

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. Children's very specific needs are extremely well supported through well-planned care that successfully promotes positive outcomes. Children are supported in expressing their views by staff who use a variety of communication techniques. Consultation with everyone supporting the children is highly effective and contributes to the home's continuous improvement agenda.

The strengths of this home lie 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, but there is a need for further inputs to ensure all staff remain fully up to date with professional and legal developments following extensive changes to the inspection frameworks.

An on-going review and redesign of children's residential services is taking place. Parent representatives are fully involved with consultation processes and have a genuine say about the home's future direction of travel. The home's management views change and challenge positively seizing each opportunity presented to further enhance the quality of its services, introduce new service level agreements, and improve working protocols.

The home's management works very effectively with parents and partners, especially school headteachers, when supporting wider planning considerations. Excellent links are maintained with young people's families who are primary advocates for their

children. Relationships are built on highly effective communication and this ensures young people enjoy a positive experience of being away from home. Young people, their families and partners are all very positive about the care and support provided for young people. Young people thrive and make clear progress due to the high quality interactions provided at the home. A parent commented, 'My daughter is encouraged to do things for herself and her skills are improving all the time. This is due to the support outside of the home that she receives from this service.' Young people are kept safe and made to feel safe. There are no safeguarding or behaviour management concerns. A few of the records on staff recruitment could be improved. This is specific to casual staff working across different settings within the local authority. All staff had been carefully vetted and deemed suitable.

Comprehensive arrangements are outlined within placement plans designed to deliver individualised support. The assessment of need specifies the levels of support required. Plans make it clear that staff can only contribute towards the overall arrangements due to the amount of time that young people actually spend at the home. Staff have a detailed knowledge of the young people they care for and this enables them to meet their complex and diverse needs. A parent commented, 'I have no hesitation in their (staff's) ability to deal with a child with complex needs like mine.' Staff remain highly motivated and provide a warm and extremely caring environment.

The manager of the home routinely monitors the quality of young people's care and the home's operation and she understands the home's strengths and takes action to rectify any identified weaknesses. Pilot work had further strengthened working arrangements between inspections. This was especially evident when managing transitional arrangements with adult services. New ideas and work streams are constantly introduced to support the home's continuous development.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure the home's learning and development programme keeps staff and management fully up to date with professional and legal developments; in particular, the new inspection framework, evaluation schedule and grade descriptors (NMS 18.1)
- establish clearer records of the recruitment and vetting checks which have been carried out on casual staff members; in particular, those staff working across different services operated by the local authority. (NMS 16.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and 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.

This service has augmented learning and development through innovative ways including learning and achievement logs that provide a 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. On-going investment in the service takes place. Plans to utilise latest technology, such as tablet computers will undoubtedly enhance each child's development and options for communication. All staff are fully aware of individual's assessed needs and the services and quality of care required to meet them. Achievement and development logs, certification and photographic evidence confirm that young people are making exceptional progress in developing skills and confidence.

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. Young people are very relaxed during their short breaks. Parents confirm that they have full confidence in the ability of the staff to support their children when at the home. A parent commented on her daughter's introduction to the home, 'A lot of time was invested in helping her settle in and getting to know her prior to her overnight. I have seen my child develop and improve skills with her own personal needs. The home has listened to advice from me regarding things that may seem very small and trivial e.g. the way her clothes are laid out for her to dress herself; however, this is a major thing for her due to her visual impairment. She has grown in confidence'.

Staff maintain good links with young people's families, social workers and other support services to ensure young people have every opportunity to develop to their full potential. The quality of staff practice and effective communication alleviates any anxieties that parents might have. Parents and social workers confirm that staff are good at meeting the diverse needs of the young people receiving short breaks 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 the service aims and objectives.

Plans are high quality and individual targets are being set and met. Staff work remains clearly focused on achieving outcomes. Partnership arrangements and communication clearly works. A headteacher commented on one student accessing breaks at the home, 'These breaks are most definitely beneficial for the young person, as she has spent very little time away from direct family and familiar adults at school. It is fantastic to see her adapt so well and certainly shows her maturity and confidence is developing'.

