

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Stephen Trainor
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a children's home operated by a local authority. The service offers short-term care breaks for up to four children and young people with physical disabilities, young people with learning disabilities and young people with sensory impairment.

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 **outstanding**.

The home's aims and objectives are clearly being fulfilled by management and staff who recognise the intrinsic value of children and young people as individuals. The assessment of need specifies the levels of support required. Children's very specific needs are extremely well supported through well-planned care that successfully promotes positive outcomes. Progress and achievement records show exactly how children are improving their skills, confidence and independence. Parents and social workers comment very favourably on the quality of transitional planning provided that support young people to move to independence and adult services.

Plans have been further enhanced for some children through a 'Gateway Awards Scheme' allowing extra participation in events in the surrounding community. Some very challenging targets have been set and children have responded extremely well to the stimulating events being provided. Partnership arrangements with a local academy school underpin the scheme and this provides lots of 'exposure' to testing experiences that children might otherwise miss out on. The children have excellent peer social interaction through strong community links. Following the success of this scheme it is to be extended to other young people.

Children are supported in expressing their views by staff that use a variety of communication techniques. Consultation with everyone supporting the children is effective and contributes to the home's continuous improvement agenda. The home's management views change and challenge positively, seizing each opportunity presented to further enhance the quality of its services and improve working protocols.

The manager of the home routinely monitors the quality of young people's care and the home's operation; she understands the home's strengths and takes action to rectify any identified weaknesses. The home has a detailed development plan. New ideas and work streams are constantly introduced to support the home's continuous development.

The strength of this home lies in the stability and experience of the staff team together with the leadership and support from the Registered Manager. The staff learning and development programme is well coordinated and staff are able to keep their skills sets up to date. The children receive stimulating experiences from the highly focused and skilled workforce. Staff have a detailed knowledge of the young people they care for and this enables them to meet their complex and diverse needs. Staff remain highly motivated and provide a warm and extremely caring environment.

Excellent links are maintained with young people's families who are primary advocates for their children. Relationships are built on highly effective communication ensuring young people enjoy a positive experience of being away from home. Young people are kept safe and made to feel safe. There are no outstanding safeguarding or behaviour management concerns. All concerns are reported transparently and this allows investigations to be carried when required. Ofsted need to be informed on the outcome of a notification following the conclusion of an external safeguarding investigation. This issue had been discussed between inspections.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- further enhance the personalised care being provided for young people by including more of them on the Gateway Awards Scheme (NMS 2.1)
- notify in writing to Ofsted the final outcome statement of the safeguarding enquiry recently completed. (NMS 24.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Young people are making excellent progress relative to their age, level of ability and the length of time they spend at the home as part of their short-break agreement. Many of the young people only visit the home for short periods of time but staff make good use of this time to ensure young people have the right support and guidance to enable them to develop their full potential. Services are presently provided for 14 children and young people. Parents confirm that they have full

confidence in the ability of the staff to support their children when at the home. Parents also value the role staff provide for the family unit in helping their children to learn personal skills especially when accessing social activities and community events. Parents are not always in a position to provide these group experiences. Photographic displays capture all the success stories leading to children's positive outcomes.

This service has increased learning and development through innovative ways including progress and achievement folders and a valuable contribution from a Gateway Awards Scheme. Work programmes and target setting provide a measurable and very specific focus for each child. Communication methods are best suited to each child and this means guidance for children and young people is available in many different formats. Staff including casual members of the team have excellent signing skills. On-going investment in training takes place. Latest technology including i-pads is utilised and this undoubtedly enhances each child's development and options for communication. All staff are fully aware of individual's assessed needs and the quality of practice clearly meets needs. Children are making exceptional progress in developing self-confidence.

Transition plans are being developed through statutory review procedures. Transition planning for the time that the young people move from the home to adult services is managed very well. The home's Registered Manager continues to be instrumental in shaping and improving the transition process. Programmes operated, routines followed and placement planning are clearly being linked at this service.

Young people gain many positive experiences during their short breaks, and learn how to interact within a group setting. They learn how to make choices, make responsible decisions, keep themselves safe and, at the same time, have lots of fun with friends and staff doing stimulating activities. Progress is made in many areas and, as a result, young people continually develop and mature.

Staff maintain good links with young people's families, social workers and other support services. Parents and social workers confirm that staff are good at meeting the diverse needs of the young people and overcoming the challenges they may face. This means young people's life opportunities are not limited by the inequalities associated with their disabilities. The excellent ethos and culture established fulfils service aims and objectives.

Plans are of high quality and individual targets are being set and met. Staff remain clearly focused on achieving outcomes. It is clear that young people routinely attend meetings and reviews where they can express their views with confidence. There are occasions when young people cannot participate fully. Young people living at the home are treated fairly and staff practice is capable of supporting their individual needs. Young people gain tremendous benefits from the high levels of personal care and emotional support they receive. Individual plans have clear guidance for staff and this is followed in practice.

