

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Merryl Wahogo / 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.

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

This home provides education and residential care for up to 28 pupils, eight 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 and Skills. Some of the children are accommodated in the main house, which is organised into three residential units. There are also four additional units, including a two-bedroom lodge and a six-bedded unit designed for older pupils. 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.

Summary

This was the key inspection covering standards in all outcome areas. All outcome areas are of an exceptionally high standard and the home continues to innovate and to be a leader in its field. There is an unusually strong and cohesive senior management team, which ensures continuous development based on close monitoring. Equally, this team supports its staff so well that it is an extraordinarily contented staff group, highly motivated to focus on the young people.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no recommendations at the previous inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The young people in this home have particularly complex dietary needs and preferences. Staff are excellent at addressing these needs. For example, they have outsourced preparation of gluten free food to an external company to ensure its quality and attractiveness. Staff are already working on the new nutritional guidelines and how to apply them, so that they are prepared when these come into force in September 2009. Meals are nutritious and there is a good standard of choice, with staff encouraging young people to try new food when their diet is too limited. Also, staff respond quickly when a young person's weight becomes a concern. There is a newly refurbished teaching kitchen and young people are encouraged to plan, prepare and cook their own meals. Young people and parents are able to enjoy photographic evidence of this work around the home.

Staff keep detailed health records such that everyone has a high level of awareness of young people's health needs. Staff were impressive in presenting a detailed health plan in a PowerPoint display at one annual review. The home has an excellent contingency plan in place to address any problems that might be caused by swine flu. All the young people need help with intimate care and staff display a high level of respect for their dignity. This is based on great clarity about the home's guidelines.

Staff do well at detailed recording and monitoring of the administration of medication and are working on how to improve stock control in relation to some drugs in liquid form. Two qualified nurses now support care staff and monitor the administration of medication closely. The Head of Care has great clarity about her role and the role of unit managers in the absence of the nurses. Managers work well to ensure that staff receive first aid training as well epilepsy training in particular, on a regular basis. They also ensure that senior staff receive training in the administration of medication.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Staff respect young people's privacy at all times and are supported in doing this by very clear guidelines and regular discussions. Currently bedroom doors are a little shabby in comparison to the rest of the environment and do not perfectly preclude unnecessary monitoring of young people. Whilst there is no evidence that staff intruded upon their privacy, it could not currently be said to be impossible.

There have been a few minor complaints which staff have addressed promptly, effectively and respectfully. Child protection is high on the agenda, with management ensuring that all staff receive regular training to update their knowledge and skills. New procedures are in place, as an additional measure, to ensure that parents are fully aware, when their children come home for the weekend, of any injuries that may have occurred. Staff show impressive awareness of their responsibility to raise concerns about any poor practice they witness. Equally, the management ensures excellent levels of communication with outside agencies, in relation to safeguarding. This means that staff keep this particularly vulnerable group of young people as safe as possible.

Bullying cannot be considered an issue with these young people but if they appear to target other young people in any way, this is highlighted well in records. Equally, staff are good at reading those records and responding appropriately.

One young person did demonstrate unusual skills to go missing a few months ago. Staff immediately put in place a range of new security measures, which have been successful in preventing a recurrence.

Parents are mostly impressed by how staff manage young people's behaviour to keep them safe. One parent says '...steps have been taken to slow young people and guide them more safely to the bus at [one unit]. Planters have been introduced just in front of the entrance which help guide the young people more safely'. One parent did have specific concerns, however, and as a result managers have ensured even better communication between staff.

The analysis, recording and monitoring of young people's hugely diverse behaviours is outstanding and forms the basis of how staff work to increase the proportion of acceptable behaviours. The computerised records allow staff to identify trends in both individual behaviours and those across the home. They show that restraint is being used less and less overall, despite some young people being in crisis. This all means that young people can learn more useful behaviours in positive ways.

Managers model a particularly positive and thoughtful response to difficult behaviour. As a result, care staff enjoy the challenge of analysing what might trigger it and therefore how to

prevent or calm it. Equally, even the most senior staff give immediate help when necessary. The level of support for care staff is one reason that they are unusually contented and unified despite being a very diverse staff group.

Individual and general risk assessments are extremely thorough and the bursar keeps them up to date. Even so, he is looking into devising a generic format that will be easier to follow, as well as showing what aspects need adapting or updating. Staff adhere to all aspects of fire safety procedures in detail. They conduct fire drills with a sensitivity to the young people's understanding and needs. The fire service attend regularly to familiarise themselves with the building. This means that both staff and fire officers are best placed to ensure the safety of the young people in the event of a fire. The bursar expresses pride in his staff. Their willingness to address unpleasant cleaning and repetitive maintenance jobs also demonstrate how the positive attitude of senior managers permeates to all staff.

All the senior management team are completely up to date with safer recruitment practices. Recruitment procedures are robust in all respects. This includes the appointment of external consultants, such as the aromatherapist.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Staff tailor support very closely to the young people's needs. They make good use of sensory assessments done by a visiting occupational therapist. In addition to ensuring appropriate supervision levels at all times, they make use of a wide range of visiting professionals. These include an osteopath, a drama therapist and a music therapist. Every young person who enjoys a particular approach has the opportunity for individual work with the relevant therapist, at least once a week. Some young people do drama therapy in groups, which is a reflection of excellent work on the part of all the staff involved. Staff support young people to take part in a show each Christmas and ensure that wherever possible it showcases their talents. Specialist staff look after a range of farm animals in the grounds. Those young people who enjoy being around them are assisted to carry out animal husbandry tasks. Staff are able to give wonderful examples of the progress these therapies allow young people to make.

