

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
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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 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.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

The children's home is run by a private organisation. It provides accommodation and care for up to two children or young people in the main house and one young person in the cottage annex on the other side of the driveway. The accommodation is for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

The home is providing personalised and well-planned care which takes good account of each child's individual needs. There is good quality, consistent care being given by a small and stable staff group. As a result, children benefit from improving outcomes in all areas, particularly in regard to their health, education and confidence in their skills. Children enjoy positive and constructive relationships with staff and are able to express clearly that they like living here and feel settled. Children are safe and feel safe because managers and staff are effective and skilled. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of safe working practice. However, young people do not have enough formal opportunities to have their views, wishes and feelings heard, either through the monitoring systems of the home, or independently of the home.

Managers have development plans in place and have established suitable monitoring and recording systems to underpin the quality of care and safeguarding of children. However, there are shortfalls in meeting the regulations pertaining to consistency with the home's Statement of Purpose; placement plans; and consulting with children, relatives and placing authorities. There are also minor shortfalls relating to appraisals of staff and the detail of some recruitment and complaint records. The impact of these shortfalls upon the quality of care or outcomes for young people, are small. Nevertheless, the shortfalls indicate a standard of leadership and management which is satisfactory rather than good.

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
4 (2001)	ensure that the home is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its Statement of Purpose, in particular,	02/03/2012

	with respect to the admission criteria and procedures for emergency admissions (Regulation 4 (6))	
12A (2001)	ensure that placement plans are prepared in accordance with the provisions in Regulation 9 of the Care Planning and Case review (England) Regulations 2010 and that they are agreed and signed by the placing authority and registered person (Regulation 12A (1))	02/03/2012
33 (2001)	ensure that persons carrying out Regulation 33 visits to the home, interview, with their consent and in private, such of the children accommodated there, their relatives and persons working at the home, as appears necessary to form an opinion of the standard of care provided in the home (Regulation 33 (4))	02/03/2012
34 (2001)	ensure that the system for monitoring and improving the quality of the home provides for consultation with children accommodated in the home, their parents and placing authorities. (Regulation 34 (3))	02/03/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the views of the child, social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer are sought regularly on the child's care and that children have access to independent advice and support from adults who they can contact directly, appropriate to their age and understanding (NMS 1.4 and NMS 1.5)
- ensure that the recruitment records for staff show the date on which each check was completed and who initiated the check. With respect to the Criminal Records Bureau check, ensure also that the level of disclosure and the outcome of the check, including whether the individual is barred, is recorded (NMS 16.3b and NMS 16.4)
- ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually and this appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for (NMS 19.6)
- ensure that records of how allegations are followed up and resolved are complete, retained on staff confidential files, and a copy provided to the person concerned. This is in particular respect to evidence of referral to the Independent Safeguarding Authority and their receipt thereof. (NMS 20.7)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children are making very good progress towards developing emotional resilience and

confidence in their skills. They enjoy one-to-one time with staff and are engaging well in a wide range of daily living and outdoor activities which are also benefitting their physical health. For example, they participate well in meal preparation and have cooked fresh fish which they have caught themselves. They have a good understanding about healthy lifestyles and are taking very good responsibility for their health in view of their age. They are gaining confidence to explore country and urban environments because they are learning how to cross roads safely and navigate rural paths and tracks. Children are attending school consistently and are better engaged in education. They are making good progress with their concentration, reading and problem solving. This is because they are enjoying a lifestyle where classroom activities at mainstream school are complemented by practical, outdoor and life skills activities which add a realistic context to their learning. For example, children are using books and the internet to research and identify plants, animals and stars that they have seen while out in the countryside during hours of daylight and darkness. At the same time, children are making good progress with their psychological health as they overcome fears and enjoy achievements and successes each day.

Children are making progress towards a more positive self-view because they enjoy consistent and caring relationships with a small and regular staff group. Children are making attachments and are becoming confident to speak truthfully about their feelings, including their past experiences. Young people who have moved on from the home to independence are benefiting from continuing contact with staff and managers too, which builds on their support networks for independence in adult life. Similarly, children living in the home are gaining appropriate self-care skills and making a contribution to their home as they engage in cleaning, tidying, laundry, gardening, shopping, budgeting and cooking. Children benefit from well-organised and appropriate contact with relatives and other people who are important to them. This is because staff facilitate and lend intensive support to children so that they can cope with their feelings about this with increasing confidence and appropriateness.

Quality of care

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

Social workers say that children's behaviour has improved 'no end' and they are 'very settled' because staff are 'very good' with them. Children are evidently enjoying very positive relationships with staff who are warm, attentive, consistent and nurturing towards them. Children know that staff are consistently concerned with their welfare. They feel that their views, wishes and feelings are actively sought because staff are always there for them and spend all their time with them. For example, children choose and help with deciding on all the meals and preparing them. Similarly, they choose evening activities, whether it be games; playing in the tent; playing make believe role play games or making a real fire and sitting by it. Equally, children understand and keep well to their daily routines and help with the running of the home. This is because they are fully involved in weekly meetings, key working sessions and in devising their individual behaviour, activity and reward schemes.

Staff effectively help children to understand their placement plans and why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases. The contribution of the home to children's placement plans is of good quality and involves them quite well. Staff advocate clearly and proactively with placing authorities, relatives and education providers as appropriate, to ensure that children's voices are heard. For example, staff liaise with teachers and support workers in school about the completion of homework and missed work when young people are commuting long distances and attending part time in order to retain consistent schooling. Similarly, staff advocate with placing authorities to ensure that required reviews and placement plans are up to date so that undue delay in achieving stability for children is minimised. However, staff have not been so proactive in arranging independent advocacy for children when they have questions about their contact arrangements and future placements which are progressing too slowly. Children do have contact numbers and names for independent advice and support but have not benefited from direct input from an Independent Reviewing Officer or advocate since placement. The impact of this is minimised by staff's own good work, but there is some delay in achieving long-term stability and improved contact for children. Children know how to complain, but none have wanted to do so because staff are effective in their work.

