

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC012021
Inspector	Bridget Goddard
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Residential special school (>295 days/year)

Registered manager	Joy Audrey Wake
Date of last inspection	25/03/2014

Inspection date	13/11/2014
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Previous inspection	good progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	none

This inspection	
Overall effectiveness	outstanding
Outcomes for children and young people	outstanding
Quality of care	outstanding
Keeping children and young people safe	outstanding
Leadership and management	outstanding

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	outstanding
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Young people benefit from a bespoke transition into this home which involves meticulous assessment of all aspects of their functioning. This produces a highly personalised and detailed care plan which is then thoroughly monitored and regularly reviewed. This enables young people in this home to make exceptional progress.

A key area where all young people progress is in communication. Excellent communication practice is embedded in this home. All young people carry their own individualised communication book, and staff are well-trained in making best use of this. Improvements in communication skills and staff's commitment to listen, means that young people are both more able to make choices and to be involved in decisions about their lives.

Young people generally have excellent relationships with their highly attentive staff team. They are kept safe by vigilant staff who understand them well, and are proactive at protecting them from harm. Their often complex and challenging behaviour is carefully analysed by the leadership team, and highly effective strategies are developed to promote their well-being and minimise any restrictions.

Leaders and managers are fully involved in the life of the home. They are passionate

about young people achieving the best outcomes possible, and constantly engaged in achieving further improvement in the outstanding quality of care provided.

Full report

Information about this children's home

This home provides education and residential care for up to 30 pupils from 8 to 19 years of age who have severe and complex learning difficulties associated with autism. The home operates as a charitable trust and, as it is a school as well, it is approved by the Department for Education.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
25/03/2014	Interim	good progress
11/09/2013	Full	good
16/01/2013	Interim	good progress
02/08/2012	Full	outstanding

What does the children's home need to do to improve further?

Recommendations

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

- ensure that there is an effective system in place to always notify the regulator of significant events in accordance with Regulation 30. (NMS 24.1)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **outstanding**

Young people make exceptional progress in this home. Parents comment very favourably about the positive changes in their children, and one said, 'there have been huge changes for the better'. Some young people develop a regular sleep routine for the first time, and others learn some basic self-care skills. All young people make significant progress in their abilities to communicate their needs, and as a parent commented, 'this means he can now make some choices in his life'. Many young people are now better able to self-regulate their behaviour, and this means they can live at least some of their lives alongside others. A local authority colleague commented that, 'he has really settled here and is the happiest I have ever seen him'. This systematic focus on the development of communication skills, self-care, and social skills is vital in ensuring that these young people can live adult lives as independently as possible.

Young people have highly complex health needs particularly in relation to their psychological well-being. Some young people were previously in hospital placements, and a medical professional noted that the home is, 'very successful at reducing the levels of medication young people take'. This means that young people's functioning is no longer restricted by medication, but is more self-managed. Getting to this stage requires highly focused interventions and these make up the individualised 'curriculum' that each young person follows. External professionals and parents alike praise the lack of a traditional classroom model of education, and feel that the learning opportunities presented throughout the waking day are central to enabling young people's excellent progress.

Wherever possible young people are facilitated to access the wider community. For some, this is a new experience and staff develop carefully staged plans, initially using the home's grounds and escalating from there. Some young people exceed expectations, for example a young person visiting a supermarket with staff when previously he was in a contained placement. Some young people have even achieved a Duke of Edinburgh award which involved walking and overnight camping with staff support. Given young people's starting points, these are highly significant achievements which not only develop independence skills but create a sense of pride and well-being in young people and their families.

The home is very strong at encouraging regular contact with young people's families. All young people have a weekly routine of involvement in photo-letters home, and some use Skype to stay in touch. Some parents routinely visit, and other young people are now newly able to regularly go and stay at home. This dedicated focus on family relationships helps to maintain and sometimes restore strong bonds, which will be crucial for young people in their adult lives.

Quality of care

outstanding

Young people live in small group homes each with a dedicated staff group. Parents and placing authorities are very positive about the high standard of care offered. A parent summarised this as, 'all staff are nurturing and caring'. All young people have at least one to one day-time support, which is generally drawn from this staff group. This means that young people are able to have a high level of consistent care, delivered by staff who know them well. This creates a climate which promotes positive and constructive behaviours and generally, young people behave exceptionally well.

Staff have high aspirations for young people in the home. For example, some young people were previously managed by large numbers of staff, and contained in a much more restrictive environment. In this home they are free to roam with their staff member, around the grounds, and if they choose, into offices and other parts of the building. This highly child-centred approach places the young person's needs at the centre of the home's life.

Young people also make daily choices in a more structured fashion. Each young person has their own bespoke communications book containing picture symbols and velcro strips. Each day young people queue at the home's café, and pick their favourites from the visual menu. They then exchange their symbols for snacks and drinks. This imaginative activity not only rewards communication skills, but also builds on social skills and the concept of exchange. This strongly assists young people with the development of more independent skills.

