

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Paula Lahey
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This local authority service is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to ten children and young people. The service can provide a home and a short break service for children and young people who may have a physical disability and/or a learning disability.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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

Overall effectiveness

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

This is the second full inspection carried out this year, following an inadequate overall rating at the inspection in June 2013.

A change to the leadership of the home is having a notable positive impact. There has been a strong drive by the interim management team to raise standards and make the necessary improvements in order to provide children with a better quality short break experience. Action has been taken to address previously identified regulatory breaches and there are improvements to the environment, culture, documentation and direct practice.

The staff team are now being provided with clear direction, effective management and constructive leadership. Most of the staff who participated in the inspection demonstrate an increased enthusiasm and motivation to support the changes and development of the service. Morale has increased, as has the team's understanding of the services strengths and weaknesses; this positively benefits children.

Children's opportunities to develop are starting to improve. Action has been taken to provide greater consistency in supporting children's communication needs, provide them with more stimulating leisure times and ensure that activities support placement aims.

However, developments and improvements remain in their infancy and will require further consolidation to become embedded into practice. The challenge for the

service is to maintain this upwards momentum and sustain the necessary improvements over time. Requirements relating to embedding progress with activities, children's records and improving the quality of care have been made.

In addition, requirements and recommendations are raised in relation to staff skill and competence and to further improve the experience for children. In particular this relates to improving how children express their individuality and identity in their bedrooms and ensure they are suitably prepared to manage the current changes that are being undertaken in the home.

Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
18 (2001)	ensure that children accommodated in the home are (a) encouraged to develop and pursue appropriate leisure interests and (b) are provided with appropriate leisure facilities and activities. Specifically, ensure that activities during the week are sufficiently varied, stimulating and purposeful (Regulation 18 (2) (a) (b))	01/11/2013
25 (2001)	ensure that there is at all times, having regard to- (a) the size of the home, the statement of purpose, and the number and needs of the children accommodated there, a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working at the home. In particular, ensure that staff are suitably skilled and competent to carry out their role (Regulation 25 (1)(a))	01/12/2013
27 (2001)	ensure staff receive appropriate training. In particular, ensure that the identified training programme is delivered (Regulation 27 (4)(a))	01/12/2013
28 (2001)	maintain in respect of each child who is accommodated in the home a record in permanent form which (a) includes the information, documents and records specified in Schedule 3 relating to that child. In particular, ensure that care plans identify children's cultural, religious and educational needs and how they are being supported in the home (Regulation 28 (1) (a))	01/11/2013
34 (2001)	establish and maintain a system for (b) improving the quality of care provided in the children's home. In particular, ensure that action plans are compiled and implemented to support the sustaining of improvements over time. (Regulation 34 (1) (b))	01/12/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children receive personalised care that promotes all aspects of their individual identity and are treated as an individual rather than a member of a group. In particular, ensure that children's bedrooms are personalised to reflect their individuality, personal preferences and identity (NMS 2.1)
- implement clear procedures for introducing children to the home and help children to understand what to expect from the home. In particular, ensure that children are well prepared and supported to cope with the changes that are happening in the home. (NMS 11.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Children are benefiting from the recent changes in leadership and management. There is now an increased focus on the importance of improving children's outcomes in addition to providing care and a break for families.

Each child now has clearly identified development aims that are starting to be achieved during their visit. The aims for children include developing autonomy with personal care, improving physical fitness, making choices, increasing independence skills and fostering positive social interaction. During each of their visits activities are now starting to be offered that enable children to work on their individual aims while also having fun.

Some children have been working on trying new foods and making healthy choices and portion sizes at mealtimes. Others are supported to use walking frames during their visit and/or spend time out of wheelchairs stretching and exercising. These activities support children to develop improved health outcomes.

