

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Robin Whistlecraft
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Residential special school (>295 days/year)

Date of last inspection	25/01/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This provision is a children's home registered by Ofsted and a 52-week independent residential special school, registered and approved by the Department for Education. It is for boys and girls aged six to 17 years with severe and complex learning needs.

There are 10 residential homes, but one was closed during the inspection having recently been refurbished. All young people have a statement of special educational needs. Many who enter this service have had several unsuccessful placements in previous schools. Each home is managed by a team leader and line managed through the Care Management team and the Head of Care.

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 was an aligned inspection, carried out simultaneously with a separate inspection of the service's educational provision.

Young people make exceptional progress. They learn new skills, reduce the risks they take, and make marked progress in coping with the challenges that they face. This means that they come to enjoy experiences in social settings outside of the home. They achieve this because the home closely monitors their progress from the outset and effectively deploys resources in support of each young person. Young people benefit from a range of specialist staff, provided by the home, who come together with care and education staff to form a 'team around the child' (TAC). This illustrates how young people are at the centre of planning and practice throughout the home.

Staff know the young people well and are skilful and caring in their interactions with them. Staff work together in a collaborative way in order to share learning and best practice for the benefit of the young people.

Young people are able to influence the care they receive and the running of the

home. The home provides excellent and innovative support for young people's contact with their families. Young people feel safe, and are safe.

The home's management is committed to continual improvement in the care it provides to young people. They have a robust understanding of the home's strengths and areas for development. This is because they evaluate the home's practice, revise internal systems and introduce new approaches in order to maximise the outcomes young people achieve.

This report contains two recommendations for areas for improvement. One relates to making a record about certain decisions when employing staff from overseas. The other asks the home to periodically compile a report of the improvements it makes as a result of its internal monitoring activities.

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 has a record of the recruitment and vetting checks which have been carried out on those working for the home, which include, where the person has lived outside the UK, further checks as are considered appropriate. This is in relation to recording the reason why it is not considered appropriate to carry out the further checks (NMS 16.3.f)
- ensure that reports of actions taken to improve quality of care, as a result of internal monitoring, are completed at six monthly intervals. Copies of these reports should be sent to Ofsted. (Volume 5, statutory guidance, paragraph 3.14)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people with learning disabilities make exceptional progress in this home. Examples include young people learning to deal with personal challenges such as frustration, crowded spaces and eating out. They learn how to express anxiety safely. Young people learn to allow people close enough to provide haircuts, nail care and dental care. Young people learn new skills such as communication systems, using cutlery and using a washing machine. This learning means that instead of experiencing the world as an overwhelming and sometimes frightening place, young people learn to engage with it and enjoy experiences in it. One parent commented: 'After a year she is unrecognisable from the troubled little girl who moved in.'

Young people receive good support for their health needs. Young people who find routine health examinations threatening experience acclimatisation sessions so that they become familiar with the places, people and processes involved. Young people

benefit from integrated support from the various professional groups in the home. This means that young people's physical, emotional and psychological health is addressed in an integrated fashion as needs emerge. Young people enjoy a varied diet. Those young people with limited food preferences are encouraged to try new foods.

Young people have excellent attendance at school. Their achievement in school was judged as good, during this aligned inspection.

High staff ratios, very good awareness about young people's behaviour, and effective monitoring means that young people's risk taking is kept to a minimum, and is managed well.

Young people influence the running of the school through a student council. For example, they have chosen items for a play area. At a personal level, young people have choice in the food they eat, the activities that they undertake, and decoration in their room. Young people are actively encouraged to express their choices through a flexible variety of communication systems and equipment.

Young people experience committed, resourceful and imaginative support for contact with their families. The home provides dedicated accommodation for families to stay in, with their child, during extended visits. There is also private accommodation available for shorter visits. The home has recently created a room for young people to enjoy contact via computer with families who cannot visit as often. This means that the home enables the re-building of previously stressful relationships, as well as enabling young people and families to continue to be involved with each other.