Care staff support teaching staff and outside consultants throughout the day. Everything in this home is based on a detailed understanding of the young people's interests and skills, and building gradually on those. Staff do, however, also use this understanding to slowly reduce the occurrence of what they describe as restrictive behaviours, increasing the opportunities the young people can have.

Managers ensure that budgets allow for the purchase of even expensive equipment where this will enhance young people's enjoyments as well as their skills. For example, they recently purchased an interactive white board, which allows young people to engage in enjoyable art activities without getting messy.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Local authorities placing young people in this home provide careful information. Managers then develop particularly detailed care plans. Apart from the clear information about the young people's preferences and needs, managers also compile extremely elaborate target charts. Staff

fill these in on the basis of 20 minute slots, which provides the clearest possible ongoing information about a young person's progress. Additionally, the monthly behaviour diary shows the bigger picture in terms of where the young person has chosen to be and what they have eaten, for example.

Reviews now occur approximately every five months, which is well above the frequency demanded by law. Staff ensure that as many key people in the young person's life as possible, attend. Staff inform those attending the review, not only by the information noted above, but also by photos and sometimes PowerPoint presentations.

Parents very much appreciate the weekly phone calls and letters home, as well as photographs of the activities their children engage in. It is a measure of the success of this communication that parents want even more of it. One parent says, 'Weekly phone calls are good and our weekly letter home. I would like to hear more of what happens in residential time'. Another says, 'More photographs would be ideal to keep us up to date.' They also say, 'My son really enjoys his opportunities to access the community during shopping and recycling trips. He also enjoys visits out to places of interest for walks'.

The whole ethos of this home is to be led by the young people and build from there. Staff increasingly use the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), as well as speech and signs, to encourage young people to communicate their wishes and needs. This process can take a long time but staff are enormously proud and happy when young people succeed in this effort.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

There is lots of evidence to demonstrate the home's commitment to ensuring young people are fully prepared for adulthood and adult services. Staff create full and comprehensive transition plans for each young person once they have reached 14 years of age. Staff update these when necessary, based on person centred planning. Staff hold regular meetings with parents, social workers and adult services, at the home. They do good work to ensure positive transitions and that placements are available to promote a positive experience for young people moving to adult services. Staff communicate the needs of young people well and demonstrate how these are to be met in future placements. The home undertakes excellent work to involve adult care managers. Staff do a lot of work with young people on independent living skills to further prepare them for adult life. An open plan kitchen in one unit allows staff to help young people develop greater independence.

The home has continued with an excellent refurbishment programme, both within the units and in the grounds. This means, for example, that bathrooms are now truly fit for purpose and that there is an excellent play area outside. The bursar ensures that there are clear plans for future spending which are followed carefully. He is happy that the home is currently in a strong position to plan for further improvements. There are house martins nesting under a small area of the roof, producing a lot of mess near the entrance used by young people. Although this is cleaned regularly, it may still pose a risk to any young person who may put the excrement in their mouth.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. There is wide ranging diversity amongst staff and young people, with absolutely no evidence of friction. On the contrary, staff are so child focused that all other issues are secondary. In addition, however, the long standing tradition within this home is to actively celebrate different cultures. For example, parents and staff may work with young people to prepare food, music and so on, from any particular culture, for a whole day of celebration. Furthermore, staff especially appreciate the support they receive to obtain qualifications whilst working in the home. This is particularly helpful to anyone who had not been able to benefit from the education system earlier in their lives. Some of the home's in-house training materials are provided in a variety of languages. Nevertheless, staff work in domestic or maintenance roles until and unless their English is good enough to work with the young people. Domestic and maintenance staff are now able to undertake NVQs relevant to their work, so that they too can obtain qualifications. This means that young people benefit from contented staff who are able to pay excellent attention to them.

There is a well presented Statement of Purpose, containing all necessary details. It is extremely good at conveying how the home supports young people.

The daily handover during the school week, at which teachers take primary responsibility for the work with young people, is a complex affair. Timetables have to be prepared each day, depending on what is happening for the young people at the time. These include sessions with visiting consultants, such as the osteopath. This is all managed remarkably well, so that young people get the most out of the school day.

Despite a very large staff group the home manages to meet standards in terms of the percentage of care staff with, or working towards NVQ3 in care or above. There is a great commitment to staff training, with one member of staff allocated to oversee this. This person and several other members of staff are qualified NVQ assessors, so that the home is not dependent on finding external people. Staff speak highly of the quality and amount of internal training available to them. This means that young people are supported by staff who are suitably qualified to meet their needs.

There are regular visits undertaken by either the independent advocate or the responsible individual, to monitor the performance of the home. Managers are currently improving the form used, to assist visitors to evidence all their monitoring.

Monitoring in this home is unusually thorough and regular. The senior management team consider statistics and patterns particularly in relation to behaviour and its management, on a weekly basis, allowing them to respond quickly whenever necessary. It also allows them to gain a clear picture of any improvements needed in staff recording. This ensures that young people benefit from prompt responses to their changing needs.

Staff keep confidential files in the administration office, which is locked at all times. This means that only non-confidential files are available to care staff on a routine basis, so that families can feel certain that their information is kept secure.

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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Recommendations

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

- consider replacing the bedroom doors in the main house, addressing appropriate ways of ensuring a balance between safety and privacy. NMS 9
- consider how to prevent the bird excrement collecting on the paving area. NMS 24