

The Independent Person's Report

Report as per Regulation 44, Part 6, *The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015*: Visits by the Independent Person must form an opinion as to whether (i) children accommodated at the children's home are effectively safeguarded; and (ii) the conduct of the children's home promotes the well-being of the children accommodated there. NYAS is an independent children's rights charity.



Visitor's name:	Adam Cox	Date of current visit:	21/02/24 – Unannounced
		Date of previous visit:	23/01/24
Time of arrival:	12:40pm	Time of departure:	16:10pm
Home:	Apple Trees	Ofsted URN:	SC372511
Total number of young people accessing short breaks at the home:	Maximum occupancy of five young people at any one time.	Initials of young people present:	Y, K, A
Admissions/discharges during the period:	All short breaks are logged. There have been no admissions on a longer-term basis in this period.	Initials of staff on duty and their position:	AC – Deputy Manager CF, TM & NB – Residential Care Workers SB – Bank Worker
Visitors' book:	I was signed in as I entered the building, using the confidential visitors' book.		
Permission to view young people's core files	Yes.		

Recommendations from the previous regulation 44 visit:	Actions taken by the registered manager:
None made.	N/A
Judgement from the last Ofsted inspection and any subsequent requirements and/or recommendations:	Actions taken by the registered manager:
<p>The home was last inspected on 06-07/12/22. The home has received the following rating</p> <p>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people – outstanding; taking into account:</p> <p>How well children and young people are helped and protected – outstanding</p> <p>The effectiveness of leaders and management – good</p> <p>There was one requirement made, due by the 31/01/23:</p> <p>The registered person must keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it, and notify HCMI of any revisions and send HCMI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. The registered person must ensure that the home is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose.</p>	No further updates required.
Theme/s that have been identified for this month's visit.	
<p><u>Management oversight</u></p> <p>In the time that I have monitored this home I have seen excellent management oversight through different audits of systems and by supervising and monitoring the performance of the staff team.</p> <p>As well as regular supervisions and an annual appraisal, the managers do routine observations of staff on shift to observe general practice as well as specific observation of their medication competency. In-depth team meetings also show that managers keep up to date and have oversight of the staff team and their views and opinions. The training matrix is regularly audited to ensure all staff training is up to date and relevant which is also a useful tool for managers.</p> <p>The managers can often review and change staff and key worker responsibilities as well as management responsibilities for supervisions if they feel this needs a change to get better outcomes for the young people or to better support the team.</p>	

Although key workers have direct responsibilities for updating and reviewing placement plans and having regular contact with parents, audits of files and of documents such as risk assessments evidence that managers have regular oversight of all of this work at least every three months. Managers monthly checks include audits of daily and weekly records of the young people's stay such as the positive interaction book. Documents such as the handovers and information sharing books are also checked daily by managers. In this period, new groupings of the young people have been devised because of management oversight (see strengths and weaknesses section).

The managers also audit supervision files, medication administration records and undertake a bi-annual health and safety audit on top of the formal health and safety audit completed for them. Case notes and short breaks plans that the home contribute to on the authority's internal system are also audited by the managers. The home sends out regular surveys to staff in order to ensure they have oversight on what parents' views are of the home.

The manager and deputy manager complete most audits together. The deputy manager commented that this works well as you always have two sets of eyes over the one area and this allows different perspectives to have an input into the audit. I can also see how these audits change practice in the home as systems are adapted and updated.

