

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspection date	29 April 2010
Inspector	Warren Clarke
Type of Inspection	Random

Date of last inspection	9 December 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, 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 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 11 years, were resident. They were all seen and they contributed to the inspection.

Summary

This unannounced interim inspection assessed the home's performance against the key national minimum standards (NMS) relevant to the Every Child Matters outcome areas staying safe and organisation. Areas where any requirements or recommendations were made at the last inspection were also assessed.

The home benefits children due to the high standards of care provided in a comfortable and homely setting. The children are content. They engage positively with staff and, with their parents, regard the home as making a positive contribution to their family life. With this in mind, the overall rating is elevated from that given at the last inspection.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection one action and two recommendations were made to secure improvements in the being healthy and staying safe outcome areas. Since then, satisfactory steps have been taken to better safeguard the children by ensuring there is crucial evidence to demonstrate that staff employed in the home are suitable. Firm arrangements are in place to ensure all staff will complete training with a common approach to behaviour management. Detailed menus, or records of food provided are being kept, although there are occasional lapses with regard to the level of detail. However, the current arrangements provide much better data which demonstrate that the children are provided with a wholesome and varied diet.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The home's excellent catering arrangements ensure that the children benefit from varied and nutritious meals. Staff are particular about menu planning, which takes full account of children's and young people's special dietary requirements and the food preference of the group resident at any one time. Food and communal dining experiences are used effectively to promote

inclusion of all the children. Mealtimes are therefore well planned to achieve a relaxed, pleasurable experience for all the children. This includes children who need assistance with feeding. However, there continue to be occasions when the record of food provided is not set out in sufficient detail in order to demonstrate that the children are benefiting from a consistently wholesome diet.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Staff employ a wide range of practices to ensure that the children are looked after safely and their privacy and dignity is preserved. Children with high levels of dependency benefit from the particular care taken to ensure their intimate care is consistently conducted in private. The well-equipped accommodation provides each child his or her own bedroom to which they can retreat from the rest of the group when they choose. Necessary equipment, such as hoists and adaptations, promote young people's independence and thereby their privacy. Robust policies and procedures, which staff diligently apply, ensure that the confidentiality of children's personal information is maintained.

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 they have. This proactive approach using direct contact and surveys is effective and successful in identifying any concerns at an early stage. There are few complaints, but when they are made they are taken seriously, dealt with quickly and fairly, and scrutinised. The home's sound complaints procedure is well promoted and presented in a format appropriate to the children's age and understanding. In addition, staff are alert to some of the children's individual means of communication. They use this understanding to ensure that the wishes or concerns of those children are expressed and addressed.

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 equips them to identify and respond appropriately to allegations or suspicion of abuse, and to act to prevent abuse with particular regard to disabled children.

The registered provider's comprehensive anti-bullying strategy is successfully introduced into the home. Although conventional bullying is not a feature of the children's behaviour, staff are nevertheless familiar with the excellent guidance they are provided with, on how to promote an anti-bullying ethos. This has been relevantly adapted to the children's special needs. For example, 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 in the event of a child and young person being missing from the home or absent without permission. Staff are provided with 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. Risk assessment and control measures in respect of all children have, to date, been successful

in preventing children from leaving the home without permission or going missing while in staff's care.

A clear, detailed behaviour management policy is in place. Staff work effectively within the policy to promote good order in the home and the children's acceptable conduct. The policy is successfully implemented and thus, safeguards the children by setting out clear parameters within which staff must operate. For example, prohibited sanctions which are abusive or inappropriate are clearly outlined. Sound guidance is given to ensure that any physical restraint of a child is necessary and safe. The staff approach encourages the children and young people to behave acceptably and reinforces this when they do. Staff recognise that, in some cases, unacceptable behaviour may be symptomatic of a child's disability or health problems. They therefore, employ helpful instead of punitive strategies to deal with undesirable conduct. Nevertheless, the system in place for recording sanctions and physical intervention requires staff to make entries of the same information in different records and this causes confusion. It is also observed that contrary to the national minimum standards requirement for these records to be stand-alone documents, the relevant details and full information can only be gained by reference to other records.

A comprehensive range of health and safety measures is in place. These successfully protect the children 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 equipment, and staff are trained in manual handling to enable them to assist disabled children safely. It is observed, however, that fire drills during the last twelve months were not carried out at the minimum frequency required. It is necessary for fire drills to be conducted at reasonable intervals to ensure staff and children are familiar with the procedure for evacuating the building. The removal of a hedge that previously provided a suitable screen around the garden has left it exposed. This compromises the children's privacy. The gravel path in the garden is proving to be an inconvenience and potential hazard for children who are wheelchair users.

There are satisfactory systems in place to ensure that anyone who is employed at the home or has substantial contact with the children, is suitable. However, whilst records kept go some way to demonstrate this, they are not sufficiently detailed. They do not indicate whether there are issues arising from criminal records checks and, if so, how these were addressed. There is also no record of whether references were satisfactory.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The home continues to be run on the basis of a clear Statement of Purpose that underpins the very high standards of care from which the children are benefiting. This document sets out accurately and in acceptable detail, the facilities, services, principles and methods that drive the effective running of the home. Summarised and presented in a form for children and separately for parents, the Statement of Purpose provides them with helpful information about how the home is run, the quality of care or service they may expect 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 with continuity and a consistent approach to their care.

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. For example, staff continue to care competently for children with complex health needs. This evidently impacts on the children positively which has led them to comment most favourably on their care experiences. The majority of children report that they enjoy the home and look forward to their stays. Similarly, a significant number of parents rate the service highly and are confident to entrust the care of their children to the staff within the home's environment. This, parents indicate, has a positive impact on their family life.

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 races and cultural backgrounds. Although the number of female staff remains much greater than males, the manager is making headway in addressing this imbalance. This gives the children, particularly boys, much more choice of staff to approach should they have any personal problems.

The registered provider ensures the home is competently managed. This is demonstrated in the effective quality assurance system. This includes frequent and robust monitoring of the home that effectively promotes and safeguards the children's welfare. The system ensures that where difficulties emerge which are likely to impact upon the children's well-being, they are quickly identified and addressed. Management of the home and care of the children are driven by a clear development plan that ensures high standards are maintained and continuous improvement is pursued.

In each child's or young person's case, the home gathers all the information necessary to plan and provide them with 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
26	ensure that at least four fire drills, including evacuation of children and staff from the building and fire drills held at night, take place in a 12-month period (NMS 26.8).	30 July 2010

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 demonstrates that provision of a suitable and varied diet is maintained in full (NMS 10.4)
- ensure the record of any use of restraint on a child by an adult, and sanctions imposed, is kept in the precise form and includes all the details specified in the national minimum standards (NMS 29.9 and 29.10)
- conduct a risk assessment and introduce any control measures necessary in relation to the home's perimeter security and the safety of children who use wheelchairs to access the garden (NMS 26.2)
- ensure that the written record of the selection process followed in respect of staff or volunteers who work in the home, is sufficiently filled in, in every case (NMS 27.1).