

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Tola Akinde-Hummel
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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 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* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

The children's home is owned and run by a local authority and provides short breaks for children and young people aged five to 19 with learning, sensory and physical disabilities. There are five beds available in the home to provide overnight and holiday stays. The home has recently increased the numbers of children who access the service. The home provides day care during the half term and Easter holidays.

The home provides a block booking period that covers week long stays during the summer holidays.

Overall effectiveness

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

This is an exceptional home that supports children and young people to improve their self esteem, confidence and ability to progress areas of independence. This is done while paying attention to individual needs and safeguarding. The home has a proven track record of supporting children and their families. One professional summed up the home by saying: 'the support given to children and young people is very personal, one tries to find fault but you can't.'

Areas for improvement

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **outstanding**.

Children and young people receive a service of very high quality. Children and young people are provided with numerous opportunities to develop in a holistic way whilst accessing a short break service. Targets are identified and these are worked towards, reached and in many cases excelled. One parent stated: 'my child has made tremendous progress and has grown in confidence.'

Children and young people make decisions and participate in the running of the home. Records of children's meeting minutes and individual discussions demonstrate that they are consulted on all aspects of the homes functions. Staff use a variety of communication methods to ensure they elicit the views of children and young people and that they can make themselves understood. This minimises the risk of misinterpretation and frustration that children with communication needs may have. The review consultation officer stated: 'all staff know as much as the key worker about individual children and young people, I know that their communication is brilliant and their paper work contains lots of information.'

Children and young people enjoy an active lifestyle and are regularly exposed to new experiences. Children and young people fully participate in community activities of their choice and enjoy this immensely. A parent added: 'I could not manage to take my child horse riding or swimming; she can do those things when she is there.'

The home has developed solid relationships with schools. While direct communication was not available on this occasion this was confirmed by parents and other professionals. The relationship between the school, home and parents is strong and supports increased consistency of care. Staff attend school reviews and regular meetings with key staff in school ensure all parties are aware of any developments. One parent said: 'I like the way they work with the school and use the same technique. I trust them.'

The home has always undertaken transition work with young people close to moving on from the service. The home is pro-active in ensuring transitional visits are supported and young people understand that their time at the home will come to an end. The home has developed links with the boroughs new transition project team. Although this is a new relationship, the project manager noted the positive attitude of staff and their enthusiasm for helping children and young people. The manager said: 'parents are always unhappy when they have to finish with the service and you realise that it is one of those places that goes the extra mile.' Another professional added: 'I meet young people who have left the service and ask to return.'

Children and young people are enabled to stay with their families and community in part due to the support offered by the short breaks service. One parent stated: 'the support of the service has helped to keep our family together. Without them we would not have been able to cope.' Another parent said: 'the benefits I cannot express, they have liberated me and my child.'

Quality of care

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

Children and young people know that staff have high expectations of them. Staff work with children and young people at their individual starting points and build upon their existing strengths and help them to develop new ones. Small achievements and progress are praised. Good quality records are kept of young people's milestones. Regular discussion takes place amongst staff exploring new and innovative ways of moving young people along. One parent stated: 'this service is life saving, the staff are hardworking and dedicated.'

Staff are proactive in ensuring that all necessary steps are taken to promote equalities and participation for all the children and young people they work with. Parents regularly comment on the opportunities that children and young people have during their short break. The diversity of children and young people and the staff team add to the richness of the experiences that are on offer in the home. Any attitudes or behaviours which compromise this are addressed within the home and outside so clear messages are given about acceptable behaviour that will carry

consequences.

The staff team willingly embrace the challenges the children and young people face. Feedback from professionals of different disciplines confirms that the team go over and above what is required of them. This ensures that children and young people have the opportunity to improve their prospects in every area of their development. This is always done in a way that is supportive to school and family life.

The home manages behaviour positively. This is reflected in the number of sanctions and restraints recorded in the home. The home has not had any sanctions and only one restraint since the previous inspection despite increasing the numbers of children and young people that use the service by 50%. One member of staff added: 'we are working with children and young people who have more complex and challenging health and social needs. It is very rewarding.'