1 The Quality of Care Standard (see regulation 6)

Physical condition of the home, fixtures and fittings (internal and external) in this monitoring period. To include young people's bedrooms where possible / where permission has been given:

Internal/external condition	<p>Access to the home is restricted to authorised visitors only and the grounds remain well kept for the time of year. I was made aware that health and safety audits on the outside play equipment have been undertaken in this period.</p> <p>I was able to see all communal rooms throughout the home. Standards of décor and furniture have been maintained and the home and the rooms were clean throughout. It is a lovely well looked after home with lots of toys, games, and equipment for young people that feels bright, interesting, and inviting.</p> <p>The locality risk assessment has been reviewed in this period to reflect local crime statistics.</p>
Have young people's bedrooms been seen?	<p>Rooms were prepared for the young people's arrival and were individualised for their stay. There were no issues to note. Where necessary, appropriate equipment is in place.</p>

Interviews with staff at the home:

Job role	Comments
Deputy Manager (AC)	<p>AC discussed this month's theme with me as well as providing the relevant evidence for this. We also discussed general updates in the home as well as training and staffing matters. AC also made me aware that the home is putting on a parent's event where they will offer Makaton training and advice and guidance about transitions to adult services. This will take place on the 05/03/24.</p> <p>Ofsted surveys have been sent to staff, professionals and parents and the home is aware that an inspection is imminent. Through the local authority's participation group, the home will also be receiving a 'young person's inspection' of the service.</p> <p>The local school where most of the home's residents attend have been using the grounds for outdoor activities and this is reported to be going well.</p> <p>Some of team will also be attending a disability day event on the 27/02/24 to support the social work team with any new potential referrals or families that want advice and guidance.</p>
Residential Care Worker (CF)	<p>CF talked about two young people who are at the end of their transition periods and are about to start overnights. CF gave insight into how she felt they may do. CF felt that both will enjoy staying over based on how much they have enjoyed their visits so far. CF added that one young person does say she will not enjoy it but initially said that about her introductory visits and now she 'runs into the home' where she is excited to visit. CF was also aware of how parents felt their young people had progressed and if they were ready for overnights through the regular conversations that she has with them.</p>
Bank residential care worker (SB)	<p>SB was booking in one of the young person's possessions and setting up her bedroom when I spoke to her. SB explained the process to me and understood why it was important to be accountable for the young people's possessions.</p> <p>I asked about young person A and SB was able to talk about her interests, her needs, how she communicates and how she is best supported. This showed SB to have a good understanding of the systems in the home and the general knowledge of the young person.</p> <p>SB was later observed supporting A and added further comments about A's routine and her likes and dislikes.</p>

Interview with parents / carers and professionals:

Status	Role	Comments

Family	Various parents.	<p>The home seeks feedback by their own consultation forms. There have been three sets received in this monitoring period.</p> <p>All the feedback was positive and specifically, areas such as the handovers were praised as well as the fact that young people do lots of activities and progress by learning and taking part in new activities.</p> <p>Parents also made comments about the following,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Cannot praise the home enough” and “cannot praise the staff enough” also said that “seeing how staff work has relieved any anxiety” about her son being in the home. ▪ “Staff are always friendly and welcoming” ▪ Young person “absolutely loves this home this is so reassuring as parents to be able to leave him with people we trust knowing he will be well looked after” <p>There were no issues raised in this feedback.</p>
Parent.	Mother of G (G)	Attempts made to call on the 21/02/24 unable to make contact.
Parent.	Mother of L1 & L2 (Z)	<p>Feedback achieved by phone on the 21/02/24.</p> <p>Z reported no concerns with the home and said that she is very happy with the service provided and care given to her children. Z added she receives regular updates and that communication is very good.</p>
Parent.	Mother of J (N)	<p>Feedback achieved by phone on the 21/02/24.</p> <p>N was extremely enthusiastic about the service provided by this home. N described the home as “outstanding” and said that the staff team go “above and beyond”. N praised the professional and the overall approach of the manager and praised how approachable he is and that he listens to her. N also wanted to mention staff members CF, NB, and EM as those who have a particularly good relationship with J.</p> <p>N noted that as well as communication with the home about J’s actual stay, her key worker CF rings on a regular basis to check how J is. N said the calls are always “all about J” and that is a great that she does that. N added again that CF is ‘wonderful’. N also said that the peace of mind knowing her daughter is safe when she visits the home is just amazing.</p>

