

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Coulter
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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 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 **good**.

The home has experienced some significant changes since the last inspection. A new working pattern has been established, a number of staff have been appointed to senior positions and there has been a drive to involve, young people, parents, carers and placing social workers in the homes future development. Although the change to a six night service caused a degree of anxiety amongst the parents and carers of some young people who regularly access the service, consultation and regular communication during the transition period helped to address their concerns.

Although staff have had to adapt to changing circumstances within a short period of time, they have remained 'child focused' and have continued to provide good quality respite care to a group of extremely vulnerable young people. Each young person is treated as a unique individual with their own specific health, social and emotional needs. Outcomes for young people are good and they clearly respond positively to the attention and stimulation they get from participating in a diverse range of social and recreational activities.

Although three recommendations have been identified during this inspection, they are aimed to further improve the quality of care. The bathroom areas are, in contrast with the recently refurbished rooms, looking old and tired and would benefit from an upgrade. Although the home has never had to report a young person as missing, the admission of more able bodied young people with autistic traits could increase the risk and better preparation for such an eventuality is recommended. While records provide an overview of what each individual does during their stay, they do not

currently link their respite experiences to identified development goals.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- redecorate and refurbish bathroom facilities on the ground floor. (NMS 10.3)
- provide more specific evidence within placement plans of how the experiences gained by young people during their respite stays are contributing to existing developmental goals (NMS 2.3).
- introduce some form of personal details document for each young person that can be taken with staff on all off-site activities and used in the event of them going missing (NMS 5.1).

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

The home provides good quality respite care for up to 6 children and young people, many of whom have complex health needs due to their disabilities. All young people are treated as individuals with their own specific care needs. The health and well-being of each individual is appropriately monitored and medical interventions are only carried out by staff who have completed additional training and demonstrated their competence. All personal care tasks are carried out sensitively. Arrangements for the storage and dispensing of medication are robust.

The home has a large communal area that allows young people, including those in wheelchairs, to move about freely and participate in social interactions. A range of specialist equipment, including overhead hoists, allows staff to move and handle young people safely. Children and young people are encouraged to remain physically active and can access a range of specialist play equipment both in the home and garden.

Children and young people are encouraged to assert their independence during their visits and staff use a range of verbal and non-verbal communication techniques to ascertain their views on a wide range of issues. A number of children and young people now use computer tablets with communication software that has enhanced their ability to communicate. Staff have recognised the importance of keeping abreast of such technological developments.

Staff are clearly aware of the involuntary nature of many behaviours that young people exhibit and the difficulties that some experience in processing information.

Young people displaying challenging behaviour are normally managed effectively using diversionary techniques. However, in some instances staff intervene physically if the child or young person at risk of hurting themselves or others. In order to prevent the need for similar interventions, all incidents and the reasons for the intervention are appropriately recorded and analysed for underlying causes. Appropriate staffing ratios ensure that young people do not engage in bullying behaviour or unintentionally strike each other.

Staff liaise with parents and carers to establish each child or young person's food preferences and nutritional needs. Although those undertaking short stays are encouraged to try new foods, staff are realistic about what can be achieved and ensure each individual receives appropriate nutrition. Staff and young people eat together and this provides many opportunities for spontaneous social interaction.

During their visits, children and young people have opportunities to extend their social horizons by participating in a range of social and recreational activities both within the home and local community. A dedicated playroom, with under-floor heating and a large array of toys, a sensory room and purpose built outside play area provide stimulating areas to relax and play. Off-site activities are well planned, appropriately staffed and organised around the needs of young people. The home has its own wheelchair-friendly transport that is used to access community facilities and places of interest in the local area. During the busy summer period regular trips were undertaken to the coast and country parks. A trip to Marwell Zoo was particularly popular. Staff aim to make each child or young person's respite stay both stimulating and fun and encourages them to participate in new activities.

All young people currently accessing the service have existing educational placements. Staff support young people's education by regularly liaising with school staff. Information relating to transport, behaviour management and health is regularly exchanged and this contributes significantly to a consistency in approach. By providing parents and teachers with information on each young person's visit, progress and developments can be shared.

