

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Elizabeth Taylor
Type of Inspection	Key

Date of last inspection	23 October 2009
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is a detached property situated in a residential area. The location of the house means young people can easily access community facilities such as public transport, schools, colleges and shops. The home can accommodate a total of four young people from 11 to 17 years of age, of either gender. The home aims to support young people with emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Summary

This was an unannounced full inspection to assess the home's performance against all of the key national minimum standards.

The home is effectively managed and young people receive a good standard of care. Although staff continue to be appointed to form a full complement, young people have formed positive relationships with members who have worked in the home since it opened in December 2009. The staff are experienced and qualified. They have already developed a child-centred environment and demonstrate a commitment to reflective practice and to implementing improvements to benefit young people. The home has established links with a range of professionals and local agencies to support them in meeting young people's diverse needs.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

No previous actions or recommendations were made as this is the first inspection following registration of the home.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people benefit from effective assessment of their health needs and clear plans which ensure these are met in full. Young people are involved in meal planning and shopping and, somewhat reluctantly, in cooking meals. Meals are healthy, nutritious, well balanced and meet individual tastes. Fresh fruit is available and fresh vegetables are incorporated into the daily menu. Young people are encouraged to try different foods such as Italian, Mexican, Chinese and Indian. Mealtimes are social occasions and dining facilities are appropriate. Takeaways are restricted to once a week. Young people are aware of the benefits of healthy eating but say they do not always like options such as 'low fat' items.

Young people's health care needs are assessed in a timely manner on admission. Individual health plans are developed by the nurse for looked after children. These targets are incorporated into young people's individual care plans. Staff ensure appointments are made for young people to receive routine health care checks though some young people do not always choose to attend them. Nevertheless, staff continue to persevere and explain to young people the benefit derived from regular check-ups. Staff particularly promote and nurture the emotional well-being of young people. Specialist services are gained to support their individual needs and staff work closely with a range of health professionals to ensure young people are well informed about matters such as alcohol and drug misuse and sexual health matters. This helps young people

to make more informed decisions and choices. Young people are also encouraged to use a local gym to support a healthy lifestyle. All but one newly appointed staff member has completed emergency first aid training. Young people have also completed first aid training with staff. This means young people know what action to take if they or someone else has an accident or injury and supports their preparation for adulthood.

The home has clear policies and procedures in place for administering medication and staff receive appropriate training. This safeguards young people's welfare. Written consent is gained from appropriate persons for the administration of medication, including homely remedies and emergency treatment. All medication is securely stored within the home. Medication records are well maintained and are appropriately completed.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people's privacy is respected. They have their own bedrooms and keys so that they can keep their belongings safe. Staff try to maintain a balance between adequate supervision of young people and promoting their privacy. However, the appointment of several new staff over the last month or so has resulted in a high number of staff being on duty at times. This has proved to be a little unsettling for young people currently resident. The manager is conscious of the impact of this and has arranged for additional staff to work off site at times. Staff uphold confidentiality at all times. Personal information on young people is securely stored and no personal details are displayed anywhere in the home. Young people have a mobile phone provided by the home to receive or make private calls and can use the house phone to call family members and their social worker.

Young people know about the formal complaints process and complaints forms and envelopes are put in their bedroom on arrival and reissued when requested. Young people say they prefer to tell staff about any problems but that they 'do not have any'. The home strives to promote good relationships with neighbours and the wider community and takes action to quickly resolve any matters. Young people's social workers are complimentary about the home's ability to revise its practice to ensure young people's individual needs are met.

Young people are supported to keep themselves safe. Measures such as young people informing staff of their whereabouts and expected time of return in the evening help to promote their safety in the community. Staff receive child protection training and this is updated on a regular basis. This ensures they are knowledgeable about safeguarding issues and know the procedure for reporting child protection concerns or suspicions. The manager has established good links with the local safeguarding board. Young people say they feel safe in the home.

Young people are aware of the home's anti-bullying policy and say there is no bullying in the home. Staff promote diversity and tolerance by constructively challenging negative attitudes and encouraging young people to learn and accept other people's differences. In this way staff help young people to develop clear expectations of how they should treat, and be treated, by other people.

The home has an individual plan for each young person that details action to be taken when they are absent without authority. The plan is developed in conjunction with the local police liaison officer and takes account of young people's age and level of vulnerability. Staff monitor young people's whereabouts and respond quickly to any changes in behaviour.

Staff view young people in a positive light and work hard at building supportive relationships with them. Young people are helped to develop socially acceptable behaviour by the use of incentive schemes, praise and the implementation of firm and consistently applied boundaries. Young people know what standards of behaviour are expected of them as these are clearly specified in individual contracts. The contracts are developed by social workers in conjunction with the young person and care staff. The contracts are regularly reviewed and revised as young people demonstrate their sustained compliance.

The home's own behaviour management plan for young people lacks sufficient detail about how some behaviours are managed and the contents do not cross-reference with other documents such as risk assessments and contracts. Staff are trained in an approved behaviour management approach which promotes de-escalation techniques with physical intervention identified as a measure to be used as a last resort only. The approach is successfully implemented by staff as no restraints have been necessary to date. The range of sanctions imposed on the young people for the first three months of the year were somewhat unimaginative. However, the lack of effectiveness in assisting young people to take responsibility for their actions was recognised by the staff team. More meaningful measures are now imposed such as reparation. Young people say they can talk to staff and that staff 'listen and help'.