		N understood the demands on the home in terms of how many young people they can accommodate so said the only thing she would wish to improve is if J was able to stay more (but understands why this cannot be the case at this time). N kept reiterating and using the word 'amazing' to describe this home.
Parent	Father of S (T)	Attempts made to call on the 21/02/24 unable to make contact.
Professional.	Child support officer (SW)	Email sent on the 21/02/24. Attempts made to call on the 22/02/24 however unable to get through.
Professional.	Child support officer (JB)	Email sent on the 21/02/24. Phone calls attempted on the 22/02/24 and voicemail left. No further response prior to submission of this report.
Professional.	Student social worker (SM)	Email sent on the 21/02/24. No reply prior to submission of this report.
Professional.	Social worker (MG)	<p>Feedback received on the 23/02/24 by email.</p> <p>I feel it is a very valuable service to the young people and only wish there was more of this kind of provision or that more children could stay there as there are many children waiting to access it and more being referred through all the time.</p> <p>It gives children the chance to go out of their families' homes; something they do not usually otherwise have the chance to do, given their disability. It also gives children an opportunity to start to develop some independence from their parent/s and work on key areas of development with the staff.</p> <p>Apple Trees always attend relevant meetings for the young people and communicate any concerns or issues promptly to relevant agencies.</p>
Professional.	Social worker (AMC)	Email sent on the 21/02/24. Out of office reply received and no answer to calls. No further response prior to submission of this report.
Professional.	Social worker (AMH)	Email sent on the 21/02/24. Phone calls attempted on the 22/02/24 and voicemail left. No further response prior to submission of this report.

Professional.	Social worker (LN)	<p>Feedback received by phone on the 22/02/24.</p> <p>LN said she continues to be happy with the support that this home gives to families and how they work with her. LN added that she currently has one young person at the transition stage who is about to start introductory visits. LN said that the home has been very supportive with home visits and working with the family.</p>
Professional.	Advanced adults social work practitioner (MC)	<p>Email received on the 22/02/24.</p> <p>I am a social worker based in adult social care; therefore, I do not have any cases.</p> <p>I am however involved in transition and supporting children and their families though the process this is a new post and I have only been in post approx. six weeks.</p> <p>I have a good working relationship with the manager and the team at Apple Trees, they always keep me up to date with relevant information and events.</p> <p>The manager and the team are keen to support transitions and work as best they can with the adult short breaks service.</p> <p>My previous experience of working as a social worker for Children that attend Apple Trees has always been positive.</p> <p>Staff always go the extra mile in terms of support for the young people and are keen to promote independence and life skills. The children and young people have a good experience and they are supported to learn and develop in lots of ways. Staff are proactive, approachable, kind, caring and supportive.</p>
Professional.	School assistant head (JR)	Email sent on the 21/02/24. No reply prior to submission of this report.

Visitor's evaluation of the interviews conducted. Has the standard or quality of the accommodation changed since the last visit:

No concerns to note with the condition and standard of the accommodation. No issues either with any of the interactions with the staff team as always, I am impressed by their insight and knowledge about the young people and their care plans.

The feedback received is excellent and there are no follow ups needed from this.

