

Inspection report for Children's Home

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Inspector	Rossella Volpi
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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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 is conducted by a voluntary organisation. Its purpose is to provide long-term care and support within a homely environment to a maximum of four children or young people between the ages of 12 and 18 years, who have severe learning or physical disabilities or both. The service aims to offer positive everyday life experiences in a safe environment and support the young people to exercise choice in their lives.

The accommodation is a large detached bungalow set in a residential area. Adaptations have been made to the building to meet the needs of the young people placed. There is parking space at the front and a large garden with play equipment at the rear.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

At this unannounced full inspection, all key standards were inspected.

Young people benefit from a home that is well managed and from a staff team that is well led and supported, knows them well and is committed to their welfare. There are good strategies to help young people to stay healthy and to encourage a healthy diet; staff are aware of and sensitive to health needs relating to culture and ethnicity. Young people feel safe at the home and at ease with staff, whose company they enjoy. Although sanctions are rarely used, the lack of a proper central record means that the sanction system does not lend itself to proper scrutiny and review.

Young people receive good, individualised support from a staff team committed to working in partnership with the families and external professionals and there is excellent liaison with the schools young people attend. Young people usually have their needs assessed effectively, but there has been some potential for relevant information to be overlooked recently, because of lack of proper information from the placing authorities before recent admissions.

Improvements since the last inspection

The previous inspection, of December 2009, considered the home's operation as overall sound in promoting the welfare of young people, but it identified a number of areas for improvement. These related to: the record of complaints; records of the support and assistance offered to young people preparing to leave care; décor, furnishing and repairs; review of the children's guide; records of staff appraisals and supervision sessions; monitoring of the care provided in the home; reports

completed following the statutory monthly visits from the provider to be sent to Ofsted; daily timetables for young people no longer in education.

This inspection confirmed that necessary repairs and refurnishing have been carried out and the records of staff appraisals and supervision sessions are kept.

There is monitoring of the care provided in the home; however this has not been effective enough to ensure that all relevant records are appropriately kept; the reports completed following the statutory monthly visits from the provider have not been sent to Ofsted.

Practices regarding the recording of complaints, of the support and assistance offered to young people preparing to leave care and the completion of daily timetables for young people no longer in education have been reviewed and changed, to comply with the regulations and standards. However, there have been no complaints since last inspection and no young people out of school or for whom plans for leaving care are being considered. Therefore, the effectiveness of the review in supporting appropriate practice would be considered at a future inspection.

The children's guide has been reviewed and Ofsted details inserted. The guide is under a new review, so this will be considered again at a future inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people's health is promoted well.

Staff are prompt in ensuring that young people are registered with a general practitioner, dentist and optician. Medical advice is sought when required and staff are aware of and sensitive to health needs relating to culture and ethnicity. Staff promote healthy lifestyles and actively encourage young people to take an interest in looking after themselves.

Overall there is satisfaction with the support provided to young people. For example, children said that, when feeling unwell: 'They take care of me and make sure I am comfortable.' A placing social worker commented that there are very good strategies to support young people to stay healthy and to encourage a healthy diet.

Young people are offered food that reflects their individual and cultural preferences, while being encouraged also to try new dishes. They have opportunities to shop and cook with staff. For example, they said: 'I am provided with a varied diet that includes my five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. I am given choice so I can choose what I like and do not like.' and 'I go shopping with a staff member where I can help choose and buy what I like to.'

Staff have sound understanding of what makes up a good, balanced diet; had training on nutrition and have knowledge of eating disorders and difficulties with eating. They work closely with health professionals who are helping young people to

overcome such difficulties. The home has excellent food hygiene practices in place.

The policies and procedures for administering medicines and providing treatment are well understood by staff and followed; thus young people's welfare is safeguarded. In fact the home has a sustained record of full compliance with the administration, safe keeping and disposals of medications.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

This service is provided in a way that contributes well to safeguarding the young people living at the home. The sound recruitment practices and vetting of staff minimise the risk of young people being exposed to potential abusers. Equality and diversity are promoted in the recruitment process. Periodic health and safety checks are conducted to monitor that the premises continue to offer physical safety and security.

Staff feel passionate about providing care in a way that fully respects the young people's privacy and promotes their dignity, with particular attention being given to gender and cultural issues when providing personal care. The living arrangements offer enough private and communal space to ensure young people are able to relax with staff and peers and have quiet space if they want it.

Young people, or their placing social workers, report that young people feel safe at the home and at ease with staff, whose company they enjoy. They know how to complain, are confident that staff would know if they are not content and said that they feel able to tell staff their concerns. For example, young people said: 'If I am worried the staff know me and can tell when I am not happy.' The service ensures that young people have access to advocates, while managers external to the home visit regularly and spend time with the young people.

The incidence of complaints about this service has been low and this is consistent with the reported high level of satisfaction by its service users. The manager is aware that lack of complaints does not always mean that all users are satisfied; therefore she endeavours to have good contact with families, placing social workers and other relevant people to ascertain their views and to guide how the service may improve.

The ability of staff to protect young people and to respond appropriately to allegations of abuse is enhanced by procedures that are clear to staff and by regular training. However, staff have found that the new emphasis on individual learning accessed from a computer does not meet their needs well, in relation to safeguarding. This is mitigated by the on line learning being followed up by discussion at team meetings. Nonetheless, staff have found this not to be a proper substitute for the challenge that an external trainer or sharing ideas with people from other environments would bring; particularly as this is a stable team, with most members of staff having worked together for years and the young people having complex needs and use non-verbal communication.

