

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Dennis Bradley
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home provides residential care for up to eight children and young people, usually offering short breaks, but sometimes they can stay for a few weeks. Children and young people who use the home have a learning disability and associated challenging behaviours. The local authority owns and operates this setting.

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 **good**.

Overall this home provides a good quality of care to children. Staff are good at seeking, and take into account, children's wishes and feelings about how they should be cared for. Children make good progress in their short-break placements and staff make sure their achievements are celebrated. Staff are good at creating a caring atmosphere which enables the children to relax and feel comfortable during their time at the home. A parent said the home, 'Is the best thing that could have happened' to their son who 'loved it as soon as he walked through the door.' Another parent said, 'It has a lovely atmosphere as soon as you walk in.'

Children benefit from having individual care plans and risk assessments and they receive good, personalised support from staff. Very good staffing levels help make this possible. Children feel safe and staff are clearly committed to using their knowledge and skills effectively to keep them safe. Staff are good at building positive relationships with children, including some whose behaviour, at times, can be challenging. A professional said, 'When spoken to the children have very good things to say about the staff.'

Overall, the management team ensures the home is managed efficiently and effectively. They understand the home's strengths and areas for development. Professionals who work with the home said the services it provides are either excellent or good and they all agreed improving outcomes for children is a clear priority for staff.

Most of the shortfalls identified relate to weaknesses in record keeping. For example, staff do not always keep suitable records of incidents when they use physical restraint on young people and staff training records have not been kept up-to-date. Other areas for development relate to the arrangements for monitoring the quality of care provided in the home and ensuring only suitable people are employed to work there.

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
26 (2001)	ensure a person is not employed to work at the home unless full and satisfactory information is available in relation to them in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 2. (Regulation 26 (3)(d))	26/09/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure young people's placement plans focus on clear measurable outcomes and address children's individual needs, in particular their health care needs (NMS 2.3)
- ensure if any staff in the home resort to any measure of control or restraint this is carefully and clearly recorded with full details by the staff involved within 24 hours in a record kept for this purpose (Volume 5, statutory guidance, paragraph 2.91)
- ensure where the use of physical intervention is part of a child's individual behaviour management plan, this plan is in line with relevant government guidance on restraint and physical intervention, specifically Guidance for Restrictive Physical Interventions (DH/DfES 2002) (NMS 3.14)
- ensure reports completed in respect of any review of the matters set out in Schedule 6 and of the quality of care provided in the home, are sent to HMCI within 28 days of completion. It will be good practice for these reports to be completed at six monthly intervals (Volume 5, statutory guidance, paragraph 3.14.)
- ensure the home's records are kept up to date, specifically the records of staff training. (NMS 22)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Overall, outcomes for children are good. A professional said, 'Staff encourage and support children in their care to develop confidence, social skills and life skills.' Another professional said, 'Staff work intensively with children to ensure that they can achieve the best outcomes for them.'

Children benefit from being supported by staff who maintain good links with their families, schools and health professionals. The very good arrangements for assessing children's needs and planning their admissions help ensure each child's needs and preferences are met from the outset. Children receive consistency and continuity of care because the home has a collaborative approach to care planning, ensuring parents and relevant professionals are actively involved in this process. Professionals who completed a survey all confirmed staff work well with them and the needs of all the children are considered appropriately.

Children make good progress in developing and maintaining their self-care skills and independence. This helps build their confidence and self-esteem. Professionals all confirmed children's social and emotional development is improved by the care they receive at the home. Children benefit from being cared for by staff who respect their privacy and dignity. They are able to have their say about how they are cared for, and what they want to eat and do during their stay. Staff use a variety of methods to enable each child to express their views and feelings. For example, menus are available in a pictorial format for children who are unable to read. Parents who completed a survey all confirmed staff communicate well with their children and, where appropriate, can use the additional communication methods their children use.

Children receive good, personalised support that meets their needs and wishes. They are able to pursue their individual hobbies and interests and take part in a good range of activities within the home and the local community. Parents all confirmed their children are able to follow the out of school activities they are interested in. Children said there were lots of things to do when they stayed at the home.

Children receive care from staff who have the knowledge, skills and resources to meet their, often complex, health care needs. For example, specialist nurses provide staff with training in how to care for children with epilepsy. Professionals all confirmed staff are well trained to look after the children the home caters for.

Children are supported to attend their education placements by the routines of the home and regular communication with the schools. For example, the home provides transport for children who attend one of the local schools. This enables staff to have daily contact with the school about the children's needs and progress.

Quality of care

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

Staff are good at developing positive relationships with the children. They also ensure there is a warm, secure and caring environment within which children are able to feel safe and relax. Professionals all confirmed staff provide a safe and comfortable environment that meets children's needs.

Staff try to ensure the diverse needs of the young people are clearly and comprehensively recorded in their individual short-break care plans. However, these plans do not always identify clear measureable outcomes for each child. This makes it more difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and the progress made in meeting each child's individual needs. Also, the care plan for one young person did not contain all the relevant information about their health care needs. Because of this, staff may not have all the information they need about how to meet their needs.

Staff make sure they ask children for their views and feelings about their day-to-day care. Their views are also sought about the running of the home. For example, regular children's meetings are held where they are asked for their views about matters such as what activities they would like to take part in during the summer holidays. Children are also involved in the selection process for new staff.

