

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Coulter
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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 home is registered for a maximum of six young people between the ages of five and under 18 years. It is owned by a city council and provides short-term placements for young people with learning difficulties and physical disabilities.

The home provides ground-floor accommodation and has a range of specialist equipment, including hoists and assisted baths.

Overall effectiveness

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

The home has experienced a number of significant changes since the last inspection that have included major building works and the appointment of a number of new staff. Staff have coped extremely well during this period and have continued to produce good quality care to a group of extremely vulnerable young people with complex needs. Staff continue to expand their use of social pedagogy and now use a programme named Head, Hands and Heart to form positive relationships with children. This child-centred approach is proving successful in creating the conditions for each individual's growth and development.

Staff are clearly conversant with the care needs of the young people in their care. Young people clearly enjoy themselves and engage with staff in a variety of activities. Specialist equipment and close staff supervision provide opportunities for young people to play independently and have fun within a safe and controlled environment. Young people respond positively to the care and attention they receive from staff.

Although the home has appropriate facilities to meet the needs of children and young people with complex disabilities, the existing environment is somewhat institutional and in need of refurbishment. The shortfalls in the existing facilities have been recognised by the local authority and plans have been developed to ensure young people have the opportunity to access single accommodation

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- implement a refurbishment programme that will ensure children and young

people are provided with a comfortable and homely environment that is well maintained and decorated. (NMS 10.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people benefit from staff who employ a child-centred approach to care. Each young person is treated as an individual with their own specific health and emotional needs. Each young person's health needs are clearly identified prior to admission and guidance produced for staff to ensure they are satisfactorily met during their visits. Young people requiring medical interventions such as peg feeding are cared for by staff who have completed specific training. All young people requiring assistance with personal care are treated with dignity and respect.

Staff promote the concept of healthy living and young people are encouraged to eat healthily and participate in a range of physical activities. A safe and well-equipped play area provides opportunities for young people to run around and develop their physical abilities. Young people with mobility difficulties can experience new sensations by accessing specially designed equipment such as wheelchair swings. Such activities provide fun and opportunities for young people to assert their independence by exercising choice. Young people clearly enjoy the ability to move between activities at their own pace. Many of the young people also like to access the specially designed sensory room and respond well to the varied stimulation it provides.

During their visits, young people, with the assistance of staff, work towards achieving a number of outcomes relating to their personal development. Outcomes frequently relate to areas such as communication and social interaction. Staff provide a warm and stimulating environment that is appropriate for experiential learning. Young people are helped to develop a range of skills by undertaking activities. The acquisition of practical skills and successful mastering of identified tasks contributes significantly to the improvement of individual's self-confidence. Cooking is a popular activity with a number of young people. Staff provide opportunities to assist in the preparation of group meals and to acquire skills such as baking. During the inspection one young person was observed producing his own biscuits. Young people clearly enjoy such activities and benefit from the praise and encouragement they receive from staff.

Young people and staff eat together and this provides opportunities for young people to engage in group interaction and further develop their social skills. Young people are also provided with opportunities to expand their social horizons by accessing a range of social and leisure facilities in the surrounding area. Visits to country parks, the coast, swimming pools and restaurants are all commonplace. Although staff can access the home's transport, many of the young people enjoy the novelty of different forms of public transport including buses and trains.

Quality of care

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

The home provides an important role in the support services for families caring for children and young people with complex disabilities in the city. Children and young people are referred to the home for short stays by a commissioning social work team following a detailed assessment. The home currently provides short breaks for 50 young people. Although the frequency of day and overnight stays is determined at the point of referral, the home is responsive to the changing circumstances of families and will increase visits if required. Admissions are carefully planned and staff work at the pace of each individual. Children and young people are introduced to the home via short visits that can include staying for a meal.

Young people and their families are provided with detailed information on the aims and objectives of the home prior to any admission. This information includes details of how to raise concerns or register a complaint. Staff aim to ensure that there are good lines of communication established between all the parties involved in the care of the young people in their care. Designated key workers monitor the progress of individual young people and liaise regularly with their parents, teachers and social workers. Staff are proactive in seeking out any concerns from young people and parents and seek to address them before they develop into complaints.

The care needs of each young person are identified prior to admission and risk assessments are used to identify any areas of potential concern relating to their health or behaviour. All religious and cultural needs are identified on admission and arrangements put in place to meet them. Staff are very strong advocates of young people with disabilities and ensure they are able to undertake a range of activities in both the home and local community. An effective care planning system provides clear guidance for staff on how the needs of each individual can be met. Staff closely monitor the progress of each young person and modify placement plans in response to changing needs.

