

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Paul Scott
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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

This is a children's home operated by a local authority. The service offers short-term respite care breaks for young people who have severe learning or physical disabilities and significant communication difficulties. The service is registered to care for up to 10 young people between the ages of five and 17 years old.

Overall effectiveness

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

This is an outstanding service that achieves good outcomes for young people. Young people thrive and make good progress because of the excellent support provided to them. They are cared for by very well trained and highly competent staff with the right skills and experience. Staff have a detailed knowledge of the young people they care for. This enables staff to meet young people's complex and diverse needs very effectively.

Care planning and care practice is highly individualised. Staff effectively use a number of communication aids to empower young people to express themselves. Excellent links are maintained with young people's families who are primary advocates for their children. This ensures young people enjoy a positive experience of being away from home, and their families have a necessary break, safe in the knowledge their child is being well looked after. One parent said, 'my child is very safe and well looked after. Staff really care about him which puts me at ease and relieves my anxieties.'

Young people, their families and stakeholders are very positive about the care and support provided for young people at the home. Young people enjoy consistently strong and positive relationships with staff and receive continuity of care. This enables them to develop trusting relationships with staff, who are extremely knowledgeable and familiar with young people's individual routines, enabling these to be maintained successfully. One parent said, 'I can't speak highly enough of staff, we trust them 100%.'

Young people are kept safe and made to feel safe. This is because of robust systems and excellent care practice that ensures the welfare and safety of young people is given the highest priority at all times. Staff have a good knowledge of young people's vulnerability and risks they may face. They manage these risks well. This ensures young people are given the right support and supervision to ensure their safety and wellbeing is promoted.

The manager of the home routinely monitors the quality of young people's care. She

understands the home's strengths and takes action to rectify any identified weaknesses to promote the smooth operation of the home. One parent said 'this is a brilliant service, everything is positive.' However, some areas for improvement are identified. These include development plans and staff supervision.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure there is a written plan, reviewed annually, for the future of the home, either identifying any planned changes in the operation or resources of the service, or confirming the continuation of the home's current resource (NMS 15.2)
- ensure all staff are provided with regular supervision by appropriately qualified and experienced staff. (NMS 19.4)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are making good progress relative to their age, level of ability and the length of time they spend at the home as part of their short break, respite agreement. 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 skills. For example, one parent said, 'Staff have helped my child to improve his speech, interact more confidently with others and to sleep in a normal bed. This has been a great place.'

Staff maintain good links with young people's families, social workers and other support services to ensure to young people have good opportunities to develop to their full potential. One social worker said, 'The staff are good at meeting the diverse needs of the young people in their care and overcoming the challenges they may face.' This means young people's life opportunities are not limited by the inequalities associated with their disabilities.

Arrangements for promoting the health needs of young people are good. Staff work in partnership with parents who retain primary responsibility for the health of their children. This ensures staff are fully aware of young people's current individual health needs at the time of their stay including any specific dietary requirements, illnesses or medication needs. Good support is provided for young people to ensure they are enabled to access routine and specialist services and any emergency services, which may be necessary.

As a short break service the responsibility for young people's education remains with

the parents and the local authority. All young people have good attendance at school and are making good progress relative to their age and understanding.

Quality of care

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

Young people are cared for by staff who always place their individual needs at the centre of their practice. Staff plan for young people's care and accommodation exceedingly well. Admissions are planned in a sensitive way. They carefully assess young people's compatibility with other young people visiting the home as well as working with young people's families to ensure their anxieties and concerns about their child being away from home are alleviated.

Staff always gather sufficient information about young people to ensure they can meet their needs and look after them well for the duration of their stay. Short break placement plans are extremely detailed and accurately reflect young people's individual needs and the support they require. Staff consistently put these plans into practice ensuring young people receive a highly individualised service that provides them with a very positive experience whilst they are away from home. One parent said, 'I know my child is well cared for and is safe, it is just like him going to visit relatives, they are like extended family.'

Relationships between young people and staff are genuinely warm and friendly. Staff always see young people in a positive light and are fully committed to enabling children to overcome the difficulties they may face to lead safe, happy and fulfilling lives. One parent said, 'Staff are very good with my child, they love him to bits.' Staff use excellent communication and interpersonal skills to develop positive and trusting relationships with young people in their care. They ensure young people receive a considerable amount of support to express themselves so they can make informed decisions and choices. For example, staff effectively use a number of alternative communication tools to ensure young people's views are routinely sought as part of everyday practice. Also, staff have good links with young people's families, who are regarded as experts on their children. One parent said, 'If there are any concerns staff will always contact me.'

The home ensures that young people know how to complain. For example, Information about how to complain has been published and is available in several different communication formats to ensure all young people know how to express their concerns. Information is provided to parents who are regarded as primary advocates for young people. One parent said, 'I have never had cause for concern because the staff provide excellent support to young people.'

Staff support young people with their education by having them ready for school and by attending education reviews. The manager and staff maintain good links with education providers to ensure young people are well supported. One social worker said, 'Links with education are very positive, a number of staff working at the home also work with young people in their school setting. This provides children with

excellent continuity of support.'

