

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Maire Atherton
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Date of last inspection	15 December 2009
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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 is a service for children and young people with disabilities and their families. It provides short breaks for young people who have a learning and/or physical disability, who may require nursing care and are living at home with their family; many of the young people may also present challenging behaviour. It is jointly funded by a Primary Care Trust and a local authority, and managed by the Children and Young People's Directorate of the local authority. The unit is registered to accommodate up to six children and young people, two of whom may be under eight years. Other services offered include day care, after school care and support groups. The unit is closed overnight on Mondays when it is used by a young carer's group.

The centre is a detached two-storey building, about one-and-a-half miles from the town centre. It is not easily accessible via public transport but has the use of transport for the young people, to enable good links with neighbouring towns and local facilities. The building has its own large secure garden area with lawn, patio area and outdoor adventure play equipment. The interior of the building has been developed to provide accommodation that is accessible to all. The premises have been equipped with additional overhead hoists and other specialist equipment to meet the complex physical needs of children and young people using the service.

Summary

This unannounced inspection covered all key standards. The well-managed staff team work hard to ensure that children and young people have a good time whilst staying in the home. The health care needs of young people are well met and they are protected from harm. Staff are skilled at enabling the children and young people to make meaningful choices in daily life at the home.

Four deficits are identified, three relate to ensuring full and complete records are kept, the fourth concerns the improvement of the appearance of the sofas.

There were two young people staying overnight at the time of this inspection.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There were four actions and two recommendations in the last report. The four actions have been met: Weekly fire checks, care plans, risk assessments and staff records for all those working in the home are now up to date and appropriately maintained.

Both recommendations have been partly met and work continues on these. There has been a significant reduction in the number of occasions when the number of agency staff on shift exceeds the number of permanent staff. This has been achieved by the use of bank staff and overtime by permanent employees in the face of high levels of sick leave. The development of communication passports for each child and young person using the service is underway and includes consultation with the schools.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children and young people benefit from tasty, nutritious meals freshly prepared by the cook, or by other staff at weekends. The likes and dislikes of children, as well as their dietary requirements, including allergies and intolerances, are well recorded and known by staff. A parent commented, 'They prepare interesting meals and they follow the dietary requirements'; empty plates at the end of the meal support this comment. Staff enable young people to make informed choices about what they would like to eat in accordance with their communication needs. The cook encourages children and young people to join her in the kitchen and enables their participation in the whole process. Meals are a social occasion, with staff ensuring that all at the table are included in the conversations, using signs and gestures, and interpreting behaviour where needed.

As this is a short break service parents retain primary responsibility for their children's health care. Staff ensure that parents provide them with the information necessary to effectively promote the health and well being of children and young people using the service; those who have complex health care needs receive care from qualified nurses. This is clearly recorded in the plans that are in place for each child and young person. Accident records are well maintained and monitored by the manager. The home has measures in place to minimise the risk of infection.

A unified medication procedure, for use by both medical and social care staff, has been successfully implemented. Staff adhere to the robust procedures in place, thus ensuring that children receive the right medication at the right time. Staff practice is kept up to date by regular refresher training, the most recent on the day of the inspection. Staff use the information gained from training to inform practice with specific children and young people.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children and young people benefit from good a level of privacy in the home. Staff manage personal care sensitively in accordance with the care plan for each young person, by providing direct care or discreetly monitoring self care. Staff are very aware of each young person's need for personal space and ensure that this is achieved. Personal information is held securely.

Children, young people and visitors have easy access to the complaints system. All are encouraged to express any dissatisfaction and staff respond well to this, thus reducing the need for complaints to be taken further. There has been one formal complaint since the last visit. The record gives a clear account of the action taken but does not evidence whether the complainant is satisfied with the outcome. There is also a record of thanks from parents, reporting positive experiences during the visit.

Staff receive annual refresher training in child protection, tailored to safeguarding children with disabilities. Staff are knowledgeable about and understand the procedures to be used to protect children. However there is a slight risk that staff will be unable to assess the timing or significance of illness or injuries as body maps do not always provide enough specific detail.

High staff ratios, one to one at the time of this visit, and vigilance alongside the careful grouping of children and young people minimises opportunities for bullying to occur. A child's absence is quickly noticed and staff respond immediately, finding the child within minutes. One such

instance (during a game of hide and seek) resulted in the improvement of an area of a boundary fence and an updated risk assessment.

The use of sanctions and physical intervention is rare as staff use their relationships with and knowledge of the young people to promote positive behaviour. Nevertheless the staff team are reviewing their behaviour management strategies in accordance with an approved method. There is a clear focus on early intervention and establishing the function of behaviour in order to devise a suitable behaviour support programme, where physical restraint is the very last option. Team members trained as trainers in the method are leading staff discussions for each child where staff focus on the behaviour they want to discourage. Triggers, warning signs and potential distraction/diversion techniques are shared and form the basis of the behaviour management plan which is agreed to by parents.

Positive steps are taken to keep young people, staff and visitors safe from the risk from fire and other hazards. Timely checks are carried out on equipment and installations and there are good systems in place to address maintenance issues as they arise. There are a range of risk assessments in place both environmental and relating to individual children and young people.