2 The Children's Views, Wishes and Feelings Standard (see regulation 7)

Interview/s with young people present with their consent and in private (where possible) / or observations made. Use quotes from the young people where possible and if required use APPS, PECS or Makaton to aid communication.		
		Comments
Interviewed y/n	N	A was seen coming into the home and being greeted by staff warmly (as were the rest of her peers). A then spent some time in the lounge on a tablet device looking at a video for baking an 'Oreo cake'. A was competent in making choices on the tablet and seemed happy sat with staff and enjoying the support.
Observed y/n	Y	
Initial	A	
Interviewed y/n	N	Y was seen upon arrival and seemed to be happy and excited to be in the home. Later I observed him interacting with staff and he helped to make himself a cup of tea. Y had a snack and enjoying using a bouncy ball with staff NB. Y was asked about if he went bowling the other day with the home and if he enjoyed it. Y was visibly excited by this which showed how much he enjoyed the experience.
Observed y/n	Y	
Initial	Y	
Interviewed y/n	N	K was supported into the home by staff and spent some time having a snack and a drink. K looked to be comfortable being supported by staff and helped around the home.
Observed y/n	Y	
Initial	K	
<p>How young people are consulted day-to-day? What communication methods are used? Are their views, wishes and feelings during this monitoring period taken into account in the running of the home as well as their individual plans of care?</p>		
<p>The home can evidence within their activities and positive interaction logs how young people make choices and choose activities or how they generally want to spend their time in the home. A round up of each month through a young people's meeting also shows what young people have enjoyed and how they have communicated.</p>		
<p>3 The Education Standard (see regulation 8)</p>		
<p>(This section does not necessarily need to be assessed / completed at every visit. If education was assessed last time and there appears to be no significant change in circumstances, it can be left. However, this section must be completed at the next visit).</p>		
<p>Evaluate how the staff team ensure that young people make measurable progress towards achieving their educational potential and how are they helped to do so?</p>		

Initial	Individual education, health and care plan (EHCP). Review dates	How are these plans being used to help young people?
-	No changes in this period.	N/A
<p>If a young person is a 'looked after child' there will be will a range of statutory plans and information available. Where young people are designated as not 'looked after' what access does the home have to this information, if any?</p>		
<p>There are no looked after young people accessing the home who the home have educational responsibility for.</p>		
<p>4 Enjoyment and Achievement Standard (see regulation 9)</p>		
<p>Describe in this monitoring period how young people choose, take part in and benefit from a variety of activities that meet their needs and develop / reflect their creative, cultural, intellectual, physical and social interests and skills?</p>		
<p>The home has a 'themes' book for each month and February showed that the home is prepared with several relevant baking ideas, arts and crafts ideas based around seasonal themes or current topics. For example, Valentines Day cards were made with young people recently. There is also evidence in the young people's meetings how birthdays in the home are celebrated.</p>		
<p>What specific activities are available for young people with learning / physical disabilities and/or additional needs so they are able to fully participate? Do staff ratios support this engagement?</p>		
<p>One young person has been bowling for the first time in the last few days and reports are that he had an amazing time and really enjoyed this experience.</p> <p>Young people continue to attend swimming sessions at the hydro barn and photos as well as records of their experience show that they have a good time with this and enjoy going.</p> <p>Young people have also watched films, used the sensory rooms and outdoor play equipment, they have also played with sensory toys, engaging in singing activities and been on sensory drives. A teddy bears tea party also looked to be a huge success.</p> <p>One young person has done some exercise routines (as per parental requests) so made this a fun activity for them and staff joined in with them.</p>		
<p>Visitor's evaluation of how the home promotes young people's ability to enjoy and achieve in a way that meets their needs, personal development and choices during this monitoring period:</p>		
<p>The home very much meets this standard by offering a wide range of inclusive activities for all young people.</p>		

5 The Health and Well-being Standard (see regulation 10)

Evaluate in this monitoring period, how young people's health / well-being needs are met, including the assistance and support given that relates to: eating and drinking, personal care tasks / routines and the management and administration of medication.

Not discussed on this occasion as no significant changes were identified.

6 The Positive Relationships Standard (see regulation 11)

How in this monitoring period are young people helped to develop and benefit from relationships based on mutual respect and trust; and understanding of acceptable / unacceptable behaviour?

There are daily entries in the home's positive interactions book where young people have shown behaviours such as taking turns, supporting peers, saying please and thank you, being independent, sharing with others and being kind to peers. These are all behaviours that the home encourages and praise the young people for that.

A specific session has also been covered with some young people in relation to encouraging 'kind hands and words' to consider the feelings of others. Also, a session was completed about recognising emotions.

Use of restrictions of movement and / or liberty during this monitoring period:

Since the last visit, reviews / implementation of any deprivation of liberty safeguard which are part of the home's implementation of the Mental Capacity Act:

No changes or updates to note in this period.

Have there been any restrictions of movement?
If so, how many and with which young people?
Is this less or more than the last period?

