

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Paul Scott
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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 is a children's home operated by a local authority. The service offers short-term respite care breaks for children who have severe learning or physical disabilities and significant communication difficulties. The service is registered to care for up-to-10 young people between the ages of five and 17 years old.

Overall effectiveness

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

This is a good service that provides an excellent quality of care for children. Staff are skilled and well trained, which enables them to meet children's complex needs. Staff effectively plan for, and manage children's care ensuring their individual needs are clearly identified and addressed. Consequently, children enjoy a positive experience of being away from their families, and their families have a necessary break, safe in the knowledge their child is being well looked after. One parent said, 'my child is very happy at (name) House and looks forward to going there'.

Staff work with young people in a way that maximises their individual potential. Communication difficulties are effectively overcome through the empowering use of visual supports, which staff use to facilitate communication. Staff are in regular contact with parents which ensures children's views, and the views of families are actively sought.

Children enjoy positive relationships with staff. Staff genuinely care for children and invest a great deal of time and effort into ensuring their stay at the home is enjoyable and fun. One child said, 'the staff are brilliant' and another said, 'I like the children and staff'.

The home is well managed. The manager places a strong emphasis on providing a high standard of care for children, ensuring continuous improvement and development. However, some areas of attention are identified. These include a development plan for the service and improving the development of staff including supervision and appraisal.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure there is a written plan, reviewed annually, for the future of the home, either identifying any planned changes in the operation or resources of the service, or confirming the continuation of the home's current resource (NMS 15.2)
- ensure all staff are provided with regular supervision by appropriately qualified and experienced staff (NMS 19.4).
- ensure all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually and this appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for. (NMS 19.4)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

The arrangements for promoting the health needs of children are good. This is because staff work in close partnership with parents who retain parental responsibility as part of a shared care agreement. Effective communication with parents at the point of admission ensures staff are aware of children's current health needs. During their visit young people are supported in accessing routine and specialist services as well as any emergency services, which may be necessary.

Staff are trained to meet the specific health needs of the children in their care. They are trained in autism and epilepsy to enable them to have a good knowledge and understanding of individual needs. Staff are trained in first aid and how to administer young people's medication, in accordance with the service's excellent procedures for the safe administration of medication. This ensures safe working practices are followed by staff and young people are protected from harm.

As a short break service the responsibility for education remains with the parents and the local authority. This service supports children with their education by having them ready for school and by attending individual education reviews. The manager and staff have established good links with school to ensure effective communication is maintained. This ensures school and the home are working collaboratively to ensure young people are well supported.

Staff maintain good links with children's families providing them with support both during their visit to the service and whilst they are at home. For example, staff are providing outreach support for one young person and their family to ensure relationships at home remain positive and are safe. A social worker said, 'staff manage the anxieties of parents well, offering them good support and reassurance making it easier for them trust in the staff at the home'. A parent said, 'the home is a great help to me, a necessary respite in my life. It takes my mind off my worries because I know my child is being well looked after'.

Children only visit the home for short periods of time. Staff make good use of this time to encourage children to develop their skills and become more independent. For example, mealtimes are treated as a social occasion where children are encouraged

to sit down and eat together, whilst developing practical skills such as feeding themselves. One parent said, '(name) House has had a profound impact on my child's development who went from being a totally dependent child to being an independent young lady'.

Quality of care

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

Children are cared for by a committed and dedicated staff team who place children's needs at the very centre of their work. Staff have an excellent understanding of children's individual needs and are very good at recognising the signs, behaviour and symptoms of anxiety or concern. This enables staff to take action to support children in times of need. A parent said, 'staff know my child well and understand their needs'. Good systems are in place to ensure young people and their families know how to express their concerns and that any matters arising are addressed quickly and fairly.

Relationships between children and staff are genuinely warm and friendly. Staff have a very good knowledge of the children in their care and are fully committed to enabling them to overcome the difficulties they may face, to lead a happy and fulfilling life. A parent said, 'Staff are brilliant. Everything is good about the service. Staff are conscientious and help my child with all aspects of daily living'. Staff have devised a number of effective communication tools to overcome the barriers to communication and enable children to express their views and opinions. Excellent links are maintained with children's families who are regarded as the experts on their children. This means children are supported well to express themselves positively and contribute to planning their care and the running of the home.