Children's opportunity to engage in more purposeful and stimulating activities has increased in recent weeks. Activities are now discussed as part of the shift plan and therefore enable staff to review the resources, share ideas and decide on options they can provide to children. As it is the summer holidays children have been able to enjoy more time in the large garden and use the minibuses to access the local area. Children very much enjoy these experiences and this positively promotes their self-esteem and well-being.

Improvements to the physical layout of the ground floor have increased children's opportunities to socialise more and develop independence. They now have unrestricted access to all areas of the home and there is now only one dining room. This means children can make choices about where they want to play in the home

and can eat meals with a wider range of peers.

Children's personal preferences and choices are being incorporated into the changes being made to some of the communal areas. Children have been choosing, buying and then planting flowers for the garden and their art work and photos are now adorning the entrance way into the home. These improvements help children to feel their views are important and valued. However, there is little opportunity for children to express their personal identity and character within their bedrooms due to the current decoration.

Not all children have been well prepared and supported to cope with the changes that have occurred in the home. Some children find changes in their routine and environment difficult and this can result in increased anxiety and challenging behaviours. During the inspection it was evident that some staff have formed better relationships with children and demonstrate more skill at supporting them during these times, than others.

Quality of care

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

There have been a number of improvements made to the environment in recent weeks. It is more welcoming and inviting and better use of the ground floor space is providing children with improved opportunities. The grounds and garden area, office, lounge and dining areas have all benefited from a 'spring clean', whereby clutter and out of date documentation has been removed. The staff office now appears more professional and provides staff with the information they require.

Bedrooms have continued to be redecorated and some have had new bedding and curtains. However, all of these rooms have been decorated in 'themes'. While this enables a more decorative environment it does not allow children's identity, personality or character to be included into the room. All bedrooms have hard flooring which is utilitarian and functional in appearance and not all children need this type of flooring.

Improvements have been made to support children who use alternative forms of communication. This includes picture exchange symbols, photographs and a visual menu. These tools are helping staff to support children to make choices and learn about their environment and/or routine. During the inspection there was an improvement noted in the number of staff using signing to support communication with children. In addition, there was more evident use of children's individual communication aids. During the shift-planning meeting the shift leader is now required to clarify with each member of staff that they are aware of children's preferred form of communication and to make sure the required aids are available for use. This is not yet embedded into practice as not all staff have received sufficient training in supporting alternative forms of communication. Training is booked for all staff in September 2013.

The home is well resourced to provide children with stimulating and enjoyable activities during their stay. In recent months there has been an increase in the number of people able to drive the mini-bus, which results in more opportunities to visit the local community. The staff team are beginning to develop systems to make activities more purposeful. This will need further development to ensure that during the term time activities do not return to being repetitive and uninspiring.

The quality of food remains a real strength of the service. It is freshly prepared and wholesome and children continue to enjoy the meals offered. There is now only one dining area, which enables children to eat in a larger group and have a more social experience. In addition, a designated outside eating area has been established and is making good use of the large outside space. The interim manager has identified that some practices around mealtimes have become institutional. For example, there has been little flexibility in the timing of meals and a set approach to when children can start and finish, even with recognition that some of them find this difficult. Action has been taken to address this.

Each child now has a care plan with identifiable risk assessments included. Local authority care plans are sought from placing authorities and are maintained on file. Previously, care plans and risk assessments were not devised until children had been visiting the home for a six-month period. There was no reasonable purpose for this time delay. It is now recognised that care plans and risk assessments must be in place when a child starts to visit the home to enable staff to have the assessed information to enable them to appropriately support children. There is a system in place to ensure care plans are regularly reviewed and kept up-to-date. Families and professionals are involved in the devising and review of care plans. The quality of information recorded in care plans remains variable and is reliant on staff skills. In addition, not all care plans contain sufficient information relating to how the home directly supports children's education, cultural and personal identity needs.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children are supported by good staff ratios, this means that they are well supervised and kept safe. Staff are aware of children's individual and complex needs and care is taken to ensure they are protected during their visit. Each child now has clearly identified plans in relation to assessed risks and behaviours. A learning disability specialist is working with the service to help develop these assessments further over the coming months.