Quality of care

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

Staff liaise effectively with parents and carers and ensure that each child or young person's care needs are appropriately identified prior to their first visit. The home has a well-established system so that each child or young person has an assigned key-worker who assumes responsibility for monitoring their progress and acts as an advocate on their behalf. Placement plans provide clear guidance for staff on how specific health, social and emotional needs should be met. Risk assessments are appropriately used to identify any areas of potential concern. Placement plans are updated in line with changing circumstances and are subject to regular review. Although placement plans clearly demonstrate how each individual's care needs are being appropriately met, they do not currently reflect how the positive and stimulating experiences they are gaining while at the home contribute to identified

developmental goals. Consideration is always given to the composition of each respite group to ensure young people are appropriately placed.

Staff create a safe and nurturing environment that helps children and young people to grow and develop. Children and young people respond positively to the approach of the home and those who initially display anxiety settle after a number of visits. The open plan nature of the building provides opportunities for young people to engage safely in activities while being subject to subtle non-invasive supervision. Staff are clearly aware that, due to their disabilities, a number of young people experience difficulties in engaging with others and can become socially isolated. Staff ensure this does not happen by spending time with such young people on a one-to-one basis.

Staff use a variety of communication techniques to illicit the views of young people about all aspects of their care. On admission, all young people and their parents/guardians are made aware of how to raise concerns and make a complaint. All concerns and complaints are taken seriously and immediately investigated in line with the policy of the home.

Staff and young people eat together and this provides regular opportunities for spontaneous group interaction. Staff closely supervise young people in group situations to prevent any form of bullying. Staff use praise and encouragement to reinforce positive behaviour and de-escalate challenging situations. The behaviours and moods of each child or young person are closely monitored in an effort to identify any factors that could be the cause of upset or distress. All significant incidents are appropriately recorded and analysed. Young people are treated by staff with respect and dignity. As a result, children and young people enjoy and respond positively to the care and attention they receive from staff.

Recent building work, that included the creation of a new lounge/play area and refurbishment of a number of bedrooms, has significantly improved the homes facilities. The home is well maintained, clean and in good decorative order. The new facilities contrast sharply with older areas of the home, particularly the bathrooms, which are now beginning to look well used and tired. Some of bedroom furniture is also starting to show its age.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The home employs a well-motivated, staff team who are experienced in working with disabled children and young people with complex care needs. They are aware of how the policies and procedures of the home can be translated into effective working practices that keep young people safe. All new staff complete a detailed induction programme and demonstrate their competence before assuming their full responsibilities. The home does not use agency staff and any shortfalls are covered by members of the staff bank. Staff are aware of their individual responsibilities in regard to the reporting of any safeguarding worries or concerns.

Appropriate staffing levels ensure young people are supervised appropriately while undertaking off-site activities. Although staff are aware of the procedures to be followed in the event of a young person going missing, the identification details of each young person are not currently carried by supervising staff, which is a deficit.

Recent building work has been carried out with safety in mind and potential hazards, such as radiators, have been replaced by safer heat sources. Staff carry out regular health and safety checks within the home and garden. Fire alarms are tested weekly and full evacuations carried out at regular intervals. Access to the home is limited and all visitors have to report to staff and sign in. The fire alarm system is tested weekly and regular fire evacuations ensure staff and young people remain conversant with procedures.

Leadership and management

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

Although the Registered Manager has only been in post for less than a year, he has introduced a number of significant changes to make the home more responsive to the needs of children and young people and their families. The home has embarked on a development programme that demonstrates a clear commitment to continuing improvement. A new work programme has also been introduced to achieve greater efficiency. This allows one day each week without placements so that administrative duties and training can be undertaken on a regular basis. Other significant changes include the further development of a support group for parents and the deployment of a number of quality assurance tools such as parental/carers questionnaires. Throughout this period of change the manager has been ably supported by a staff team that have remained 'child focused'. The manager regularly reviews the progress of each child or young person and the performance of staff. The operation of the home is monitored on a monthly basis by an independent reviewing officer and visits by the service manager. Confidential information relating to each young person is kept safe within appropriately locked facilities.

Staff spoken with talked in positive terms about recent developments and feel they are able to contribute to the home's future planning. The manager is clearly aware of the strengths and areas in need of further development of the home. Good lines of communication have been established between members of staff and regular staff meetings aid consistency in the delivery of care. Regular supervision provides opportunities for staff to examine their practice and aid their professional development. There is a culture of training and professional development within the home and expectation that individual staff will keep abreast of developments within the childcare field and access training opportunities. A record is kept of all courses attended.

There were no actions or recommendations arising from the last inspection to be addressed.

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.