

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Warren Clarke
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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, or The Project, as it is commonly known, is a short break scheme offering respite care for children and young people with learning difficulties. Some have physical or multiple disabilities. The Project currently provides for a total of 36 children, male and female, aged from 5 years to under 18 years, but accommodates no more than a maximum of four, exceptionally five, at any one time. Each child is allocated a number of weeks respite care annually, taken in sessions of one week at a time.

The accommodation is all at ground level and provides single bedrooms, most with en suite, and bathrooms equipped for the needs of disabled children and young people. There are sitting and dining areas, laundry and a large kitchen. The gardens are accessible to wheelchair users and specially designed for safe and interesting play.

The home is operated by an independent provider in partnership with a local authority from whose area all the children and young people come. At the time of inspection four children, average age 14 years, were resident. They were all seen and though some have additional communication needs, they engaged with the inspector and contributed in their own way.

Summary

This announced key inspection assessed performance against all relevant national minimum standards pertinent to the Every Child Matters outcome framework: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution, economic well-being and organisation. The home provides the children and young people high standards of care. Importantly, the children assisted by their parents say they are provided an enjoyable care experience when they are resident in the home. Parents also expressed confidence in the quality of care which some describe as excellent.

The many strengths and in some areas outstanding performance are overshadowed by a significant weakness. That is, the failure to demonstrate that there is a sufficiently robust process for establishing the suitability of staff employed in the home.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection three recommendations were made to address lack of training in behaviour management and safe restraint techniques and to ensure all staff are trained in a single approach. This has not been achieved.

Two of the recommendations were to ensure that recommendations made by the environmental health regulator for protective clothing to be worn by staff engaged in food preparation and date-labelling of frozen food to conform to food hygiene standards. Also, that aids and equipment such as the hoists, and the tail lift on the home's transport is are serviced.

From observations at inspection it was clear that frozen food is labelled appropriately and staff wear protective clothing when preparing food. This both fulfils the recommendation and enhances what were already rigorous food hygiene measures. The manager provided

documentary evidence to show that aids and equipment are routinely serviced to ensure safety and operational efficiency. The fourth recommendation which required staff to record in full food served to the children and young people has also been addressed. This now means that those monitoring the variety and nutrition of meals provided, have the fullest information on which to make judgements.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The home's excellent catering arrangements benefit the children and young people by providing them varied and nutritious meals. Strict attention to detail is evident in menu panning, which takes full account of children's and young people's special dietary requirements. Communal dining, which is promoted as a significant social event in the home's routine, includes all the children and young people including whether or not they need help to feed.

The principle that preparation and consumption of food should provide the children a home from home experience remains constant. Staff promote this by taking turns to prepare meals in a kitchen of domestic scale. Staff successfully engage some of the children in food preparation as an activity as part of their normal development, including menu planning and shopping for provisions. Healthy eating is successfully established and this is valued by children, young people and parents who comment favourably on all aspects of the catering arrangements. However, there are occasional lapses in keeping records of food served for some mealtimes. Accuracy is necessary in the keeping of these records which are used to monitor and determine whether a varied and suitable diet is provided. Also, some of the children are highly dependent and no additional staff are allocated for times when one of them is assigned to cooking duties. This does not currently have any apparent negative impact upon the care of the children and young people, but may have health and safety implications if staff who are preparing food are during the same period to be involved in personal care tasks.

All children, and particularly those with complex health needs, are provided very high standards of health care. Well-established and robust systems are in place that staff understand. The nature of the children's and young people's disabilities and health problems are documented. Individual health plans are used to accurately chart each child's health needs and the corresponding daily care inputs required to meet them. Staff, including the manager who is a qualified nurse with valid registration to practise, complete an extensive range of training to equip them to carry out some of the atypical home procedures that some of the children and young people require. Overall, therefore, the children and young people receive the precise care that they need to maintain good health and in response to any health problems with which they present.