There has been no use of restraint since the last inspection. The behaviour support policy has been recently revised and staff have been provided with a list of approved physical interventions. Children's individual behaviour support plans clearly specify the only reasons for restrictive practices and accepted techniques. As there has been no further use of restraint it is not possible to assess the effectiveness of the system to debrief children following an incident. However, a recording system has been put in place to ensure that this requirement is carried out in practice.

Staff are aware of their responsibilities in relation to child protection and have ready access to safeguarding procedures, contact details of protection agencies and up-to-date current legislation. There is good partnership working with the local area designated officer and appropriate investigations into practice concerns.

During their visit children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe. For example, they are supported to learn skills with safe road crossing and using kitchen equipment. These tasks are built into activities such as visits to the local park and cooking, which enable children to practice skills in a relevant situation while also having fun.

Children are now provided with a safer environment. The grounds have benefited from a good clear up. Broken garden furniture, damaged items, and large weeds have been removed. Pathways are now clear of hazards and the poly tunnel play area has been cleaned to make it more accessible for children. Members of the team have responsibility for ensuring fire, vehicle, and health and safety checks are undertaken routinely. During the inspection the home was undergoing a fire safety assessment and work was being carried out on the large trees in the grounds.

Two new bank staff have been offered appointments since the last inspection, however they will not start until the service has satisfactory receipt of their required checks. Administrative staff have improved the checking system of agency staff and there is now a list at the main entrance of approved agency staff photographs and details which are checked on arrival. There is robust checking and monitoring of visitors into the home. These systems demonstrate appropriate vetting and safer recruitment standards and afford children protection.

Leadership and management

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

Following the last inspection and an internal review, senior managers took the decision to redeploy the Registered Manager and undertake a formal investigation into the leadership of the home. At the time of this inspection, the investigation remains on-going. Interim managers have been seconded to the home and they are providing staff with a good level of leadership and direction. There have been notable improvements made in the home under their leadership. The two managers are suitably experienced and competent and demonstrate skills which complement each other and provide a good level of leadership. Applications to register the interim arrangements with Ofsted are being undertaken.

Over the past six months there have been a number of inspections and internal reviews carried out. The senior management team demonstrate a good understanding of the home's strengths and areas for development and in recent weeks it is evident that they are driving forward the necessary improvements. However, much of these improvements need to be strengthened and established into practice to ensure they will be sustained over time. Senior managers are yet to

compile an accumulated action plan which lists all the areas they want to develop. This will be necessary to ensure that developments are prioritised and completed in a timely manner.

There are a number of skilled and competent staff among the team. They demonstrate enthusiasm and a keenness to work with the management team to drive forward necessary improvements. However, some staff members do not demonstrate sufficient skill and competence in their role, be this leading a shift and/or working directly with children particularly those who have more complex behaviours. The senior management team has identified this as a weakness of the service; they are currently looking at job roles and are planning to bring in competency based supervision/performance management over the coming months. In addition, managers have identified a list of mandatory training required to enhance staff's competence.

Systems to support staff are being implemented. Supervision is occurring more frequently and staff are having more direction and guidance. The format of handovers have been fully revised. There is now a brief handover from the outgoing shift leader to the oncoming equivalent. This focuses on key issues that need sharing. The oncoming team now meet as a group to plan for the coming session. There is now a focus on allocating staff to specific children, identifying their aims for placement and deciding on suitable development activities to support these aims. At the end of the shift the team come back together to review the progress made at meeting the placement aims. This positively benefits children as the team who cares for them are clear about their role and are well directed.

There has been a notable improvement in the morale and enthusiasm amongst many of the team. Comments made to the inspector include 'I now feel empowered', 'we just needed direction' and 'we have managers who say yes, we can do things and this has given me confidence and freedom.'

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* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.