Young people are actively engaged in 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. They enjoy spending time with young people to ensure their leisure time is purposeful, interesting and fun. One young person said, 'I like the different activities.' Another young person said, 'Staff make me laugh' and 'I like getting out of my chair.'

Young people live in a suitably designed and very comfortable house. The location of the home ensures young people have access to local amenities and places of interest. The home has been suitably adapted to cater for young people's complex needs, including needs arising from disabilities. The home is decorated in neutral colours for the purposes of reducing stimuli. For the same reason bedrooms are simplified in accordance with young people's needs and behavioural traits.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people are very 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 exactly what to do if they are concerned about the safety of young people and take decisive action to protect them. Staff work effectively with young people, their families and social workers to promote young people's welfare. One social worker said, 'The staff are pretty hot on safeguarding; they are always in contact if there are any concerns, no matter how minor they are.'

Young people's individual plans clearly identify any risks they may face and outline effective strategies to ensure their welfare is protected. Staff ensure plans for young people's safety are consistently put into practice and fully address children's needs. They 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 home and in the community. One parent said, 'My child is very safe and well looked after.'

High levels of staff ensure young people receive the supervision and support they need to feel safe and protected from harm. There are no incidents of young people going missing from home and young people are effectively protected from bullying, intimidation and harassment, to promote their welfare.

There is a calm, effective and gentle approach towards behaviour management. This is because staff have developed a good understanding of the times and factors that contribute to young people becoming upset and frustrated. Staff are well trained in behaviour management. They use well planned and effective behaviour management

strategies, specific to the needs of the individual, to manage young people's extremely complex and challenging behaviour. Physical restraint has been used on a very small number of occasions. Where restraint has been necessary, it has been used professionally as a last resort to prevent young people causing harm to themselves or others.

The home provides young people with a safe place to live. They are protected from hazards by a comprehensive 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 monthly. 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. These plans are discussed and reviewed on a daily basis to ensure all young people and staff know how to safely evacuate the building in the event of a fire.

The recruitment and selection of people working at the home is very thorough to make sure young people are protected. The manager carefully ensures that staff have the right skills and competencies to meet the needs of individual young people. Also, there are safe arrangements in place to ensure visitors to the home are suitably checked and supervised to protect young people.

Leadership and management

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

The home is effectively and efficiently managed in the best interests of young people. The manager and staff have a strong commitment to delivering exceptionally good childcare practice tailored to meet the individual needs of the young people they look after. The effectiveness of this approach is evident in the good progress young people are making.

The home meets the aims and objectives of its Statement of Purpose, and their families and social workers are clear about the services and support the home provides. Parents and social workers all speak very positively about the service. One social worker said, 'This is a brilliant service, everything is positive.'

The home shows a capacity for continued improvement based on its performance since the last inspection. The manager has ensured the changes brought about by the restructuring and reorganisation of the local authority have not impacted on the quality of care of young people or their outcomes. One social worker said, 'The manager and staff have worked hard to make sure their morale stays high and young people's needs are always put first.' The provider and manager effectively monitor the quality of care, including carrying out consultation with young people, and they take appropriate action to improve outcomes for young people.

The manager effectively plans for the day-to-day care of young people and the support and development of staff. For example, there is a detailed team plan in place that clearly identifies the strengths of the service and the areas for further

development. However, this plan still does not consider how the restructuring and reorganisation of the responsible authority will impact on the home. Consequently, it is difficult to plan for the future and prepare staff for changes to working practice brought about by change.

Young people are looked after by a very competent and stable staff team that provides young people with an excellent level of consistency. Staff are very well supported by the manager. They have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the high expectations for providing excellent childcare practice. All staff confirm that the manager provides them with very good support and guidance, which is linked to their individual professional development. Arrangements for supervision are generally good with the vast majority of staff receiving regular supervision which is of a good quality. However, some part-time casual staff do not receive regular formal supervision. This means they are not given the same opportunity as other staff to develop their knowledge and skills and to ensure their practice is relevant to the needs of young people in their care.

Staff are suitably qualified and receive high quality training to ensure they have good opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills. For example, all staff undertake mandatory training including safeguarding, first aid and how to administer medication, in accordance with the services excellent procedures for the safe administration of medication. This ensures safe working practices are followed by staff and young people are effectively protected from harm. Additional training is provided for staff including autism and sensory overload and epilepsy. This ensures staff have the right skills and expertise to provide appropriate care for young people with complex needs. In addition to mandatory and specialist training a number of staff have developed and presented in-house training that is individually tailored to the needs of young people in their care. For example, staff routinely practice behaviour management techniques as part of their team meetings to ensure their responses to challenging behaviour are highly individualised and sensitive to the needs of young people.

Young people's written records are securely stored and provide a comprehensive picture of individual young people's experiences, needs, development and progress. Staff ensure young people's records contain up-to-date information, including the relevant documents from the placing authorities. As a result, records provide essential information and insight that contributes to an understanding of young people's lives.

Equality and diversity practice is **outstanding**.