There have been none. This is consistent with the last period.

How does the manager assess the appropriateness of these interventions? If there has been an increase / decrease does the manager understand how / why?	Not applicable on this visit.
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Are approaches to restorative practice used? If so, give examples:	No examples to discuss.
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Complaints / compliments during this monitoring period:

Date	Complaint or Compliment	Comments and response/action taken by the home:
None reported in this period.	N/A	N/A

N/A

7 The Protection of Children Standard (see regulation 12)

Health and safety arrangements:

What health and safety checks have been completed since the last visit?	<p>Building safety checklist last completed on 05/02/24.</p> <p>Electrical and equipment checklist completed on 18/02/24.</p> <p>Outings and evacuation bag check last completed on 19/02/24.</p> <p>Weekly water temperature checks completed 19/02/24.</p> <p>Sensory room equipment serviced this month, no issues raised other than some lightbulbs changed.</p>
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	<p>Inspection of outdoor equipment occurred also this month, no issues reported with h condition and safety of the equipment.</p> <p>Liability insurance valid until 31/03/24.</p> <p>Portable appliance testing valid until 17/11/24.</p> <p>Gas boiler certificate valid until 29/11/24.</p> <p>Electrical instillation certificate valid until 11/12/28.</p>		
How are fire prevention measures implemented? Evaluate arrangements and actions taken to keep everyone safe since the last visit	<p>Weekly fires safety checks are in place and up to date. Last completed 19/02/24.</p> <p>Quarterly fire review checks completed 08/12/23.</p> <p>Annual fire safety checks all up to date.</p>		
How often are personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs) reviewed / updated?	<p>PEEPs are reviewed at least annually and are in place for each young person. They are updated sooner if needed. Not checked on this occasion.</p>		
Fire drill/evacuation, duration of drill, attendees since the last visit:	Date:	20/02/24 @ 17:02	Staff present: NB, CF, SG
	Time taken:	Two minutes	Young people present: E, Z
Significant incidents and events that relate to young people's welfare and safety in this monitoring period, (including allegations against staff):			
Young person	Date regulation 40 notification/s if made?	Who else was notified, i.e. Local authority designated officer (LADO)/placing authority (LA)/police/parents/carers/other agencies/professionals?	Comment on actions/outcome:
None reported.	N/A	N/A	N/A
How, in this monitoring period have incidents of young people being absent or missing from home been managed to ensure their safety and welfare is promoted:			
There have been no missing from home or absent episodes in this period.			
Risk management and assessment:			

Have there been any updates to risk assessments?	<p>No significant changes to note to risk levels or risk assessments in this period.</p> <p>I was able to note some work has been completed with the 'independence group' which looked at educating young people of how to stay safe online and in the community.</p>
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Evaluate how the home is keeping the young people safe and protecting them from harm.

No significant incidents or issues to note and no changes to how young people are safeguarded.

8 The Care Planning Standard (see regulation 14)

Evaluate whether the young person / people receive effectively planned care from the point of arrival or departure which is closely monitored / reviewed.

Two young people have just finished their introductory visits to the home and will now start to progress to overnight stays. There are currently no young people transitioning to adult services currently however I am aware that the home is looking to offer support to parents about transitions by having an adult's worker attend the parents open event.

I was able to see the referral document that the home receives as one new referral has come through. It was explained that this is the starting point for new referrals and from there school and home visits will be made to determine the suitability of matching the young person to the home for short breaks.

Since the last visit, evaluate the outcomes of any quality assurance, education, health care and looked after children / care reviews for young people.

No significant issues to note. The home can still meet this standard very well.

9 The Leadership and Management Standard (see regulation 13)

Evaluate whether the registered manager knows and understands the home's strengths and weaknesses, is able to prevent shortfalls, identifies and takes effective action when needed? Since the last visit, what changes have taken place as a result of this knowledge / understanding?

