

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC037647
Inspection date	27/11/2012
Inspector	Nick Veysey
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	19/03/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a local authority children's home providing short breaks for up to four children with learning or physical disabilities. The children staying for short breaks usually are not in the care of the local authority and their parents have the primary responsibility for their health care and education.

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**.

This children's home provides children and young people with disabilities and complex needs with enjoyable short breaks in an exceptionally caring and stimulating environment. The support and opportunities they receive enables them to have fun, become more independent and make excellent progress in all aspects of their lives. Children and young people are safe and protected from significant harm. Parents and social workers are very happy with the quality of care and the support children receive from the staff. A parent said, 'I am very happy with the service, I feel very at ease leaving my child there knowing he will be looked after in the right way and by staff dedicated to their jobs.'

All aspects of care planning and practice are highly personalised and tailored to comprehensively meet the individual needs of each young person and take into account their characters, interests and disabilities. Staff work in a coordinated way with children and young people, their family, social workers, health professionals and schools. This ensures that children continue to get the right help, guidance and advice. Staff work exceptionally well with parents to support children and young people's care and fully contribute to planning for their future care needs. Staff effectively prepare and support children and young people and their families for the transition to adult life and adult care services.

Staff are highly committed and show a high level of skill, understanding and knowledge in meeting children's complex needs on a daily basis. Staff actively encourage children and young people to enjoy a full range of social opportunities and

activities and broaden their experiences by trying new things. Staff use effective communication and their awareness of children and young people's personalities and disabilities to assist them to express their views, feel safe and secure, and reduce any feelings of anxiety and frustration.

The home is very effectively managed. The manager provides strong leadership and works hard to improve the service, in particular the involvement of children and young people and their parents in the running of the home. The provider and manager effectively monitor the running of the home and develop the service to try to improve outcomes for children and young people. However, the manager has not provided Ofsted with copies of his reports monitoring the quality of care at reasonable intervals.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- supply Ofsted with reports monitoring the quality of care at six monthly intervals. (Children Act 1989: Volume 5, statutory guidance. paragraph 3.14)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people are making exceptional progress as a result of their short breaks at the home. They really enjoy coming to the home and really make the most of their stays. Parents said, '(young person) really enjoys going to the bungalow. He gets to see his friends outside school and this is very important for his social skills. I think he also enjoys a bit of time on his own away from mum for a bit of his own independence. He is an only child so being around others really makes him happy' and 'It gives him the chance to be around other people and likes to do things and go places with them when he can.' Children and young people enjoy making friends and having the same experiences as their peers. A parent said, 'He calls his stays sleepovers, he sees his sister staying over at her friends, but never gets the chance to do the same, but now he can.'

Children and young people settle in well, feel confident and secure in their time away from their family. They are becoming more communicative and sociable. They have developed trusting and positive relationships with staff and are more relaxed around other children and young people. They are assertive in expressing their views, making informed choices about how they spend their time; for example deciding not to go out, preferring instead to relax with a magazine, watch a film or listening to music. Also, they play an active role in developing the service; for example they have worked hard to secure funding for sensory equipment, and designing and decorating the new sensory space.

Being able to come and stay is having a significant impact on the lives of children and young people with disabilities and complex health needs. A social worker said, 'Staying at the home has made a big difference to (young person's) life, she is getting a lot more out of life, she has developed independence skills, mixing with other children her own age, and accessing activities in the community.' Children and young people respond positively to the challenges that staff provide them with to promote their personal growth. Including taking opportunities to become more independent appropriate to their age, level of understanding and disability. They take more responsibility for their personal care, go shopping and help around the house; for example clearing the table, doing laundry and helping to make hot drinks and cook. They are also active in the local community; for example one young person mentors other children and young people on youth inclusion projects. Some young people are involved in more complex decisions affecting their lives, including their future care needs.

They enjoy a variety of stimulating activities and new experiences in the home and out in the community that otherwise may not be available to them, including using sensory equipment, cycling, watching aeroplanes, attending youth clubs, activity centres, the cinema, and going out for meals. They love going out and are more confident in taking part in activities in the community, including going shopping to spend their pocket money, having a hot chocolate and a make-over in a department store. As a result they have greater access to a wider range of opportunities to explore the world they live in and enjoy life to their full potential.