Young people enjoy a variety of opportunities, as their needs allow, to experience activities outside of their residential unit. These range from walks to leisure centres and meals out. In recognition that experience of social settings can be challenging for the young people, the home's investment in an on-site café illustrates its commitment to sensitive preparation. The home also creatively uses the café to give more able young people some work experience. This further enhances their social skills and self-confidence.

Young people benefit from continual attention to, and support for, the development of their own independence skills. This is effective because the home's systems, such as that for young people's personal targets, ensure that independence skills are featured; even if this means breaking down whole skills into smaller, component steps. The home's approach is to maximise young people's self-care and independence skills. A member of staff described how a young person who could not use cutlery or bear crowds is now able to enjoy the experience of a carvery meal in a pub.

Quality of care

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

The home has high aspirations for the young people. For example, they have created a post-admission programme that has overcome matters that had been significant challenges for young people's previous homes and families. Key workers clearly know their key young people extremely well, and show skill in their use of non-verbal techniques, including voice pitch, in order to communicate effectively. Their interactions with young people are warm and caring.

The home actively promotes the way young people can influence how it provides their care. Young people show their likes and dislikes through a range of communication methods to choose meals or activities. One young person said: 'We can choose all types of things and who will go with us.' Some young people are members of the school council and have been involved in choosing items for a play area.

Young people's welfare is at the centre of the home's practice. The home best demonstrates this by the use of its excellent 'team around the child' approach and 'behaviour watch' monitoring system. The home has a sophisticated and pro-active system for monitoring incidents that enables it to analyse data from a large range of perspectives. In the event that it identifies worrying trends, the home calls TAC meetings involving the various specialists, such as psychologists, therapists, teaching, health and care staff, that are involved with the young person. In this way, the home has been able to identify causes and achieve improvement before negative patterns are established. The TAC approach also illustrates the home's commitment to effective partnership working. Involvement of the home's various specialists supports all aspects of young people's development. The home challenges obstacles, such as incomplete care planning by placing authorities, in support of the young people.

The home's care thoroughly reflects young people's placement plans. The home is rolling out a replacement system for identifying and tracking individual goals and targets for young people. One member of staff said: 'Using the new system will enable us to not just look at the student's development but also the potential they may achieve.'

The home has presented its complaints system in an attractive and child-focussed way for the young people. In addition, the home has engaged an independent charity to visit the young people in each residential unit each month. The home also employs a dedicated complaints officer. Complaints records use pictures to support young people's understanding. These provisions illustrate the home's commitment to listening to young people, and their families, when concerns and worries arise.

The home, with its school on site, actively supports young people's educational achievement. The home's systems, such as its TAC approach, mean that young people experience a consistent approach whether in school or their residential unit. In addition, some residential staff support young people in school. This strengthens continuity for the young people.

The home's dedicated health services team provide good support for meeting young

people's health needs. This provision means that there is professional oversight of the administration of medication, young people's other health needs and staff training in health associated matters.

The home's practice is to encourage young people to learn new skills and become familiar and comfortable in social settings. Young people's plans reflect their relevant skills and needs in relation to their goals and targets. As they learn to cope and develop new skills, young people experience a wide range of activities. For example, a young person who could not use cutlery a year ago is now able to enjoy meals out with staff.

Young people's diverse needs feature clearly in their care and placement plans and are reflected in care practices. For example, one unit has notices to remind staff about some young people's dietary needs, arising from religious requirements. The home actively promotes young people's experience of various cultures and religions. It does this through frequent celebrations involving relevant food, dress and music.

A programme of refurbishments is improving the appearance and function of the residential units. For example, the use of muted colour schemes reflects the impact of strong colours and patterns on young people with autism. Nevertheless, young people's rooms are personalised as far as possible with regard to their preferences. The home emphasises its support for family relationships by displays of family photographs in young people's bedrooms.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Staff interactions with young people are friendly and caring. Staff intervene quickly, and the home introduces appropriate behaviour management strategies, if a young person's behaviour is or becomes a risk to others. This approach, together with a one-to-one or higher staff to child ratio, means that the home is able to reduce risky behaviours. Young people are safe and feel safe. One said: 'I feel happy and safe.' A social worker commented: 'There is always fun and laughter.'