Young people achieve personal goals and this helps them to develop a better understanding and appreciation of their personal circumstances. It is clear that many of the 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.

As a short break service, the responsibility for young people's education remains with the parents and the local education authority. All young people have excellent attendance. The young people's education is actively supported and promoted. Staff know the educational arrangements in place for each resident. Morning routines support attendance at respective schools. A parent commented, 'Although my daughter doesn't have academic work to complete during her time at the home, some of her school targets are around self-help, dressing herself, etc. These targets and achievements are supported at the home, helping her to transfer the skills'. Effective communication enables teaching staff, parents and the home's staff, to provide consistent care in the three different settings young people move between. There is effective liaison with local authorities and teachers from respective schools. This fosters excellent continuity in the approaches being used to support needs. Telephone contact is frequent and good practice ideas are being shared.

Arrangements for promoting the health needs of young people 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.

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. New working arrangements allow staff to extend levels of support for young people to their new adult placements. A skills development and resource folder is evolving. There is consideration to link this work to Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) certification.

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. A parent commented, 'The home is good at communicating with parents and developing

relationships with them which is invaluable. Staff are good at understanding the needs of children and respecting individuality. Most of all they enjoy the children and encourage their personalities to develop and them to develop self-help skills if appropriate'.

The initial assessment identifies the programmes of care and support to be followed. Comprehensive arrangements are then outlined within placement plans designed to deliver individualised support. The assessment of need specifies the levels of support required. Plans make it clear that staff can only contribute towards the overall arrangements due to the amount of time that young people actually spend at the home. The work undertaken by staff and management is of a very high quality and is coordinated very well. Many parents expressed their appreciation on the added value that the service provides for their children and their family unit.

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 very well. Admissions are planned in a sensitive way. They carefully assess young people's compatibility with other young people visiting the home. Staffing rotas and deployment are managed well, ensuring support can be provided by staff with relevant skill sets. Staff handovers ensure staff are very clear on their roles and responsibilities. Plans are supported by clear risk assessments. Staff consistently put these plans into practice ensuring young people receive a highly individualised service. This was particularly evident during evening and mealtime routines and complicated bathing routines. A parent commented, 'My daughter likes privacy when getting changed and her hygiene needs are met. I know from her responses to the home that her privacy is well respected'.

Relationships between young people and staff are genuinely warm and friendly. For example, one parent said, 'The staff are excellent and always show my child that they are happy to see him; he really enjoys going and we feel confident in leaving our child in their care'. 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, 'The staff will always notify them immediately if anything happens'. Parents confirmed that they had no cause for concern.

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. Some innovative work utilising DVD had been piloted to capture the 'journey' young people make during their time at the home. Another good example is with the efforts being made to translate information and survey questionnaires into different formats that are accessible to all children and young people.

Staff support young people with their education by having them ready for school and by attending education reviews. The Registered Manager and staff maintain good

links with education providers to ensure young people are well supported. Links with education are positive and a number of staff working at the home have also worked with or visited young people in their school setting. This provides excellent continuity of support.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted. The key worker role is well developed to deliver health promotion work. Medication is stored safely within a dedicated 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. There are good collaborative links with many different health professionals and agencies. This allows helpful guidance and support to be provided when young people are most in need. Parents confirmed that they had every confidence that if their child was unwell the staff could care for them without any problems.

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. Public transport is used whenever practical to do so and the home has its own suitably adapted vehicle. Staff can be seen to be going the 'extra mile' with activity planning. A good example of this was a highly successful family event themed on the children's own Olympic challenges. With excellent weather prevailing, a fun day was had by all judging by the photographic displays prominently and proudly displayed.