Informative risk assessments, reflective practice and specialist training ensure that staff manage challenging behaviour well. One health professional said: 'the home are very good at managing difficult behaviour, a lot of the families I work with use the service, they speak very highly of it.' Positive examples given by social workers and parents support this view.

Observations show that staff know the children and young people extremely well and enjoy active engagement with them. This is relaxed and friendly.

Short break care plans give an accurate picture of the needs of children and young people. These are completed in conjunction with parents and where possible children. Parents value the time and effort that goes into getting to know their children and introducing them to the service. Parents also value the fact that staff communicate with children and young people using their preferred methods. One social worker added: 'It is the personal touch that is so important, they take every case on its own merits and provide support around this.'

The structure of the home makes the best use of available space. It is clear that the home is intended for the enjoyment of the children and young people. One professional added 'The children and young people own the home; this is a home from home for them.' The newly refurbished sensory room is well equipped and maintained and regularly used and enjoyed by children and young people. The garden is spacious and thoughtfully designed to meet the needs of children and young people with mobility and sensory needs. The vegetable garden provides a fun way of educating children and young people about growing and eating food from the garden. Children move freely around the home and have support when they want and need it. This adds to their sense of independence and exploration. Bedrooms are clean, cosy and comfortable with aids and adaptations as required.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The safety of children and young people is paramount to staff working in the home. Children and young people feel safe and are safe. The staffing ratio is high thereby allowing children and young people to take controlled risks, relevant to their development and understanding. Children and young people develop trusting relationships with staff where they can express any concerns they have.

Excellent training, communication, observation and relationship building, enables staff to share any concerns they may have about children and young people. Social workers confirmed this.

Children and young people and their families know that the home will assist them if they are experiencing any difficulties. One social worker gave an example: 'the staff facilitate contact and take action in an emergency to help maintain and support family relationships. They do not need to do this.'

The home has a missing children's procedure which has not been used for a considerable length of time. The high ratio of staff to children and young people means incidences of missing are rare. Risk assessments clearly highlight the level of supervision required for children and young people in the home and in the community. The level of supervision needed does not affect children and young people's opportunities to access different parts of the home or community activities. Exceptional planning and contingency covers all eventualities. The home has additional risk assessments in place for all projects undertaken within the home.

Parents gave examples of apprehension when accessing the service initially then described their trust and faith in the home's ability to care for their vulnerable children. Another parent added: 'my child points to the picture of the home and smiles, he is happy to go there, they are excellent.'

Leadership and management

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

The home continues to be managed by a highly capable manager and deputy. The senior management team always explore improving the service and how they can support staff to do this. Staff are clear of the expectations the manager has on the staff team. The administrative support available in the home ensures that all health and safety checks are completed in a timely manner and maintenance issues are not outstanding.

Staff say they are well supported by the managers and their views and opinions on further developing the service are always taken on board. Staff show their enthusiasm to improve their knowledge and work practices. Training accessed by staff demonstrates the home's commitment to providing a well rounded service to children and young people. This willingness to improve is recognised by agencies external to the home. A small example of the training provided since the previous inspection includes 'play for all', visual impairment training, and communicate in

print.

The attention to equalities in the home is outstanding. It is relevant to everything the team undertakes. All children and young people are assisted to make a contribution to the running of the home. No children and young people are excluded from experiences or personal development because of physical or external limitations placed upon them. Individualised support is paramount and staff find alternative ways of making things happen. All staff have a 'can do' attitude. One team member explained: 'we recognise a barrier and try to find a solution.'

The homes annual development plan fully addresses new and innovative ideas for improving the service for children and young people. These include staff profiles for the use of children and young people. They have been consulted about the common questions they believe they need to know about staff. The introduction of the pet visitor's scheme and increased involvement of children and young people in the transition project supports this.

Monitoring of paperwork used in the home and updating policies and procedures is scheduled and undertaken as planned. The home is tightly run and all members of staff embrace their roles and responsibilities. Staff said: 'the team work and support of the managers is amazing. If you have an idea you are always encouraged to develop it.'

The managers make very good use of supervision and team meetings to share practice developments both nationally and locally. Staff find these both informative and inclusive.

Equality and diversity practice is **outstanding**.