access suitable college and training opportunities. They are proactive in completing assessment work thoroughly and in liaising promptly with other professionals. This minimises wasted time, for example, when young people have been deemed unable to safely access community learning or activity until assessments are completed. As a result, young people choose to positively engage in necessary assessment, support and therapeutic work. This enables them to progress significantly in understanding their background and situation.

Staff place the well-being of young people at the centre of their practice. Social workers describe staff as 'fantastic advocates' and say that young people have made a 'considerable amount of progress'. For example, young people not able to access community education during assessment periods have enjoyed 'every educational visit possible because staff pick up on every little interest X has shown'. Staff show

particular skill in balancing the inputs of a caring parent with the independence training that older teenagers need in preparation for living without adult care and support. This extends as far as keeping in regular contact and visiting young people when they have moved on from the home or are in a period of youth custody. The commitment of staff to young people is maintained over a period of years for some young people. This results in considerable stability and improved emotional health for young people. They are able to say after they have left, 'thank you loads for all you have done for me'; 'I have made mates and had a good time.'

Staff build exceptionally effective partnerships with social work services and external agencies. They liaise regularly and informatively, sharing good quality written information about the work being undertaken with individual young people. Staff willingly overcome the barriers of distance from some placing authorities and spend considerable time assisting young people to enjoy family contact visits and use public transport. Staff also visit young people's previous placements to seek out information to help young people understand their past and make progress. There is very effective joint working with the organisation's own art psychotherapist and the youth offending service, all of which helps young people face their difficulties and learn how to make a more positive contribution.

Staff undertake high quality key work sessions with young people to address the significant individual issues which are significant to each young person. Young people are prepared to discuss issues about sexuality and behaviour incidents with staff and regularly sign the records that are written of individual discussions. Staff keep the home clean, tidy and well maintained so that it is a spacious and very pleasant place for young people to live. This includes the home's vehicles. Young people's meetings are used well to ensure that activities and necessary jobs are well planned and facilitate young people's participation. This supports young people's preparation for independence and helps them to make a positive contribution to the life of the home. Young people can also personalise their rooms and choose to spend time in the large grounds and adjacent countryside. The large indoor and outdoor space is particularly beneficial to young people who experience difficulties at times mixing with peers. Staff also ensure that young people have appropriate access to urban community activities and leisure in order to avoid any isolation.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people have a very strong sense of safety and well-being in the home. Their risk taking behaviour, including criminal activity, going missing and self-harming, has reduced considerably since placement. This is because young people are engaging in therapeutic and positive relationships with therapists, senior staff in the organisation and key workers. These relationships are helping them to address their individual difficulties and move on from them positively. In addition, risk assessments for each young person are regularly reviewed to reflect young people's present situation and are used creatively and proactively. This enables young people to feel understood

and listened to as appropriate to their age and individual needs. A culture is created where gender, identity and sexuality issues are openly discussed and where appropriate social behaviour and consideration of others is actively encouraged. Safeguards, such as night time bedroom door alarms, window restrictors, locking away of kitchen knives and bedroom searches, are used in proportion to identified risks and not routinely or unnecessarily. Similarly, internet and phone use is supervised or monitored only in proportion to current, known risks. As a result, young people feel very safe in the home and incidents necessitating the use of restraint are exceedingly rare.

Staff working with young people living in the home are very carefully selected and vetted to ensure their suitability for the work. Managers make robust recruitment decisions and monitor visitors and staff on an ongoing basis, ensuring that the home remains safe for young people. Similarly, careful assessment is made of the risks and impact of each new young person's admission on those young people already in placement. This practice ensures that each young person's individual needs and behaviours are unlikely to be compromised by another young person. In addition, young people have behaviour management plans and sanctions which are appropriate to their ages and likely moves towards independent living. Behaviour management focuses on taking responsibility, making reparation, and considering the impact and outcome of one's behaviour. These strategies are both appropriate and highly effective, so that young people are behaving well and are not at risk of harm.

Complaints and representations from young people, staff and others are properly investigated and robust procedures followed. Regular, good quality safeguarding training is also undertaken by all staff to a high level. These practices ensure that young people are extremely well safeguarded by staff who fully understand their responsibilities to young people and execute them effectively. The environment is kept very safe through the well organised use of safety checks, including fire safety checks, fire drills, vehicle checks, cleaning schedules, and monitoring of electrical items. Staff ensure that repairs and maintenance are undertaken promptly and use opportunities to include young people in learning appropriate home maintenance skills for the future too.

Leadership and management

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

Leaders and managers stimulate the enthusiasm of staff and consistently communicate high expectations of continuous improvement. They are a visible and inspirational presence in the home, providing excellent role models of how warmth, genuineness and skills can help young people to significantly progress. Young people, staff and stakeholders all agree that the leaders and managers are outstanding. Staff value the high quality training and support that they receive and professionals in the wider team around young people say, 'their in-depth knowledge is invaluable.' Leaders and managers consistently use the information about the progress young people make, and their outcomes, to secure further development

and improvement in the home. For example, their development plans take full account of the benefits of the location of this home for helping young people with certain emotional and behavioural difficulties. Similarly, leaders and managers roll out specific assessment tool training to staff when they have found a particular tool to be of benefit to young people.

Targets for the development of the service are realistic yet challenging. Leaders and managers recognise that their own input is key to young people's very good outcomes. However, they correctly identify where additional expertise is beneficial. They now employ a member of staff to focus particularly on educational provision in the home and to source appropriate education outside the home. This aims to further improve the speed and suitability of education provision for young people unable to access school or college. Leaders and managers are also now complementing their own monitoring of the home with independent monitoring by a Regulation 33 visitor. They identify that such a visitor can contextualise their own monitoring activities and bring a breadth of positive criticism to the service.

Leaders and managers have worked hard to improve consultation with young people, their families and professional stakeholders. This has been done by the responsible individual, rather than as part of the Regulation 34 monitoring now delegated to the deputy manager. There is no adverse impact on young people, but consultation by leaders and managers does not routinely take place at present, now that an independent visitor undertakes the Regulation 33 visits. Nevertheless, it is more important to note that recent consultation as part of Regulation 33 visits and questionnaires has served to boost morale amongst the whole staff team because the feedback from all quarters has been so positive.

Leaders and managers have laid on an enormous amount of good quality in-house and contactor-provided training during the year. This includes thorough induction and professional diploma training for many staff. Young people benefit hugely from staff's increased skills levels, effectiveness and morale because there is excellent staff retention and consistency of care for young people. Leaders and managers have also made changes to rotas and have added tiers for assistant manager and team leaders into the staffing structure. This has improved the quality of shift organisation and staff input to young people by ensuring that every shift has a competent senior. This makes every shift count as a period of opportunity for meaningful work with young people. Shift leaders, assistant managers and managers now share more regular supervision sessions and planning meetings. This also underpins the high quality service because staff are confident in their roles and are very well supported.

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* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.