The high staffing levels in the home and their vigilance, as well as the excellent relationships with schools, minimise the possibility of bullying taking place. There are no reports of young people being absent without authority since the last inspection. Staff view young people positively; management of behaviour is mainly by encouraging acceptable behaviour through constructive staff response to inappropriate behaviour. Therefore, sanctions are rarely imposed for the majority of young people; but the records of sanctions that are imposed do not contain all necessary information. For example, the records normally do not show why that sanction was deemed appropriate to address that young person's behaviour and there is no clear evidence that the effectiveness of the sanction is reviewed or of regular managerial monitoring. The lack of this information and a proper central record of sanctions, means that the system does not lend itself to proper scrutiny and review.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Overall, young people receive good, individualised support from a staff team committed to working in partnership with the families and external professionals. This enables appropriate help and guidance to be provided consistently, to meet identified needs and to achieve educational and personal goals.

This is well complemented by a range of leisure activities, chosen in consultation with young people and families, to ensure that young people can have fun, follow their own interests and that the activities reflect their cultures. Outings are organised throughout the year and popular choices have been, for example: trips to the zoo; the seaside; swimming; cinema; restaurants and museums. There have been also holidays away on the coast or in the countryside.

Staff have a very good approach to education with daily attendance at school and planning for moves to further education being an established part of daily life at the home. There is excellent liaison with schools and this has had a positive impact on young people. For example, in one case, such liaison enabled staff to offer advice to the school on how to deal with some very challenging behaviour; as a result the school placement has been maintained, it is successful and the young person is progressing in education.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Normally young people have their needs assessed effectively and these are regularly reviewed. Placement plans address how support is to be provided to meet individual needs, including those relating to disability, race, culture, sexuality, or language. The home has links with a range of professional agencies and where required staff seek

services to meet the needs of specific young people. Development plans detail individual goals and achievements. The staff focus on assisting young people to maximise their potential and improve their quality of life.

Recently, there has been some potential for relevant matters to be overlooked, because proper information from the placing authorities was not provided before admission. The risks have been mitigated by the vigorous attempts and steps taken by the manager to gather essential facts from different sources, to enable appropriate care. However, the lack of information at admission and for some weeks afterwards, means that the young people involved have not benefited from a holistic assessment conducted and coordinated by the specialist social worker, and to which all the relevant professionals would have contributed.

Young people's views are valued and staff demonstrate that they support them to express their opinions about the services provided and to make decisions on matters that affect them. This continues to be very challenging, as the young people currently resident have communication difficulties associated with their disabilities. Staff pay particular attention to reactions, gestures and body language and this is helped by the fact that the staff team has been stable, so that they all know the young people well. Key workers support young people to get their voice heard at child care reviews and planning meetings.

Consultation is also promoted via parents, social workers and other people significant to the young person. In fact, the commitment of staff and the work and consideration channelled into ensuring that families and friends maintain contact and have a say, are excellent and one of the best examples of how staff value and promote equality and diversity, by often succeeding in their practice of inclusion.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Preparing for leaving care and developing the skills required for adulthood are matters usually addressed by the staff with young people. Issues that arise from ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality and religion are included in individual plans. However, at present, there are no young people preparing for leaving care.

Young people live in a home that is conveniently located for schools, leisure facilities, transport links and other community resources. Its size, design and layout provide enough private and communal space and there are suitable aids and adaptations and specific furniture, consistent with the needs of the young people. The accommodation is domestic in style; it is well decorated and furnished. Attempts have been made to embellish the environment in consultation with young people and families and to reflect individual and cultural preferences. Young people are supported in personalising their bedrooms; there are bright and spacious dining and living areas and a large garden that young people enjoy.

Overall the premises support the provider's aim to create a homely atmosphere,

which facilitates each young person's growth, development and acquisition of age appropriate skills and behaviour.

The manager's office is too small to support her work well, while the ability for staff to discuss confidential issues in private is limited by the lack of office space. However, they have the use of communal rooms during parts of the day and there are plans to adapt a building in the garden for staff use.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Young people benefit from a home that is well managed and from a staff team that is competently led, knows them well and is committed to their welfare.

Managers are well respected, accountable and generally accessible. Some staff find that the more strategic approach taken by senior management recently is less conducive to foster the personal professional relationships that they have been used to and, therefore, they feel less confident in approaching senior management if they have concerns.

Staff are well supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting welfare as they receive regular supervision, annual appraisals and are able to attend a range of training to enhance their skills and ensure that their knowledge is kept up to date. Overall this is an experienced staff team, most of whom have relevant professional qualifications at the appropriate level or are studying to achieve this.

The positive comments and experiences of this home related by placing social workers, children and the warm and friendly interactions observed are additional evidence of the staff competence and skills.

There is a clear statement of how the home operates that is regularly updated; thus users are informed of the service provided and staff are well guided.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. For example, the service is sensitive to gender issues; is effective in its policy of inclusion with excellent practices regarding consultation with families; is responsive to individual wishes, beliefs and culture.

Young people's welfare is monitored regularly also by senior management, through a variety of means including: monthly visits, which are usually undertaken unannounced; consultation with young people, families and staff; review of records. Individual case files are kept securely and with due regard for confidentiality. Some records relating to safeguarding and positive contribution do not contain all the relevant information, as discussed above. This means that there are still some gaps in managerial monitoring. Furthermore, copies of reports, completed following the

statutory monthly visits conducted on the provider's behalf, have not been sent to Ofsted, although this is required by the regulations.

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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
22	maintain an accurate and up to date record of measures of control used, as set out in Regulation 17(Regulation 17 (4))	31/10/2010
2	ensure that there is an up to date placement plan for each child or young person accommodated at the home and that children have their needs assessed effectively and comprehensively (Regulation 12)	31/10/2010
32	ensure that reports of monthly visits, as set out in Regulation 33, are sent to Ofsted regularly. (Regulation 33 (5))	31/10/2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the provision of training for staff in safeguarding meets their needs. (NMS 17)