The implementation of the staff recruitment procedure is robust and ensures that only suitable staff work with the children and young people. Security in the home prevents unauthorised access and visitors are properly checked and monitored.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children and young people benefit from support from staff who know them well. Staff gather information from children and young people's families and via direct observation, to help them tailor individual support. There is an effective key worker system in place. Good relationships exist between the staff team and the children and young people so that they enjoy positive transitions during their stay. Staff work hard to achieve a balance between group and individual activities, to provide a variety of experiences.

There are established links with the school on the same site as the home and links with other schools are developing. There is effective communication between the home and the schools through the home/school diary and formal contributions to the review processes both at school and the short break provision.

Young people confirm that they 'get to do the things we like', for example, routine domestic trips to recycle and shopping, visits to the park, cinema and bowling. The activities available for each day are displayed on the activities board enabling children and young people to make informed choices. There are good facilities in-house that children and young people also enjoy, such as the sensory room and art and craft activities. There have been fewer off-site trips because of long-term staff sickness but there are plans in place for summer outings. The pocket-money system is generally working well, providing children and young people with increased leisure opportunities. Staff know the preferred activities of each child and young person and do their best to facilitate these.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There is a clear referral and assessment process. Insight into the needs of the young person is gleaned through a series of visits to home, school and the unit. In addition parents provide written information and this is incorporated into the daily living plans. The role of the key worker is central in the process and staff work hard to understand the communication methods of the child and develop their own skills in communicating effectively. Staff are working on developing communication passports for each child and young person as well as providing easy access to pictures and symbols in the living areas. Children and young people's progress is regularly reviewed (though they rarely attend) using consultation papers, to ensure plans are up to date and information is relevant. As the majority are not 'looked after children' attendance by social workers at reviews is not routine and the outcome of reviews is not always available.

The children who use this respite service do so on an occasional basis with their family as the primary carers. Whilst children are staying in the home staff support the contact arrangements in the plans as well as responding to requests by the child or young person. Parents and carers may make contact with their children during their stay should they wish.

Transition planning is well thought through and children and young people are well supported in the process of beginning and ending short breaks at the home. The home does not admit children on an emergency basis who are not known to the unit but does offer additional respite where they can in response to an identified need.

Staff tailor their communication methods according to those of the young people ensuring that they are offered choices in a meaningful way, at meal times and leisure for example. Staff take photos of children and young people doing activities as a way of recording their level of engagement and enjoyment. This will then be used to identify successful activities and adapt those that do not engage the children so well.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Staff are skilled at involving young people in day-to-day living tasks that promote their self-care skills and their independence, setting and clearing the table at meal times for example. A teenagers' group has been established with the clear aim of promoting independent living skills.

All children and young people occupy single rooms and these are personalised for the duration of their stay. The home has track and manual hoists and specialist shower and bathing facilities to assist with personal care where this is necessary.

The home provides comfortable living accommodation, and young people may be involved in choosing soft furnishings. The sofa covers do not fit well any more, as they are frequently laundered. There are two main communal areas, one of which is maintained as a quiet area. There is also a sensory room. The small self-contained flat within the home enables a mix of children and young people to stay at the same time. There are plans to further improve this area. An alarm-call system has been provided throughout the building and bedrooms can be monitored for sound should there be an identified need for this.

The garden, which includes an adventure playground area, a sandpit and a sensory area, provides young people with an attractive, inviting and safe place to play and explore. The raised vegetable bed has become home to a family of rabbits, measures to reclaim it are under consideration.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose, which is reviewed annually and updated when necessary, accurately reflects how the home is run. Information for children and young people about the home is well presented, using photographs effectively; it is also available in symbol format.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The home has a consistent approach to ensuring that the diverse needs of children and young people they support are met. The staff are knowledgeable about the wide ranging individual needs relating to ethnicity, culture, gender, sexuality and physical limitations. Religious and cultural festivals are celebrated and staff introduce young people to meals from other countries. The diversity of the staff group contributes to the home's commitment to equality.

There is an experienced, qualified and well-established management team in post with a strong commitment to learning and development, both for themselves as individuals and the team as a whole. The enthusiastic team, including bank staff, benefit from regular supervision and training both of which are given a high priority. Staff meetings are lively discussions about the needs of young people and how these identified needs can be met. A parent described staff as, 'very caring of each child's needs'.

Staff are clear about the lines of responsibility in the home and during a shift. Shift leaders are experienced and have worked in the home for some time. They understand their duties and those of colleagues who work with them. Rotas and staffing levels take into account the needs of children and young people. A proactive approach has been adopted to reduce the impact of long term sick leave by several staff. A preferred agency has been chosen and staff from the agency come for an induction, which is signed off. Only staff who have completed the induction and provided evidence that necessary checks have been undertaken work in the unit. Staffing shortfalls are also covered by the deployment of bank staff and staff working overtime. This provides the children and young people with a consistent team of people in difficult circumstances.

There are robust monitoring systems, both internal and external, that produce written reports on the overall operation of the unit and the welfare of individual young people. Any issues raised are followed up appropriately.

Records are securely stored and orderly.

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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16	ensure the complaints record evidences whether or not the complainant is satisfied with the outcome (Children's Homes Regulations 2001 Regulation (24)(5))	31 August 2010
3	ensure the outcome each child's review is available.(Children's Homes Regulations 2001 Regulation (12)(3))	31 August 2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure staff record sufficient detail to enable an assessment of the timing or significance of injury, for example the recording of the colour of bruises on body maps (NMS 17)
- replace the covers for the sofas. (NMS 24)