Arrangements for managing medication are outstanding, conforming to current good practice in all areas. Staff are provided with clear written procedures which are rigorously followed in relation to receiving, storing and recording medicines. All staff have completed safe handling of medication training, and where the giving of medicines is by means that require particular skill, staff have been assessed as competent to do this. Some parents cite this as an area in which the home's performance is particularly strong. Parents also express confidence in, and high regard for, the excellent quality of overall health care that the home provides their children and young people and the competence of the staff in this regard.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Established systems and practices that staff employ successfully promote the children's and young people's safe care whilst at the same time ensure their privacy and dignity is not compromised. This is particularly so for those with high levels of dependency in relation to their intimate care. The comfortable accommodation arrangements provide each child his or her own well-equipped bedroom when resident. This facilitates them to be able to withdraw from the rest of the group when they choose and provides private space where they can be assisted with the intimate aspects of their care. Necessary equipment, such as hoists, and adaptations promote young people's independence, privacy and dignity in their activities in daily living, for example, bathing and toileting. Robust policies and procedures, which staff diligently apply, ensure that the confidentiality of children's and young people's personal information is firmly preserved.

The manager and staff have established a culture of openness to feedback from children, parents and others about the quality of service provided and any concerns that might arise in this regard. Apart from periodic formal customer satisfaction surveys, the home provides children, parents and others with a sound complaints procedure. The procedure, which is presented in appropriate format for the children, conforms to current good practice and is properly promoted. Where complaints are made the home demonstrates that it takes them seriously and acts efficiently in dealing with them to achieve outcomes with which complainants are satisfied. This system is subject to rigorous scrutiny by those responsible for the home. They use to good effect information from the complaints process to contribute to improvements in the quality of service. The home attracts low numbers of complaints because staff work successfully to find out, at an early stage, where any problems might exist and seek to resolve them. For example, they take time to understand the wishes and feelings of children who are not able to communicate these easily.

There are no current child protection events related to the care of the children in the home. However, robust systems are in place to deal with such events. The children and young people accommodated in the home are safeguarded by a comprehensive child protection policy with procedures in line with those of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Staff have completed relevant training that equip them to identify and respond appropriately to allegation or suspicion of abuse, and to act to prevent abuse with particular regard to disabled children.

Staff operate within Action for Children's comprehensive anti-bullying strategy, which the home has adopted. Aspects of the strategy provide staff with excellent guidance on how to promote an anti-bullying ethos, prevent and deal with any incidents of bullying. Whilst conventionally bullying is not a feature of the children's and young people's behaviour in the home, staff are mindful that the behaviour of some can have undesirable impact on others. Where this is the case, thoughtful and sound measures are put in place that both protect and help those concerned. For instance, where some children's conditions may cause them occasionally to behave in ways that affect the safety and comfort of others, effective control measures informed by risk assessments are introduced in addition to appropriate supervision.

Proper safeguarding measures are in place for the event of a child and young person being missing from the home or absent without permission. Staff are provided clear written guidance on how to respond to such events in ways that take full account of the children's vulnerability

and the urgency with which staff must act. This includes a clear protocol for enlisting the assistance of the police and for notifying parents and the relevant authorities.

Staff are provided a clear, detailed behaviour management policy in which to operate in order to promote good order in the home and acceptable conduct in the children and young people. The policy which is successfully implemented, safeguards the children and young people by setting out clear parameters within which staff must operate. For example, prohibited sanctions which are abusive or inappropriate are clearly outlined as is the guidance given to ensure any physical restraint of a child is judicious and safe. Approaches that staff adopt encourage the children and young people to behave acceptably and reinforce them when they do. In essence, staff recognise that, in some cases, unacceptable behaviour may be symptomatic of the child's or young person's disability or health problems. They, therefore, employ helpful instead of punitive strategies to deal with undesirable conduct. However, the manager says that although arrangements have been made for staff training in safe restraint techniques, this has not yet taken place. This training is necessary for ensuring that all staff are equipped with the common knowledge and skills of safe restraint should it be necessary to physically restrain a child or young person.

A wide range of health and safety measures is in place. These successfully protect the children and young people from harm. All areas of the premises and activities involved in looking after the children have been assessed to identify potential risks. Where risks are identified, measures are taken to remove or control them. This is, for example, shown in fire precautions including risk assessment and regular tests of the fire alarm system. Practices such as regular testing of the hot water temperature so that it is regulated to a safe degree to prevent risk of scalding are also evident. The home is equipped with necessary aids, and staff are trained in manual handling to enable them to assist children safely.