The home ensures young people live in a safe environment, free from hazards. Risk assessments for the premises are in place. Fire safety matters receive good attention; tests on fire safety systems are generally recorded weekly and fire fighting equipment is regularly serviced. Young people receive fire safety instruction and are involved in fire drills at appropriate intervals. The fire risk assessment for the premises is up to date. There is clear evidence to show the electrical system is well maintained and all electrical appliances are regularly serviced.

The system for holding information about staff is not yet firmly established. Some required information is kept securely within the home while other information is located in the human resources department. All required information was produced during the inspection and showed that a robust recruitment and selection process is in operation. This ensures all persons working in the home are deemed suitable to work with young people. Visitors to the home are robustly checked by staff who are vigilant. This protects young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people's individual needs are quickly identified and action is taken to ensure they receive appropriate support from a range of professionals and agencies. Young people are allocated a key worker on admission, although all staff are expected to work directly with young people to ensure their needs are addressed. Records of direct work with young people show the focus of discussion is clearly linked to targets in young people's plans, to help them develop and progress. However, the diversity of matters discussed mean that some areas are not followed through to demonstrate young people's greater understanding or development.

Young people are able to contact their social worker and an independent advocate provides further individual support. Parents and other family members are also encouraged to be actively involved in plans for young people's care. Staff welcome young people's friends to the home which supports their social integration. The collaborative approach with all interested persons means young people's individual needs are effectively promoted.

Staff appreciate the importance of education for the young people. An incentive scheme is used to encourage young people to benefit from education and training opportunities. This is successful in that young people are engaging in some form of education or training, suited to their individual needs. Young people have access to a computer in the home and a selection of reference and reading books to assist studying.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Each young person has a detailed action plan identifying their needs and showing how staff will promote and address them. Measurable objectives are specified with named persons to implement them. Good use is made of local agencies and a range of professionals to support young people's diverse needs. The action plans support the overall objective of young people's placements and contribute to helping prepare them for adulthood. Staff ensure young people know what objectives they are working towards and how they will be supported to attain them.

The home has established a system for regularly reviewing and updating young people's placement plans. The system includes a monthly, internal review of the plans although elements are updated as and when events or developments occur. Young people are invited to record their views about their care and future plans prior to their statutory reviews and to attend and participate in the meetings, which take place every six months or so. This ensures young people feel involved in decision making about their lives.

Young people are supported to maintain very close links with important people in their lives. Staff regularly communicate with family members and young people's social workers to ensure contact is facilitated. Staff readily give practical support to young people to make contact possible. Family members and friends are welcomed into the home. This ensures young people develop a social network which will support them when they leave the home.

Young people are fully consulted about their day-to-day care, future plans and general decision making in the home. They have very positive relationships with staff and freely talk to them about lots of different issues. Visits from social workers and an independent advocate provide young people with further opportunities to voice their opinions.

Staff clearly value young people and strive to offer them good quality care. The newly appointed staff team initially struggled to establish firm boundaries for young people. However, these have now been successfully negotiated and implemented. This offers young people a sense of security. Staff are respectful to young people and listen and act on what they have to say.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are supported to develop independence skills to prepare them for adulthood. Their action plans reflect the varying degree of assistance they require to prepare them practically and emotionally for leaving care. Pathway plans are in place for young people and initial objectives are incorporated into their overall action plan. Leaving care workers liaise with care staff to support young people. Young people are encouraged to develop skills in a range of areas. Currently, these include buying food on a budget, meal preparation and household chores. The tasks are linked to an incentive scheme and are revised as young people demonstrate their competency.

Young people live in a comfortable and homely environment that meets their needs. Good quality decoration, furniture and furnishings are provided and the home is well equipped. Young people say the house is 'too posh'. However, they also say they enjoy living there. Young people are encouraged to personalise their rooms and make good use of the personal and communal space available to them. The home is not conspicuous as a children's home and is close to social and community facilities.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Young people's individual needs are effectively addressed and they are supported to learn about other cultures. Staff ensure young people maintain contact with their family and other important people in their lives. They support young people to establish and maintain peer relationships and to make effective use of community facilities. Young people's views are taken into account and are acted upon. Their rights are respected and they are helped to understand that they have to take responsibility for their actions.

The home has a comprehensive booklet which explains its purpose and function. This is made available to all interested persons. A young person's leaflet is also available in small and large print. However, the latter is being revised with the assistance of young people, to improve the format and make it more child-friendly. Both documents provide details explaining how the home operates. This helps young people to know how they will be cared for and advises interested persons about what services they can expect from the home.

The culture of the home is open, friendly and child-centred. Staff are clear about the lines of responsibility in the home. Communication between staff is effective; there is a daily handover session and staff meetings take place on a fortnightly basis. This provides opportunities for staff to review young people's care and revise their practice to ensure they are consistent and effective in meeting young people's needs.

The appointment of additional staff in recent weeks to bring the team up to full capacity mean staffing levels are over required levels on some shifts. This can feel a little oppressive at times for the young people but is being managed as sensitively as possible. A balance is being achieved between males and females in the team.

All but one member of care staff holds a professional qualification in caring for children. Staff are committed to continuing professional development and attend on going training relevant to their tasks and the needs of the young people.

Monthly monitoring visits to the home are carried out by representatives of the department and county councillors. Matters requiring action are followed up in a timely manner by the manager.

Young people's records are well organised and contain up-to-date information about them, including relevant documents from their placing authority. Young people are encouraged to read and sign documents which describe how they will be cared for and helped to develop.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- ensure behaviour management plans are comprehensive in covering all areas of concerns (NMS 22)
- ensure sufficient information is consistently held in staff files (NMS 27)
- ensure keyworking sessions are coordinated to follow through topics and issues. (NMS 7)