Young people benefit from care plans and practices that clearly identify and assess risks. The home uses a priority behaviour development plan to set out the approach staff are to take with each young person. Each plan begins with an overall, long-term goal that is broken down to immediate goals. The plans include an exploration of the possible causes and functions of the inappropriate behaviour that the plan is addressing, including relevant risk assessments. The plans set out pro-active strategies to reduce the likelihood of the targeted behaviour. The home includes guidance about diversionary strategies that have been successful and methods to avoid. This means that young people benefit from approaches that are pro-active, specifically designed for them, and which seek to encourage appropriate behaviour. The home regularly reviews these plans.

Staff are aware of their responsibility to report concerns about possible abuse of

young people. The home is pro-active about referring possible concerns to the local safeguarding authority, only investigating concerns internally when that authority gives approval. The level of supervision means that young people do not go missing from the home. If there is a lapse in supervision, the home notifies and consults with other agencies as necessary and investigates the reasons. This illustrates how the management is transparent about mistakes and committed to safeguarding young people.

The home carefully vets potential staff. Sometimes the home employs staff who are from overseas. Because these staff have been working in the UK for some time the home has not carried out further checks with the relevant embassies and consulates. However, the home has not recorded this decision, and rationale, in its records. This means that as managers change, the assessment of risk involved in the decision may be lost.

The residential houses have appropriate security.

Leadership and management

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

This home is effectively and efficiently managed. The home's management continually reviews and seeks to improve the home's performance. In the past year, managers have introduced the TAC approach, the behaviour watch monitoring system, and have started replacing the target-setting procedure and records. This means that young people benefit from a care regime that continually seeks to improve the outcomes that they achieve.

Managers are able to demonstrate how young people have made significant progress because of the home's intervention. Young people develop new skills, become settled, and gain confidence to cope with new situations. This means that young people are able to engage with other people and social situations, that was unthinkable before they came to live in the home.

Managers have effective systems to monitor a range of matters. The behaviour watch system enables the home to consider patterns and trends in relation to incidents. In addition, the home monitors a range of other matters, reacting to address concerning trends, such as delays in staff supervision and appraisal, and taking action as soon as such a trend emerges. Managers have reported their actions via the relevant internal systems, such as management meetings. While this means that managers are continually monitoring and acting to improve the home's quality of care, they have not periodically reported on this to Ofsted.

Leaders and managers have a robust understanding of the home's strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, managers have produced a realistic and credible development plan for the home. The plan involves appropriate milestones and deadlines. Managers have linked every target in the plan to positive impacts on outcomes for children.

The physical standard of most residential houses is good or better. The home is continually investing in its residential houses in order to improve the available space and the impact of the decor. This means that young people benefit from accommodation that supports them in coping with their needs.

Staff receive appropriate induction and value the supervision that they receive. Staff say managers meet their individual training needs and encourage them to develop their practice. Some care staff do not recognise the skills that they use because they simply see them as a part of how things are done. However, staff were seen to change the way they interacted with individual young people because they knew what worked with them. In doing so, they demonstrated skill and deftness. It is evident that all the specialisms in the home, such as care, education, therapy, health and psychology, work together for the benefit of the young people. This represents a significant cultural and structural achievement by the managers. It means that the home enhances young people's care because professionals share perceptions and suggestions, thereby increasing everyone's understanding. As a result, care staff are enthusiastic about their role.

The home keeps records about young people securely. The records provide an understanding of the young person's life in the home. They also provide an accurate record of the strategies and rationale that the home uses to improve young people's lives.

The home provides staffing levels based on assessments about young people's needs agreed with their placing authorities. This means that there are adequate care staff, augmented by a range of other specialists who provide particular support. The home appropriately advocates on behalf of young people if they need further resources.

The home notifies other agencies about significant incidents. The home's commitment to transparency means that it treats some matters as incidents because of their potential, rather than their actual impact. This openness contributes to the safeguarding of young people.

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.