On this occasion, although the manager is confident that all staff have been subject to the registered provider's rigorous staff selection and vetting process and records are held at the head office to support this, no such record or official declaration was available in the home for inspection. It is imperative for the protection of the children and young people that the registered person has a written record relating to each person employed at the home or those who in other capacities have substantial contact with them.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

In providing short break care for children and young people with disabilities, the home continues to ensure that their care experience contributes positively to their personal development and well-being. This is achieved in each case within a system of efficient assessment and care planning that provides staff a full understanding of each child's circumstances and needs. The clear setting of objectives that flows from this ensures that the ways in which staff respond to each child's or young person's needs are effective and precise. Parents and social workers give due recognition to the imaginative and successful ways in which staff nurture the children's and young people's individual talents and interests. For example, enabling established hobbies, such as horse riding, to be pursued and creative endeavour, such as that of the young people whose art work has been exhibited at a national museum.

Established policies and practices are in place and are fully demonstrated in assuring equality and diversity in the care of the children and young people. The home is, for example, fully

adapted and equipped for the needs of children and young people with physical disabilities. Care practices promote the privacy and dignity of those with the highest level of dependency and respond appropriately to the needs of all as may arise from their sex, religion and culture.

Taking account of the context of the temporary nature of the children's and young people's looked after arrangements, the home demonstrates effective support of their education in that it provides a stimulating environment to facilitate their learning. There is much informal learning through play, access to games, books and computers. All those accommodated at the home have a school place and attend school regularly. In both planning and delivery of service, the home shows that it supports each child and young person such that there is no disruption to their existing educational arrangements. This is reflected in the efficient liaison in relation to transport arrangements, routine contact with the relevant schools and contribution to the review of the children's and young people's statements of special educational needs.

When the children and young people are accommodated at the home staff act in the capacity of the supportive parent ensuring that the children get sufficient sleep and are otherwise prepared for school. They also ensure that the home is a stimulating environment, where the children learn through play, games and other routine activities that promote acquisition of practical skills. Resources such as a wide variety of toys, games, books and a computer are provided to facilitate this.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The very good quality of short break care that the children and young people are provided is underpinned by the home's effective system of assessment, care planning and review in each case. In ensuring that every child's or young person's needs are precisely met, staff demonstrate that they assess their circumstances and use the outcome to inform care plans setting out how the child's identified needs will be met on a daily basis. The success of this approach and the excellent benefits it provides the children and young people are clearly reflected in the effectiveness of care for those with complex health needs and those with behavioural and communication difficulties.

The systems in place also clearly demonstrate that the home's care inputs have contributed to positive outcomes in terms of the children's and young people's social and overall personal development. This is exemplified in parents' observations such as: 'Our child 'is encouraged to help clear the table after meals, take turns, participate and consider other people'. Parents also consider that the planning and excellent care that staff take to introduce children and young people to the home and to prepare them to leave is of immense benefit to both parents and children for some of whom these are anxious times.

An established process is in place for recording the care that is given and each child's or young person's response. This provides reliable information that informs the system for ongoing monitoring and periodic review of their progress. Consequently, where progress is limited, or not being made, the internal review process, combined with the independent looking after children review system, are effective in identifying this and responding with strategies to overcome it in a timely way.

Within the context of the short break care arrangements in which a child or young person is only usually accommodated at the home for less than a week at a time, the plans made for

them to maintain contact with their families are acceptable. The home has flexible visiting arrangements for families and there are provisions for telephone contact where required. These arrangements are very much made in staff's partnership with parents so that they remain fully involved and the children and young people do not experience any feelings of permanent separation. Further, staff regularly seek the views of the children, young people and parents about the quality of care and the general running of the home.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Staff capitalise on the children's and young people's short break care arrangements most effectively to enhance their overall development. This includes caring for them in ways that contribute to their preparation for adulthood. Effective work is done to equip the children and young people with the social skills they will need to transact with others in order to have fulfilling social experiences. For some children, this is reflected in very good work that is done to advance their communication. For others particular attention is given to modify behaviour and in all cases, self-care skills such as washing and dressing. Of particular remark is that staff continually assess their input in this and other areas of care as shown in work being done currently to find ways to help the children and young people to gain more experience using money.