Young people have short breaks in a suitably designed and very comfortable home. The home is single storey with its layout and use of different rooms being well thought out. 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. Equipment, including specialist beds and hoists, supports routines. The home's rear garden contains a safe play area where young people can have hours of endless fun. Staff continue to work hard with a local dedicated charity group to secure additional funding streams to further improve the home's resources and extend children's experiences.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

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. A parent commented, 'Staff are very friendly and I feel like if I have a problem I can speak to them quite freely'.

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 to fully address children's needs. 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. All staff are qualified and have many years of experience. Staff ensure children's safety is paramount. There have been 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 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 complex and occasionally challenging behaviour. The occasions when physical restraint is needed are comprehensively recorded. Each incident is discussed to ensure strategies and plans remain effective.

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. 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. Specific evacuation plans are produced for each young person that cover both day and night time routines and this means they can be evacuated in the case of an emergency.

Young people benefit from a permanent, experienced and stable staff team. Very few changes had been made to the staffing structure between inspections. Recruitment practice is robust, ensuring only suitable people work with young people. Suitable written information is maintained within the home on permanent staff but information held on casual staff members was not as clear. There are no safeguarding concerns linked to minor gaps in information held on casual staff. 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.

Leadership and management

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

Young people develop meaningful and lasting attachments from the supportive management culture and the hard work of the staff. Young people are gaining tremendous benefits from placement experiences being provided by a competent staff team. It is a strong, child-focused service that is conducive to young people developing and maximising their potential. Clear partnership arrangements underpin all practice and there is tremendous satisfaction with the high-quality services provided. Parents and carers describe services as, 'Second to none', and expressed their gratitude for staff support describing it as being, 'Responsive to specific needs and specific circumstances affecting both children and family'. 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, and enthusiasm infectious.

There is a clear vision for how the home should operate. Practice adjustments have been made in line with a new inspection framework, new evaluation schedule, and new national minimum standards. Further changes are planned including on-going training and inputs to ensure all levels of staff fully comprehend how change can affect practice and roles. This is important because the Registered Manager has some additional responsibilities outside the home. In her absence, two senior staff members will deputise. These staff have accessed a Level 5 Diploma to help with their personal and professional development and importantly ensure practice standards continue to be enhanced in the Registered Manager's absence.

There is extensive consultation with partners. 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 home's service history shows the assessment to be accurate.

The views of the young people and staff are fully captured during visits made to the home under the requirements of Regulations 33 and 34. A new report format, developed between inspections, better captures comments and observations. The home's management team continually reflect on their practice and the home's operation. A range of evaluative documents in line with new framework, grade descriptors and evaluation schedule was provided. Reports produced make sense of the available data and help to plan future services and ensure continuous improvements and development. Some realistic and challenging targets are outlined within the home's development plan. Evaluation of this plan occurs and this also contributes to controlling the home's activities.

Individual needs, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are being met. 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. Staffing levels are maintained and a good gender balance is evident within the team. Shift patterns

ensure excellent continuity with routines and procedures. The staff team is consistently supportive, attentive and sensitive to the care they provide for young people. Staff acting as 'children's champions' drive forward improvements continuously.

Records at this home show good clarity in how staff are managed. Detailed induction and foundation training are provided. Staff confirm that supervision is taking place. All permanent staff have relevant qualifications. 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 performance.

Young people's placements are very stable and the home's service history shows an excellent record in compliance. Few recommendations were set at the last two inspections. Those that were set have been comprehensively addressed leading to enhancements in the procedures for the internal and external monitoring of the home's practice, operation and management. There is an effective system in place to notify persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events. No reports were forwarded to Ofsted over the past 12-month period. There have been no concerns or complaints about the home between inspections.

Staff practice is supported by comprehensive written guidance, policies and procedures. These documents are also accessible through the local authority intranet. Information is written in plain English. 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 short breaks. The home's management team monitors the number of short breaks being provided to ensure full compliance with Short Break Statutory Guidance and Care planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. Cancelled reviews and meetings are reconvened quickly. Management are proactive with their requests if minutes of meetings are delayed.

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.