Quality of care

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

Children and young people are thriving in the caring and stimulating atmosphere. Staff provide an exceptional standard of care that considerably enhances children and young people's experiences, progress and development. Parents and social workers are extremely positive about the quality of care provided at the home. Parents said, 'We know (young person) is in good hands and likes the staff who care for him during his stay' and 'My son always has a good time and is well looked after. All staff are really lovely people.' Staff value children and young people and are extremely effective at building strong and trusting relationships with them and their families. A parent said, 'All staff treat (young person) with the utmost respect and care and I know he is well looked after.' Staff are very knowledgeable about individual children's levels of understanding and comprehension associated with disability. As a result, staff engage appropriately to provide the support and reassurance children need to reduce their anxieties. Staff are skilled at helping children and young people feel safe and relaxed; not just children and young people they know well, but also those visiting for the first time.

Staff understand how best to communicate with individual children in ways that children easily understand. Staff's excellent communication skills enable children and young people express their wishes and feelings and make choices. Staff ensure

children and young people's views are listened to and their complaints are always taken seriously. Staff ensure that children and young people's concerns are dealt with, checking out that they are happy with the outcome and are happy to continue to come to stay. In addition, children and young people have easy access to advocates independent of the children's home. Staff work very effectively with advocates to improve children and young people's involvement in the running of the home and to make decisions about their lives.

Staff always place the well-being of individual children and young people at the centre of their practice. They are very knowledgeable about children and young people's individual needs and plan for each stay exceedingly well. Careful consideration is given to children and young people's stays to ensure the group is compatible, so friendships are promoted and their diverse needs can be met. Children and young people's placement plans provide a comprehensive picture of all their personal needs and the support children require. Also the plans provide a clear picture of each child and young person's personality. Staff put children's plans into practice effectively to ensure children's specific needs are met on a day-to-day basis. Care planning and staff's day-to-day practice recognise children as individuals with different needs, backgrounds, interests and views. Therefore, staff ensure that children receive an individual service designed to meet their personal needs, disability, cultural background and identity. Staff work exceptionally well with parents, social workers and other agencies to promote children's welfare. This includes supporting parents to promote children and young people's independence at home; for example managing their own personal care or eating meals at the table and using a knife and fork.

Children and young people's plans are regularly and comprehensively reviewed to ensure their needs continue to be met. Staff contribute effectively to each child's short break care plan review by producing a detailed report that provides a comprehensive picture of the child and young person's progress and how they are being cared for in line with their plan. They also produce a photographic record showing how young spend their time and the range of activities they take part in. Staff also play a significant role in planning for young people's transition into adult life. Staff work extremely well to prepare young people and their parents for moving on receiving support from adult services; including providing them with information about the services that are available, identifying which ones may suit their needs best, and arranging visits to see services to enable young people and their parents make an informed choice about their future.

Staff's strong and effective partnership with parents, schools, health services and social workers mean that children's education and health care is not disrupted during their stay. Excellent school attendance is maintained and they continue to achieve at school. They stay in a stimulating environment that promotes their learning and development. Staff help with homework and make sure children and young people have easy access to a wide range books, sensory equipment, computers, art materials, games and other educational resources that meet the full range of children and young people's abilities and interests. Children and young people enjoy healthy lifestyles and continue to have excellent access to a full range of health services and

receive excellent support with any health problems. Staff understand children and young people's specific dietary needs and food allergies. They ensure children and young people enjoy well-balanced and nutritious meals. Staff have an excellent understanding of children and young people's specific health needs to ensure children's needs are met on a daily basis. Staff carrying out specialist health tasks are always competent and suitably trained. Staff closely monitor children and young people, including the management of individual children's epilepsy and being aware of the risks associated with hydrocephalus. They ensure children and young people always get suitable medical advice and treatment when they are feeling unwell or showing signs of distress. The arrangements for dealing with medication are safe and effective. Staff are suitably trained in first aid and the management of medication.

Children and young people stay in a suitably designed and comfortable house. The house is very well maintained, equipped and suitably decorated to a very good standard. Children's bedrooms are well designed and furnished to promote children's privacy and meet any specific needs they may have in relation to their health and disability. The lay out of the house promotes children and young people's privacy and enables them to get around easily. Staff ensure that children's bedrooms are prepared for them before they arrive with their belongings so their personalities and tastes are reflected; this helps them feel at home. Staff have made creative use of the space available to enhance the facilities for children and young people. Children and young people have helped to design and develop a sensory space for them to use during their stays; including choosing the colour scheme and going shopping for cushions. They are already making good use of the space to help them relax and feel calm; and enjoy the different colours, lights, sounds and textures.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Staff work effectively with parents and the safeguarding agencies to promote children's safety. Exceptional safe caring practices ensure that children and young people feel safe and are protected from harm. Staff fully understand their responsibility to protect children and are well trained in child protection. They are able to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse, including issues in relation to children's personal circumstances and learning disabilities. Children and young people's individual plans clearly identify any risks they may face and outline effective strategies to ensure their welfare is promoted and protected. The plans for children and young people's safety are consistently put into practice and fully address their needs and circumstances. Staff are very knowledgeable about children and young people's particular vulnerabilities relating to their level of understanding and disability. This enables them to ensure children are safe at home and in the community. Staff balance the need for protection with enabling children to take reasonable risks as part of their growth and development. For example, children are always suitably supervised and any activities in the community are carefully planned. Also, staff effectively support children and young people's understanding and