There are clear procedures regarding how to make a complaint. It is good that children can access information about how to complain in different formats to meet their diverse communication needs. The home has received no complaints since the last inspection.

Staff are good at working constructively with children's parents and carers and they have regular contact with them. This helps to ensure continuity of care and appropriate outcomes for the children. Parents confirmed they can talk to staff about the care of their child as often as they wish, and that staff keep them informed about their progress. A parent said staff, '... always keep you informed, which I am grateful for so I know how he has been.'

Children have opportunities to experience a good range of activities within the home and in its garden and outdoor play area. For example, there is a large play room equipped with a variety of games and toys. Staff are also very good at supporting children to access activities and facilities in the community, such as visits to local shops, beaches and cinemas. This helps children develop their social skills, self-confidence and self-esteem.

There are good arrangements for storing, administering and monitoring children's medication. For example, only staff who have had training in safety with medicines can administer medication to children. Also, care staff are trained in emergency first aid should a child require this. Parents all confirmed that their child's health needs are met when they stay at the home. All the professionals who completed a survey strongly agree young people access appropriate health care.

Young people enjoy staying in a comfortable, spacious and pleasant environment. The home is a large bungalow situated in a residential estate. There are good arrangements for ensuring the home is well maintained, and furnished and decorated to a good standard.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children said they feel safe living at the home and there are adequate arrangements in place to keep them safe. Staff try hard to protect and promote children's welfare and they are clear about their roles and responsibilities in doing so. They take prompt and appropriate action when children are at risk and ensure the home's safeguarding procedures and risk assessments are implemented.

There have been no occasions when a child has gone missing from the home. Staff's vigilance and the very good levels of supervision they provide children help ensure this does not happen. Staff have a good understanding of the potentially harmful effect of bullying behaviour and there is a clear policy of zero tolerance of bullying. There are no recorded incidents of bullying having occurred.

Staff implement positive behaviour strategies to support children to manage their emotions and anxieties. Children are rewarded and praised for positive behaviour and staff try to enable them to understand the impact of their behaviour on others. When staff do use sanctions for poor behaviour these are relevant and appropriate.

Staff only use physical restraint on children as a last resort and after they have used the de-escalation techniques they have been trained to use. When they do use physical restraint on children it is to keep them or others safe. However, staff do not always keep an appropriate record of incidents where they have used physical restraint on children. For example, one record of such an incident did not include details of how long the restraint was used. This makes it difficult to assess whether the use of physical restraint was proportionate. Some incidents where staff have used physical intervention have not been recorded in the home's restraint log book but in separate record book, and staff have not recorded all the required information. All the children have individual behaviour management plans, and where the use of physical interventions has been identified as part of the plan staff have prepared a written protocol regarding its use. However, these do not fully comply with government guidance regarding the content of such documents.

The Council has clear staff recruitment and selection procedures. However, these have not always been fully implemented when vetting checks have been carried out on new staff. For example, although two written references were obtained for all staff prior to their appointment, these did not always include one from the person's most recent employer, as required by the Children's Homes Regulations 2001. Failing to carry out robust recruitment and vetting checks makes it more difficult to ensure only suitable people are employed to care for children.

Children are accommodated in a home that is safe and secure. For example, the home's fire procedures are implemented and there are good systems to identify and minimise any risks or hazards. Staff use each child's individual risk management strategies effectively in order to safeguard them and promote their welfare.

Leadership and management

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

The home has a Statement of Purpose that provides clear, accessible information about how it operates and how young people will be cared for. The management team ensure all staff working at the home consistently follow its policies and procedures and understand their roles and responsibilities. There is also a children's guide to the home which tells them what the home is like and includes important information, such as how to complain or contact an independent advocate. It is very good that it is available in formats appropriate to the communication needs of the children who use the service. For example, there is an audio version for children who cannot read so that they can access the information contained in the guide.

The manager of the home is skilled, experienced and appropriately qualified. They ensure they keep up-to-date with developments in legislation and care practice and use forums such as team meetings to share these with staff. They provide effective leadership for the staff team to enable them to provide good outcomes for children. They ensure the home has a clear ethos and staff work with commonly understood objectives.

There were no requirements or recommendations made following the previous inspection of the home.

The manager has a system in place to regularly monitor the home's records to identify any concerns and to improve the quality of the care provided. However, they do not send a copy of the reports of these reviews to Ofsted within 28 days of completion. There is also an effective external quality monitoring programme. This involves monthly visits to the home to check the quality of care provided and the welfare of the children staying there.

The majority of staff are skilled and experienced and all either have a relevant qualification or are undertaking training to achieve one. Staff demonstrate a commitment to meeting the complex and diverse needs of the children who stay at the home. They receive good support and supervision which enables them to have a good understanding of children's needs and how to support them and keep them safe. Staff also have access to good training opportunities in caring for children and young people. However, records of staff training have not been kept up-to-date, which makes it more difficult to monitor when staff's training has to be updated. All the staff who completed a survey confirmed their training needs are identified and met, and the supervision they receive helps them do their job.

Staffing levels are good and enable staff to spend time meeting the individual needs

of the children. Regular staff meetings and good handover arrangements between shifts help ensure there is effective communication within the staff team. This helps staff to keep up-to-date with any changes to children's needs or circumstances.

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.