Young people are further involved in the reviews of their placement plan. Some attend the meetings, and all help choose the photograph which fronts up the extensive paperwork. Parents and placing authorities praise the review format which involves visual verification of young people's progress, feeling it demonstrates the 'very skilled work' done in the home. Placement plans are highly detailed, and effectively build on the meticulously planned initial assessment period that all young people go through. They contain a full range of highly personalised positive strategies to encourage young people's optimum well-being, as well as clear, achievable and well monitored development targets.

Young people's health needs are extremely well-met, especially their emotional well-being. Constant emphasis on what individual young people need, and staff's excellent communication skills means that young people's frustrations are reduced as their needs are usually met. Young people also strongly benefit from the animal care options on site, as well as the swimming pool and various relaxation therapies. This range of on-site activities means that young people take pleasure in at least some aspects of their day, and this promotes their well-being.

One key aspect of this home is the lack of distinction between the 'learning' and the 'living' environment. However, young people do still have a highly personalised weekly timetable which is designed to assist them in acquiring necessary skills. The difference is that this learning does not take place in a traditional structured setting. It may be in a one to one outside, or it could be in a group art or music session. This bespoke approach enables all young people to make measurable progress in achieving important skills.

The home is well-located in private, spacious and well-kept grounds which offer a range of creative and practical opportunities to young people. The internal environment is generally well-kept, and young people's bedrooms are individually decorated to meet their particular needs. Maintenance issues are promptly and effectively attended to.

Keeping children and young people safe outstanding

Young people demonstrate by their usually calm and contented behaviour that they feel safe. Vigilant staff protect them from any risks from other young people, and their environment is kept safe by thorough health and safety practices. All staff including auxiliary staff are well trained in safeguarding, and there is a positive culture of appropriate whistleblowing. Relationships with the local authority designated officer for safeguarding, are highly effective, and allegations are dealt with promptly and fairly.

High staff ratios and effective site security mean that young people rarely go missing. However, on occasion this has happened and the home has effective procedures which are swiftly implemented. Any lessons learnt from such incidents are promptly actioned, such as refining the type and location of walkie-talkies.

The home's behaviour management is totally focused on reinforcing positive behaviour, and de-escalating the impact of negative behaviour. Sanctions for negative behaviour are not permitted. Even though the home accommodates some exceptionally challenging young people, this behaviour strategy is generally highly effective. Physical intervention and other restrictive practices such as emergency door holding are unusual, and when used are recorded transparently and appropriately. The home does not use certain holds, notably those where the young person is placed in a supine position. This further promotes young people's safety.

The home routinely analyses all significant incidents and has had major success in significantly reducing the numbers of aggressive episodes in some young people. This means these young people will have much fewer restrictive interventions. Where changes in young people's highly challenging behaviour have been slower to achieve, the home together with the local authority have changed the young person's environment. This protects other young people, and enables staff to withdraw from the young person rather than there being a confrontation. This proactive

safeguarding means that the young person is kept safe with minimum restriction.

Leadership and management

outstanding

There is an effective and efficient Registered Manager in post. She has been in post for some years and has an appropriate qualification. The manager is a key part of a highly effective leadership team led by the Principal. This team has a daily handover cycle of meetings, and a wider weekly meeting which enables an analysis of all aspects of the home's functioning. Individual monitoring data on young people is scrutinised at these meetings, and adjustments to programmes made where necessary. The home's development is monitored through a comprehensive development plan which has clear priorities and well-monitored actions.

The whole leadership team is highly visible throughout the home. They set an ambitious agenda for continuous improvement to the already outstanding levels of care offered, and staff are generally keen and able to go along with this. For example, the results of the initiative to track what it is like to be a young person living in this home resulted in several improvements such as activities running later, and improvements to reviews to involve the young person more. Staff have enthusiastically implemented these changes.

Staff are clear that they feel well-supported both through supervision and informal support as well as by the excellent training programme. However, there are some staffing pressures in the home, and this has resulted, uncharacteristically for this home, in the use of a small number of agency staff. Arrangements for their recruitment, supervision, and training are robust, and there is no evidence that the quality of care offered is compromised in any way. The leadership team have a comprehensive strategy devised with employees to counter staff shortages, and prospects for improvement are good.

Significant events are usually appropriately notified to Ofsted, but there has been a recent oversight. This event was appropriately notified to other agencies, and as such had no adverse impact on young people's safety and welfare.

One recommendation is made as a result of this inspection.

What inspection judgements mean

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Good	A service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements.
Adequate	A service that only meets minimum requirements.
Inadequate	A service that does not meet minimum requirements.

Information 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 framework of inspection for children's homes.