The deputy manager described a recent process whereby the groupings of young people has changed based on feedback. The deputy manager had worked a weekend shift and said that although the young people's needs were met and they were always safe throughout, due to their specific care needs, staff were unable to do the extra activities with them that they usually do with all young people to achieve better outcomes. The deputy manager reported this to the manager and explained that why, in practice, the groupings anticipated and planned on paper were not working to the extent they had hoped. The manager sought further consultation with the staff team and this led to the

manager and deputy manager revamping the groupings to ensure a better dynamic and balance. This was a good example of the home recognising what they could be doing better (despite careful consideration and planning to groupings in the first place) and acting on this with the input of the staff team.

What monitoring, quality assurance processes are in place to inform the development of the home? Since the last visit, what evidence is there for this?

Recently there has been a medication file audit which has added new forms and folders to the medication administration process. The homes training log has also been updated and reviewed in this period. Supervisor responsibilities have been updated to ensure that supervisions have a fresh perspective from a different supervisor.

The work force development plan has been updated to reflect change in bank staff (one bank staff no longer working here). The statement of purpose has been updated to reflect the current referral process (which includes a new 'matching meeting' process). The home submits the regulation 45 report every three months and this is next due at the end of March 2024.

See this month's theme section in relation to all audits and management oversight.

Evaluate how the Registered Manager has managed the staff team during this period?

Refresher for first aid training is booked for the 12/03/24. Face to face medication training held 31/01/24. Safer recruitment training is booked for the 13/03/24 for the manager and senior practitioner. The managers are also due to attend an ADHD Neuro diversity in children training/event on the 19/03/24.

Senior practitioner (SG) starts her level 4 course in March.

The home has planned rotas and enough staff to be able to meet the needs of the young people. No agency staff are used.

The most recent team meeting only occurred on the 20/02/24 therefore notes were not yet ready to be seen. I could however see notes from the meeting on the 23/10/24.

The meeting began with a team exercise about their understanding of the senior role as the managers want to encourage some staff to apply for it and were curious why they had not done so already. This was an excellent way to engage the team in this process as well as getting their feedback on recruitment. The previous meetings actions were reviewed and an update given about each young person, this was very comprehensive. Feedback relating to any safeguarding matters were given as well as covering the usual topics of health and safety, medication, training, staffing etc. The managers feedback form audits of the home were also given. Further actions were also set.

How are newly recruited staff or staff still on probation

Not applicable on this visit. There are no new staff in the home and none are still in probation periods.

supported with their training and development?	
Visitor's overall evaluation of leadership, management and staffing in this period.	
No concerns with staffing levels or the support and training that the team receives. The managers have excellent oversight of the home through the audits they do and involvement they have with the team.	
10 Summary and Sign-off	
Young people's suggestions:	
None made.	
Visitor's summary:	
<p>Some very good conversations with staff about young people and equally good observations of how they interact with young people. All three young people came confidently into the home and seemed very happy to be in the company of the staff team. External feedback received was also excellent.</p> <p>No significant concerns have occurred for young people in this period and plans and risk assessments therefore remain the same. Management oversight in this home is excellent and it shows how systems and processes are continually reviewed and improved where possible.</p>	
Recommended actions to consider (including a date by which action/s must be taken).	
None.	
Sign off by the independent visitor:	
<p>I have discussed this report with the deputy manager at the time of my visit. Subject to quality assurance process this could be enhanced. I am satisfied that at the time of this visit the young people accessing this service are effectively safeguarded and their well-being promoted.</p>	
Signed: <i>Adam Cox</i>	Date: 23/02/24
Manager's comments with regard to any recommendations made by the independent visitor:	

A really positive report that highlights the management teams continuous oversight /eye to detail, and the effectiveness of all their quality monitoring systems.

It also highlights the strengths and working relationships between myself, the deputy, and the wider team and how all have a voice and contribute to the overall running of the home.

Signed: 	Date: 26.2.2024
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Comments from the responsible individual:

A really good report that evidences strong management oversight and the positive impact this has upon the children and families ensuring all children and their families receive a high and consistent standard of care.

Signed: 	Date: 26.2.2024
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