Children and young people make excellent progress from the varied experiences

provided. Experiences provided at the service complement those gained at home and school. As a short break service, the responsibility for young people's education remains with the parents and the local education authority. Staff know the educational arrangements in place for each resident and morning routines support attendance at respective schools. Staff also provide support when homework is set. Staff show good creativity in enhancing learning opportunities. Effective communication enables teaching staff, parents and the home's staff, to provide consistent care in the three different settings young people move between. A parent referred to staff as, 'An extension of the family'.

Arrangements for promoting young people's health needs are extremely clear. Staff work in partnership with parents who retain primary responsibility for the health of their children. Handover meetings ensure staff are fully aware of any health concerns including specific dietary or cultural requirements, recent illnesses or medication needs. Young people benefit from access to both routine and specialist health services which are coordinated efficiently. A comprehensive review of individuals short break arrangements takes place following any significant health issues. The staff team in day-to-day control access further training to meet children's health needs and this means programmes can be quickly refocused to assure parents that their children's full range of needs continues to be met.

Quality of care

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

The nature and extent of the assessments, prior to agreeing short breaks, allow the home and other agencies to construct the support needed around a comprehensive plan that considers the individual within a health and social context. Assessments identify the programmes of care and support to be followed. Detailed arrangements are outlined within placement plans designed to deliver individualised support. The work undertaken by staff and management is of high quality and coordinated very well. Many parents express their appreciation for the added value that the service provides for their children and their family units. Some comments outlining their views include: 'Impressed with independence support', 'More opportunities to mix with others', 'More participation in the community', 'Turn up at the home and made to feel very welcome every time I visit'.

Young people are cared for by staff that always place their individual needs at the centre of their practice. Staff plan for young people's care and accommodation very well. The home environment is adjusted to the individual child. Staff carefully assess young people's compatibility with other individuals visiting the home. Staffing rotas and staff deployment are managed well. Staff handovers ensure staff are very clear on the particular roles and responsibilities they have on each shift. All staff have relevant skills sets to support the children they are working with. Placement plans are underpinned by clear risk assessments. Staff consistently put these plans into practice ensuring young people receive a highly individualised service. This is particularly evident during morning and mealtime routines, complicated medicine procedures and bathing routines. Young people are always afforded suitable levels of

privacy.

Staff always see young people in a positive light and are fully committed to enabling them to overcome the difficulties they may face to lead safe, happy and fulfilling lives. Staff use excellent communication and interpersonal skills to develop positive and trusting relationships with young people in their care. There is transparent communication with parents. Parents confirm they have no cause for concern. Parents are confident to raise concerns if they arise. The Registered Manager is committed to gathering the views from parents, carers and partners. New ways of gathering views are frequently being introduced to help in monitoring staff and developing the home.

Relationships between young people and staff are genuinely warm and friendly. Young people respond with tremendous enthusiasm to the welcome they receive from staff and their friends as they arrive at the home. They are very quick to engage with their favourite activities. Young people are provided with a wide range of enjoyable, stimulating and creative activities. Staff make good use of the resources available for young people within the home and the wider community. Trips out are planned frequently. An extremely successful overnight camping trip contributed to young people's personal growth and development. The effort staff make in planning events exceeds parent's expectations and takes young people's participation to a different level.

Staff at the home ensure that young people know how to express their views including how to complain. Ways of enhancing young people's communication are continually being introduced. A good example is with the efforts being made to translate information, including complaints, and survey questionnaires into different formats that are accessible to all children and young people.

Staff support young people with their education when attending education reviews. Links with education are positive and a number of staff working at the home have also worked with or visit the young people in their school setting. This provides excellent continuity of support.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted. Medication is stored safely in a secure cabinet. Records are maintained on the administration of medication. There are clear policies and procedural guidance and these are followed in practice. All staff receive suitable training to support health and well-being and this maintains the high quality of care being provided. All staff have a level 2 award in medicine management. There are good collaborative links with many different health professionals and agencies. Parents confirm that they have every confidence that if their child was unwell the staff could care for them without any problems. Young people, completing their own questionnaires, confirm that staff look after them well if they are ill.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people benefit from a permanent, experienced and stable staff team. Only one change was made to the staffing structure between inspections to allow a staff member to return to her substantive post. Recruitment practice is robust, ensuring only suitable people work with young people. Personnel information shows no staff start ahead of being in receipt of an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. Good practice ensures the vetting of visitors to safeguard young people.

The home provides young people with a safe place to stay. They are protected from hazards by a range of detailed health and safety procedures, risk assessments and routine fire and maintenance checks to ensure the premises are safe. Fire drills are undertaken regularly and the home is connected directly to the local fire station assuring a prompt response in the case of an emergency. In-house training is provided for staff enabling them to devise effective strategies for the evacuation of young people, giving consideration to their individual needs, including issues of mobility. Suitable levels of staff are maintained at all times and this means specific evacuation arrangements are in place to cover both day and night time routines.