competence in road safety and their awareness of potential risks to their personal safety. All safety precautions are put into place, including adjustments to the physical environment or the use electronic monitoring, are based on careful risk assessments of individual needs, and allow children and young people as much freedom as possible consistent with the need to keep them safe.

Children and young people's behaviour is exceptionally good and they do not engage in behaviour that may place them in risk of harm. They do not experience bullying or harassment. They get on well together most of the time and staff effectively deal with the rare occasions when children fall out. Staff have a very good understanding of the times and factors that contribute to children becoming upset. This includes working very well with children's schools and parents to develop consistent and well thought out behaviour management strategies that reduce children's anxieties and frustrations; for example spending a little time and space in their bedrooms to calm down. The focus of these strategies is on praising positive behaviour and staff put them into practice effectively to support children. Staff have an excellent awareness of the effects of individual children and young people's disability on their social and emotional development and behaviour. Staff work effectively and sensitively with children and young people to manage their behaviour constructively and reduce their level of anxiety. This may be as simple as explaining to children and young people what is happening and what they are going to do next; or providing them with regular experiences in the community to reduce their fears about being away from home.

Children and young people live in a physically safe environment. They are protected from any hazards by a comprehensive range of detailed health and safety procedures, risk assessments and checks. Staff carry out regular health and safety checks, including fire drills with children, to ensure the premises are safe and children know what to do in case of an emergency. External agencies undertake health and safety inspections to ensure that all play equipment and aids to children and young people's mobility are in good working order. The recruitment and selection of people working at the home is very thorough to make sure children are protected. The manager carefully ensures that staff have the skills and competencies to meet the needs of individual children. Also there are suitable systems in place to ensure that visitors to the home are suitably checked and supervised to protect children.

Leadership and management

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

Children and young people stay in a place that is very effectively and efficiently managed in line with their best interests. The home comprehensively meets its aim to provide a warm, safe and caring homely environment that motivates and stimulates children and young people to develop their personal and social skills, and independence. The home is adequately resourced and the manager ensures that the physical environment at the home is maintained to a high standard. In addition, the manager and staff work imaginatively to attract additional funding from different

sources to improve the service and enhance children and young people's experiences; for example the development of a sensory space for them to enjoy.

The Registered Manager is a highly competent, experienced, suitably qualified and an effective leader. He and staff consistently demonstrate a strong commitment to delivering exceptional care practice tailored to the personal needs of the children and young people they look after. The effectiveness of this approach is evident in the excellent progress young people are making.

Staff are exceptionally competent, enthusiastic and caring, and work well together to promote young people's welfare. The skills within the staff team match children and young people's needs exceptionally well. The numbers of staff on duty are sufficient to meet the needs of children and young people in the best possible way; including the support they need for their personal and health care and opportunities to take part in different activities. Staff are suitably qualified and receive high quality training to develop their individual skills and knowledge relevant to the complex and diverse needs of the children and young people they are caring for; including competence in carrying out key health tasks. Staff are effectively supported and guided through excellent professional supervision. Also team meetings take place regularly to allow the whole staff team to discuss the running of the home, to look at ways to improve the service they offer, to reflect on young people's progress and how best to support them.

The home shows a strong capacity for continued improvement based on its performance in the development of positive outcomes for children and young people. The manager has acted decisively to make improvements since the last inspection in relation to staff contribution to the review of children and young people's short stay plans. Children and young people's written records provide a clear and detailed picture of all their needs and the support they require during their stay at the home. The records also provide a narrative about children's daily lives, experiences and progress. Records are generally thoroughly written; provide an insight and understanding of children and young people's lives and contribute to the planning for their future.

The manager has a realistic understanding of the home's strengths and is able to show the impact and value that living at the home has had on children and young people's lives and how their quality of life has improved. The provider and manager effectively monitor the quality of care, take into account the views of children and parents about the service, and identify areas for improvement. The changes necessary to improve the service always take place. There is a persistent commitment to improve: the participation of all children and young people in their care and the running of the service; the quality of information for parents to show what their children enjoy doing during their stays; and provide families with the dates of stays for six months in advance. However, the manager has not supplied Ofsted with copies of his monitoring reports.

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 children's homes.