The home provides well for children's health because staff are effective in organising appointments with health professionals who can assess and treat physical and psychological health issues. Staff also work well to continue the medication, advice and routines which health professionals prescribe or recommend. This is underpinned by clear healthy lifestyle routines, purposeful and enjoyable activities, and individualised care. The home itself is also welcoming, well maintained and appropriately safe. Children choose how their bedrooms are decorated and enjoy safe cosy spaces as well as larger areas to play actively. For example, they have boots and head torches to go walking across the hills and a large garden and pond to play in and help maintain. Equally, they can use their 'off road' radio controlled car on the gated driveway or lawn and can play inside the tent left up in the lounge. Children are benefiting hugely from the beautiful rural location, both for education and health. As a result, children are making good progress in all aspects of their health and personal identity.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children are safe and feel safe in the setting. They rarely go missing and their behaviour is improving significantly. This is because staff are consistent, positive and engage skilfully with children, including when they are working alone with a child or young person. Managers and staff also keep children safe by discussing and risk assessing the impact of new admissions upon the children and young people already in placement. Staff are well trained in child protection, positive behaviour management and self-harming behaviours. Staff are also able to recognise when children and young people are being bullied or have significant and deteriorating emotional and mental health difficulties. Staff effectively work with teachers, police, hospitals and mental health specialists at these times. This minimises unsafe

behaviour and secures the right help and support for young people in times of crisis.

Children are protected from significant harm, including neglect, abuse, exploitation and accident. This is because staff are vigilant and aware of children and young people's whereabouts and activities at all times. They are robust to ensure that young people are making safe and appropriate relationships outside the home. Staff also take appropriate and timely steps to keep young people safe when risks are identified. Staff and managers follow safeguarding procedures properly, both when disclosures are made and/or allegations made against members of staff. Records made of the actions taken are also robust and serve to protect both children and staff. However, in one case there is no documentary evidence that an allegation has been fully completed with respect to a referral to the Independent Safeguarding Authority. There is no current impact on children resulting from this shortfall, but there is potential for unsuitable adults to be able to apply to work again with children if this action is not fully concluded.

Staff working with children are carefully selected and vetted. They are a small, qualified and stable group who are consistently providing safe care. They share responsibility for ensuring that the home is maintained as a safe and pleasant environment where all visitors are properly checked. The house is kept appropriately secure to prevent intruders from getting in and no forms of surveillance are in use. Risk assessments for the home and specific activities are used to ensure that children's safety is considered and risks to them minimised. This includes the risks associated with working alone with children. These procedures work well to help keep children safe. The records of recruitment are held centrally for the organisation and are accessible on the home's computer. These show that all required vetting checks have been conducted so that children are cared for by suitable people. However, the record does not show in every case who initiated the check or when it was done. In addition, some of the details required to be recorded about Criminal records Bureau (CRB) checks are missing from the checklist. This does not impact directly on children's safety because staff have all been robustly vetted. Nevertheless, evidence of staff suitability is compromised if this information is not available, especially if the actual CRB check has been securely destroyed because it is no longer required.

Leadership and management

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

This is the first full inspection of the home since its registration in July 2011. Children and young people placed in the home during the last six months have benefited from sound day-to-day management by the deputy manager. The deputy manager is actively overseen by the manager who manages this and one other home in the organisation. Managers and staff work cooperatively across the organisation, sharing their training, experience and knowledge. They also know the children and young people in the three homes. This helps assure continuous improvements as lessons are learnt from inspections, monitoring and significant events across the organisation. It also ensures that children and young people are cared for by relief

staff whom they already know when the regular staff team for the home are away.

The home is not currently working consistently within its stated aim of providing longer-term placements with a view to preparation for independence. Instead, emergency and short-term placements are being provided. Children placed are benefiting from the good quality care and their outcomes are also good, but the Statement of Purpose has not been reviewed and amended to appropriately state all the placements that the home can offer. In addition, some placing authority plans for children are not agreed and signed and do not refer to, or correctly explain, the purpose of the residential care placement. This shortfall compromises good placement planning and increases the risk that children may stay in placements longer than is desirable. Nevertheless, the home's managers ensure that the home's contribution to placement planning is good. This is because the home draws up and regularly adds to its own placement plans for children and ensures that these focus clearly on improving all the outcome areas for them.

The deputy manager conducts monthly monitoring of the home and is usually present when the monthly Regulation 33 visitors come to the home. All the reports of monitoring are adequate and are used to help formulate the home's development plan. The home is adequately resourced, indicating the financial viability of the provider. However, managers do not have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home and are not very clear about what, how and when changes should be implemented in order to achieve consistent improvements. Nevertheless, staff and managers spend fruitful time reviewing significant events and ensure that personnel are supported and debriefed following stressful situations. Supervision is regular and effective, but annual appraisals do not happen within timescales because due dates are not identified or planned in advance. However, staff frequently undertake training together and remain motivated to increase their skills. This assures good quality care for children.

Children enjoy good relationships with managers who spend time directly with them and are regularly available to them. This enhances the quality and stability of placements. However, managers and Regulation 33 visitors do not systematically and regularly obtain feedback and views from children, relatives or placing authorities about the quality of care being provided in the home. This includes involving children in recruitment and appraisal processes. As a result, there are missed opportunities to identify ways to improve the home, to hear relevant views and to build more effective relationships with children and stakeholders. The impact on children of these shortfalls is reduced while numbers in the home are low. This is because staff and managers informally spend good quality time with children and know their wishes and feelings well.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.