Young people are well protected from harm. This is because staff give young people's safety the highest priority and are well trained in safeguarding. They are able to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse, including issues relating to young people's personal circumstances and abilities. Staff know what to do if they are concerned about the safety of young people and will take decisive action to protect them. Staff work effectively with young people, their families and social workers to promote young people's welfare.

The Local Authority Designated Officer confirmed that there are no outstanding safeguarding concerns. A safeguarding matter reported through the notification procedure was reviewed at a previous Ofsted inspection. The home's Registered Manager has appraised Ofsted on the progress of the investigation between inspections. A practice matter was investigated independently at the request of the home's Registered Manager. The investigation revealed no serious concerns. Findings helped to strengthen some areas of practice and develop a policy on the specific use of and time to be spent in wheelchairs.

Young people's individual plans clearly identify any risks they may face and outline effective strategies to ensure their welfare is protected. Staff have a clear understanding of young people's vulnerabilities relating to their level of understanding and disability. This enables staff to ensure young people are safe at the home and when out in the community. High staffing levels ensure young people receive the supervision and support they need to feel safe and protected from harm.

There is a calm, effective and gentle approach towards behaviour management. All staff are qualified and have many years of experience. Staff ensure children's safety is paramount and each staff member is trained in selected behaviour management techniques. Staff have developed a good understanding of the times and factors that contribute to young people becoming upset or frustrated. Well-planned and effective care practice ensures each child is protected from any form of bullying. The rare

occasions when restraint is needed are comprehensively recorded. Each incident is discussed to ensure strategies and plans remain effective.

Leadership and management

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

The staff and the management maintain a strong, child-focused service that is conducive to young people developing and maximising their potential. The young people and their parents have full confidence in the staff and know who is responsible for them at all times of the day and night. Parents confirm that there is a friendly, welcoming atmosphere whenever they visit and their children look forward to going for their short breaks. Parents express their appreciation for the above and beyond efforts staff make.

There is a clear vision for how the home should operate. Practice has been enhanced between inspections and is now fully in line with the inspection framework, evaluation schedule and grade descriptors, national minimum standards and regulations. Encouragingly, all levels of staff have a good awareness of these important documents. Staff are confident to match their practice against this guidance.

Staff practice is supported by comprehensive written guidance, policies and procedures. These documents are also accessible through the local authority intranet. Information for children and young people is produced in different formats to support their communication needs. Electronic technologies also support young people's communication. The home's Statement of Purpose provides information in accordance with regulations. The ethos and working practices of the home meet aims and objectives and this means young people develop their potential as they experience their short breaks.

Records at this home show good clarity in how staff are managed. Staff confirm that supervision is taking place. All permanent staff have relevant qualifications. Senior staff have grown in confidence through access to post level 3 training. Systems for staff personal development and appraisal are well established and this helps staff to further enhance their skills. Challenging objectives are being set for staff as part of the management response when evaluating individual's performance.

Clear partnership arrangements underpin all practice and there is tremendous satisfaction with the high-quality services provided. Young people develop meaningful and lasting attachments from the supportive management culture and the hard work of the staff. This service is managed by a highly experienced and fully qualified manager. Partners confirm communication is highly effective. Permanent records are produced to show how children's developmental needs are being met. These records run parallel to a comprehensive assessment of needs. Staff morale is excellent, energy levels high, enthusiasm infectious and all challenges are met head-on by a very attentive group of staff.

All levels of staff influence and shape the service with their ideas and initiatives. Practice is developed by a management team that is perceptive in identifying the home's strengths and the areas where it could perform better. A comprehensive written and verbal self-assessment of the service was provided by the Registered Manager.

The views of the young people and staff are captured during visits made to the home under the requirements of Regulations 33 and 34. Improved reporting between inspections better captures comments and observations. The home's management team continually reflect on their practice and evaluate the home's operation. Monitoring reports make sense of the available data, help to plan future services and ensure continuous improvements. Some challenging targets are outlined within the home's development plan. The home's management team continue to appraise Ofsted on developments affecting the service as a result of the responsible authorities on-going review of residential services operated for children with a disability. Encouragingly, parents have been involved at each stage of the consultation process.

Young people's placements are very stable and the home's service history shows an excellent record in compliance. The two recommendations set at the last inspection were addressed allowing more specific objectives and targets to be set for each child. The home's Registered Manager remained in day-to day control of the home and this meant there was no need to register a second manager. The present Registered Manager has shown that she can balance her management role with some extra senior management responsibilities very well. There have been no concerns or complaints about the home between inspections. There is an effective system in place to notify persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events. There have been no issues raised between inspections. A final outcome statement is to be provided by the home's Registered Manager on a matter that has been under investigation since 15 December 2012. This was made known to Ofsted and reviewed at a previous inspection. The home's manager has kept Ofsted informed throughout this recently concluded investigation.

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.