

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Bridgette Lowe
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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

This home provides education and residential care for up to 28 pupils, from 8 to 19 years of age who have severe and complex learning difficulties, associated with autism. All have communication difficulties, a number have additional impairments and all exhibit challenging behaviour to varying degrees. The home operates as a charitable trust, and being a school as well, it is approved by the Department for Education. Some of the children are accommodated in the main house, which is organised into four residential units. There are four additional units for older pupils, three inside the grounds and one a short walk from the main site. The home has extensive grounds that are well used for horticulture and animal management, as well as leisure activities. It has its own indoor swimming pool.

Overall effectiveness

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

Young people benefit from living in a school that excels in delivering individualised personalised care and support to them. Exceptional planning and transitioning of young people into the school and on leaving contributes to young people achieving and being settled in their units. Young people have achieved excellent outcomes since joining the school through individualised education and activity programmes. Young people thrive in learning independent living skills through excellent care practices and support from staff. Caring and committed staff ensure that young people receive continuity of care that is truly individualised to their specific needs. Excellent relationships exist between staff and young people. This provides young people with very well trained, caring staff that understand their needs and challenging and complex behaviours.

Extremely effective safeguarding measures ensure young people's welfare is given high priority and that they live in a safe and secure environment. The management of the school is extremely effective and coordinated providing young people outstanding quality of care and enables young people to reach their full potential. Young people are supported in small living units adapted to meet their needs. Most units are well maintained and every effort is made to keep them in good decorative condition and homely. The school has a development plan that proposes purpose built homes within the extensive school grounds. A recommendation has been raised to ensure all units provide suitable accommodation that further promotes their development opportunities.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure all units provide suitable well designed environments that are fit for their purpose to promote young people's development. (NMS 10)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Since joining the school young people have made significant progress in relation to their disability in all areas of their lives. Parents and staff comment that young people have grown in confidence and ability since living at the school. Comments from parents include: 'I would not have believed my child could have achieved some of the things they can now, they are so much more settled and confident, they can even access the community and go out for meals, whereas before joining the school I thought this would never happen.' Placing social workers were equally complimentary about the achievements young people have made since joining the school. Young people were seen enjoying the vast range of activities and opportunities on offer and are obviously very happy and settled in their environment.

The school excels in ensuring each young person has an education and activity programme that is tailored to their individual needs. Young people benefit from a seamless programme that starts the moment they are awake until they go to bed. The school has developed its own curriculum to meet the needs of the young people. The Personalised Learning for Life Using Supportive Strategies (PLLUSS) enables young people personalised education and care delivered through an individualised programme. There is a very clear focus on developing young people's independent living skills that has resulted in young people learning new skills such as shopping, self help skills, cooking and home management skills such as washing and cleaning. Young people also achieve in areas such as animal care and horticulture. All achievements, however small, are celebrated and rewarded with young people gaining accreditation for new skills learnt. Young people are empowered to make choices about their daily programme of activities enabling them to feel more in control of their daily lives. This has resulted in fewer incidents of challenging behaviour and young people being able to access many more activities they feel comfortable with. Young people also benefit from accessing the community with support from well trained staff. Young people access community groups such as Brownies or indoor climbing clubs as well as the local leisure facilities. This has resulted in young people having greater opportunities and improved quality of life. Comments from parents include: 'my child has a better quality of life than we do now, since joining the school my child's quality of life has improved so much, they do so much at the school and in the community.'

Young people benefit from regular contact with their families. The school is very

proactive at arranging functions such as Christmas concerts and family days in order for families to visit their children in a safe environment. Young people are positively encouraged to phone home every week and write letters if possible. If a child has no verbal communication they are still encouraged to listen to their family members on the telephone for the benefit of the young people and parents alike. Family members are also encouraged to spend time with their children in their units. This has enabled families success in rebuilding their relationships with their child and the siblings after being at breaking point prior to young people joining the school.

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy positive relationships with staff that are caring and understand their needs very well. Staff treat young people with respect and dignity especially at times of managing their intimate care needs. This has enabled young people to develop their self help skills and become more independent individuals. Staff have consistently high and realistic aspirations for young people ensuring they reach their maximum potential in all areas of their lives. For example staff never assume that a young person is unable to experience a new activity, even if at first this may cause the young person some anxiety. Careful planning and excellent support enables young people to achieve and take part in new activities and access the community.

Excellent systems ensure that staff practice is continually monitored and reviewed to ensure that young people receive the best possible care. Excellent care planning and reviews ensure young people are consistently getting the care and support they need. Annual reviews and regular looked after children reviews are held at the school. These give an excellent picture of the assessed needs of the young person and how these have been met. Social workers comment: 'the school reviews are the best I have been part of, the young person's achievements are celebrated through a large visual presentation clearly showing the developments the young person has made.' Changes to the staffing structure and reorganisation provide young people with more consistent care that is tailored to their individual needs. Young people are calmer as a result of knowing who is working with them and what their daily programme involves. Parents comment: 'I can't praise the school highly enough, the care and support are excellent, I wouldn't want my child to go anywhere else.'