The composition of resident groups is carefully considered to ensure compatibility. Staffing levels are determined to ensure each young person receives appropriate support. Care is tailored to the specific needs of each individual and in most cases staff work on a one-to-one basis. All activities associated with medical interventions and personal care are dealt with appropriately. Staff deploy a range of specialist equipment, including overhead hoists, to keep young people safe during health and personal care activities. Staff are clearly aware of the potential risks associated with handling the medication so systems have been developed to minimise risk. Designated staff undertake responsibility for the dispensing of medication on each shift.

Although the service operates a key-worker system, staff work with all the young people in their care. Staff are extremely attentive to the needs of young people and closely monitor their movements and behaviours. All shifts are managed by experienced staff who plan activities around the needs and interests of the young people being accommodated. Handover meetings ensure that important information

is shared with staff on different shifts.

Young people are treated with respect and staff deploy a range of communication techniques to ascertain their views and wishes. Staff are extremely adept at reading the non-verbal cues of young people with communication difficulties. The social interaction between young people and staff was observed to be spontaneous and warm.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people are kept safe by a stable group of experienced staff, all of whom have been carefully selected and vetted. All staff have completed safeguarding training and are aware of their responsibilities in regard to the reporting of any concerns relating to those in their care. The home does not use any volunteers and access to the home and contact with young people is restricted. All visitors have to introduce themselves to staff, produce proof of identity and sign in.

Due to their disabilities many of the young people who use the service experience difficulties in processing information. Although staff promote positive behaviour, they are clearly aware of the involuntary nature of many of the behaviours young people can exhibit. Challenging behaviour is normally managed by the deployment of diversionary techniques, and restraints are only ever used if a young person is putting themselves or others at risk. A written record is made of all physical interventions. Staff work closely with parents and teaching staff to ensure young people's behaviour is addressed in a consistent manner. Staff reported that bullying was not a problem between young people, however, there is an acknowledgement that some can strike in frustration. Staff are aware of the need to ensure such individuals are given appropriate personal space.

An assessment process is used to identify the potential risks associated with each young person. From the information received, staff develop strategies to keep young people safe. Staff are not risk averse and young people are encouraged to participate in physical activities both within the home and local community. The environment of the home has been modified to minimise risk. For example the outside play area has been constructed on specialised soft matting to prevent any potential injuries caused by falling. As a number of young people experience mobility difficulties, play equipment is sited to provide ease of access. The layout of the play area allows staff to safely supervise a number of young people at the same time.

During their visits young people are often provided with opportunities to undertake activities in the local community. All such activities are risk assessed to ensure that there are enough staff to meet the needs of the young people in their care. Staffing levels are increased if it is felt a young person could go missing. All staff carry mobile phones and there are well-established procedures for reporting any young person who goes missing. There have been no incidences of young people going missing from the care of staff in recent times.

Leadership and management

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

The home operates with an experienced team of dedicated staff who have sufficient skills, qualifications and experience to meet the often complex needs of the young people accommodated. The recent appointment of two new senior staff has further strengthened the team. Effective leadership is provided by an experienced manager. There are suitable arrangements in place to cover the management of the home in the manager's absence. The home has a comprehensive range of policies and procedures that have been translated by staff into effective, child-centred working practices. Recommendations arising from the last inspection have been appropriately addressed to improve practice. All staff are now receiving monthly supervision and all physical intervention reports are being examined and signed by senior staff

There is a culture of training and professional development within the staff team. Staff keep abreast of developments within the childcare field and regularly access training opportunities. Staff receive regular supervision and an annual appraisal. Staff engage in reflective practice and regularly look at new ways to improve the service they offer. For example, over the last year staff have employed social pedagogic techniques to determine the views of young people with learning difficulties. The desire to develop more effective methods of engaging with young people with complex disabilities is to be commended.

The service has, in recent months, reviewed its recording systems. As a consequence, all the key information relating to individual young people is now held together within one document. This development has helped reduce duplication in the recording of information. Records contain recent and relevant information which contribute to an understanding of the child's life, and are stored in appropriately locked facilities to maintain confidentiality. The home is subject to regular monitoring, and any recommendations arising out of the monitoring visits are discussed with the manager to ensure a good quality of care is maintained.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.