In this children's home the children and young people experience short break care in an environment that is very well equipped and maintained, and which provides them a close substitute to normal home life. The home presents a warm, homely, comfortable and a pleasing environment. It is decorated and furnished to an exceptionally high standard providing the children and young people with a very good material quality of life..

In design and organisation, the home permits the children and young people to be supervised, but without this being avoidably intrusive. Children with physical disabilities are well provided for in terms of access to permit their unencumbered passage around the home and with aids and equipment to facilitate comfort and safety in aspects of personal and intimate care.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children and young people continue to benefit from a very good standard of care informed by a clear and appropriate written statement of purpose. This document sets out accurately and in acceptable detail, the facilities, services, principles and methods that underpin the running of the home and the care of the children. This statement of purpose has been summarised and presented in a form that is appropriate for the age and understanding of the children and young people and contains appropriate information for parents. In essence, these documents provide the children and young people and parents with helpful information about how the home is run, what they can expect the care experience to be and what is expected of them.

Staff are employed in sufficient number and are efficiently deployed to meet the children's and young people's needs both day and night. Where some children's and young people's needs so dictate, as with those with a particularly high level of dependency, there is capacity to increase staffing levels to ensure the precise needs of all those resident are met. Staffing is well structured and makes effective provision for someone who is appropriately qualified and with sufficient experience to deputise in the manager's absence. The number of other senior

staff also ensures that there is, on each shift, a competent and experienced shift leader. These arrangements and the home's success in retaining a core of long-serving staff, provide the children and young people continuity and a consistent approach to their care. This is a factor that reassures parents .

The staff training and development programme is successful in ensuring that the vast majority of staff are appropriately qualified and receive the continuous in-service training to equip them to provide the high standards of care expected and to respond competently, for example, to the needs of the children with complex health needs. The evidence for this is reflected in the very high standard of the children's and young people's care. This evidently impacts on the children positively which has led them to comment most favourably on their care experience. Similarly, a significant number of parents rate the service as excellent, noting in particular staff increased knowledge and skills in caring for children with autism.

Care is taken to ensure that the use of agency staff is kept to a minimum so that the children are familiar with those who look after them. The home is also reasonably successful in assembling a staff team which includes members of varied race and cultural background. However, despite its continuing best efforts, the number of female staff remains much greater than males.

The registered provider demonstrates an effective quality assurance system including frequent and robust monitoring of the home in the successful quest to promote and safeguard the children and young people's welfare. Established systems ensure that where shortfalls are identified, they are addressed in a timely fashion and that there is always a clear development plan to consolidate and spur continuous improvement in the children's and young people's care.

The promotion of equality is good. The service intrinsically meets the needs of children and young people with disabilities and within this demonstrates successful inclusion of those who are severely so. Open to all children and young people who meet the entry criteria, staff work closely with parents to ensure that the care the children are to be provided takes proper account of their needs in relation to their sex, race, religion and culture. For example, provision is made for children's dietary needs as required by their religion. The registered person promotes equal opportunities in employment and this is reflected in the home's diverse staff team.

In each child's or young person's case, the home amasses all the information necessary to plan and provide them the precise care required to meet their needs. Detailed records are made of their circumstances and progress, and these are kept in personal files, which are efficiently organised.

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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27	ensure a written record is available for inspection, of all staff and volunteers who work in the home, including evidence that matters specified in Regulation 26(1), Schedule 2, have been met in full. (Regulation 26 (1))	29 January 2010
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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 that the record of menus that demonstrates provision of a suitable and varied diet is maintained in full (NMS 10.4)
- ensure all staff are trained in and follow in practice, the registered person's policy on the use of safe restraint techniques and other forms of physical intervention and approaches to reduce or avoid the need to use physical restraint. (NMS 22.8)