Young people are empowered to communicate their needs and have a choice about their day-to-day activities and things that are important to them. Excellent systems to promote choice making are in place with good examples being the school café. Young people learn to make choices, learn to wait and communicate their choices on a daily basis in a supportive and helpful environment. Staff are excellent at reading and understanding the needs of young people with communication difficulties. Young people are supported to communicate their needs and wishes through a range of communication systems enabling young people to grow in confidence and ability. Staff are acutely aware of the need to listen to young people that may communicate their needs in differing manners, albeit through behaviours or non verbal means of communication. This results in young people having staff that are tuned into their

individual communication methods to ensure they are continually listening and understanding their needs and wishes.

Young people benefit from having access to a range of services and therapists to promote their health and well-being. The school osteopath and a range of therapists work with young people to promote their physical and emotional well-being. The school nurse and trained staff ensure that young people's health needs are very well met. Specialist support and advice is gained when young people have specific health needs such as epilepsy. The school promotes healthy eating and works well with young people to increase a greater range of food choices when young people limit their diet. Excellent examples were given of young people now eating a greater range of foods including fresh fruit and vegetables since joining the school. Cultural and dietary needs are well catered for and young people have ample opportunity to taste and experience foods from different cultures and countries. One staff team had cooking lessons from a parent to provide them with the specific skills needed to help them to cook the young person's favourite cultural foods.

Young people enjoy living in their individual units that are adapted to meet their needs. Most units are well maintained and every effort is made to keep them in good decorative condition and homely in appearance. Two units are less conducive to the development of young people. The school works well with the physical restrictions due to the lay out of the two units in question. However, one unit has no oven and no utility room thus slightly reducing opportunities for independent living training. The layout of the units and the physical structure do not allow for major changes to be made. The school has a development plan that proposes purpose built homes within the extensive school grounds.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people live in an environment that is extremely safe and keeps them safe from harm. Young people are protected by the use of robust risk assessments. These clearly outline the risks they pose to themselves and others and how staff manage these risks positively. Any restrictions in place are addressed in the risk assessments, such as the use of electronic key fobs used by staff for the protection of young people. Young people are able to move freely around the buildings and grounds indicating through communication systems if they wish to finish an activity and move onto another chosen activity.

Young people's challenging behaviour is managed extremely well. Staff are extremely proactive in finding supportive strategies to manage some very complex behavioural issues. Young people benefit from positive reinforcement and extremely well trained and supportive staff in a range of positive interventions. Physical intervention is only used as a last result to protect young people from harming themselves or others. Behaviour support managers and staff effectively monitor and record any intervention used with young people. Clear and accurate records demonstrate that

there is a continued trend in the reduction of the use of any physical intervention used. This shows that behaviour management systems are helping young people to manage their behaviours and behave appropriately within the school and community. Parents comment: 'my child's behaviour has improved ten fold, I trust the staff implicitly to keep my child safe, they do an excellent job to manage his challenging and complex behaviour.' Observations on inspection were of very happy, calm young people engaged in a range of enjoyable activities.

Young people are further protected to a high degree by staff that are well trained and understand their duty to protect and promote the welfare of young people. Mandatory child protection training is undertaken by staff as part of their induction process with regular refresher training being continually delivered within the training programme. Excellent systems for recording and reporting any concern are in place for the protection of young people.

Young people are supported by excellent staff ratios thus reducing the opportunity to target other young people. All young people have a support level of at least one-to-one with increased support when accessing the community. If a young person has the propensity to run off, staff are acutely aware of these behaviours and ensure measures are in place to protect the young people. These may include walking belts when in the community and extra staff support.

Leadership and management

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

Young people truly benefit from a registered manager and senior team that have a passion to ensure they achieve the best possible outcomes for all young people. All aspects of care and education are monitored and scrutinised to further develop staff practice and promote increased opportunities for young people. A comprehensive development plan outlines areas for improvement and encompasses ideas from the quality network team. The quality network team is made up of staff from all areas across the school to reflect on current practice and develop ideas to further enhance the life opportunities for young people. The senior management team have a clear vision about how to progress the school further and continually reflect and drive continuous improvement for the benefit of the young people.

The school clearly meets the aims and objectives set out in the Statement of Purpose. There is a strong and clear focus of working in partnership with young people, parents and advocates to achieve a consistent approach to meeting the needs of young people. Parents and placing social workers agreed that the school is extremely good at communicating and working together in the best interest of the child.

Young people thrive at the school due to support from a nurturing, enthusiastic and positive staff team. Excellent staff ratios enable young people to access a vast range of activities and further enhance their independence to adulthood. Staff are equipped with the necessary skills to support young people through the excellent training

programme. The training team ensure that both internal and external programmes delivered are targeted to meet the specific needs of the young people. Staff confirmed that the training available is 'excellent.' Staff are able to use regular supervision to highlight their development needs and reflect on training that may be needed to enhance their working practice and skills, for the benefit of young people.

The school excels in its cause to achieve excellent outcomes for young people that have very challenging behaviour. Excellent examples of achievements young people have made since joining the school were echoed throughout the inspection and from parents and social workers. Parents comment: 'it was not an easy decision to take, my child going to a 52 week placement, but it was the very best thing for him. He now has a better quality of life and much improved prospects of coping with adult life'.

Equality and diversity practice is **outstanding**.