Staff plan children's care very well. Short break placement plans are extremely detailed and provide a comprehensive picture of children's individual needs and the support they require for the duration of their visit. Plans are regularly updated and staff consistently put these plans into practice, recognising children as individuals with different backgrounds, interests and needs. This means young people receive an individualised service designed to meet their personal needs and cultural identity and disability.

Children are actively engaged in a wide range of enjoyable, stimulating and creative activities. The home has developed a number of resources within the home to ensure children have ample opportunity to enjoy their recreation time. A parent said, '(name) House provides a safe, comfortable and welcoming environment with good stimulation and chill out facilities'. Staff enjoy spending quality time with children to make their visits fun. One child said, 'I enjoy dancing and listening to music'. Children are also encouraged to enjoy a wide range of social activities outside of the home. For example, children are regularly taken shopping, to the park or trips to the seaside or zoo. A child said 'I enjoy activities and days out. I would like to come to (home) House more often as I get to go places I would not be able to go with my family'. A social worker said, 'the home is good at promoting social inclusion by

enabling children to have the same experiences as their peers'.

The location of the service ensures that children have access to local places of interest. The service is purposely designed to cater for children's complex needs including needs arising from disabilities. Special adaptations have been made, where necessary, to provide young people with an environment which is safe and suitable. The home is well maintained and suitably decorated according to the needs of the young people. For example, neutral colours are used to reduce stimuli although these are pleasantly broken up with children's displays and photographs.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children live in a safe environment where they are effectively protected from harm. For example, staff are trained in safeguarding and know how to recognise, respond and report suspected abuse. Children's safety is given the highest priority. They are protected by range of safeguarding measures that staff consistently put into practice to promote their safety and well-being.

The home has effective procedures for monitoring children. Good staffing ratios ensure children receive the supervision and support they need to keep themselves safe. There are no issues of children going missing as their whereabouts are closely supervised and known at all times. Robust procedures, known by staff ensure the appropriate action would be taken to protect children if they went missing from home. Children are effectively protected from bullying, intimidation and harassment which promotes their welfare and safety.

There is a calm and caring approach towards behaviour management which means children's challenging behaviour is sensitively and effectively managed. This is because all staff have genuinely positive relationships with children and are appropriately trained in behaviour management. Staff have used physical restraints on a small number of occasions, although appropriately and professionally to prevent children from causing harm to themselves or others.

The recruitment and selection of people working at the home is very thorough to make sure children are effectively protected. Recruitment and vetting procedures are followed to ensure that employed staff have the right skills and are suitable and safe to work with vulnerable children.

The home provides children with a safe place to live. They are protected by a good range of health and safety procedures, risk assessments and routine checks. Fire drills are undertaken monthly. Evacuation plans are discussed and reviewed daily to ensure all children and staff know how to evacuate the building in the event of a fire.

Leadership and management

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

The service is effectively and efficiently managed in the best interest of the needs of children. The service meets the aims and objectives of its Statement of Purpose, and children, their families and social workers are clear about the services and support the service provides. A social worker said, 'this an invaluable service that provides children with lots of positive opportunities and essential support for their families'.

The manager and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to delivering good quality childcare that places the needs of the individual at the centre of the work that is undertaken. This has resulted in children making excellent progress relative to the length of time they visit the service.

The reorganisation of the responsible authority has meant the home has been subject to some changes since the last inspection, including a number of ancillary and care staff leaving the service. The manager and staff have ensured that these changes have not impacted on the quality of care provided for young people and the service has continued to improve, based upon on its good track record, performance and continued compliance with standards and regulations.

The manager has an excellent understanding of the service's strengths and weakness. However, there is no development plan in place making it difficult to consider how the restructuring and reorganisation of the responsible authority will impact on the home. Consequently, it is difficult to plan for the future and prepare staff for changes to working practice brought about by these changes.

The manager has positively addressed all of the requirements and the good practice recommendations from the last inspection. This has improved the quality of care and outcomes for young people across a range of issues. For example, young people's views and opinions are gathered as part of independent monitoring visits, procedures for managing when young people go missing from home are robust and electrical safety checks are undertaken in accordance with service schedules.

The operation of the service is well monitored. The home is independently inspected each month for which a written report is prepared in relation to the service's conduct. This enables the manager to take positive action to improve performance, where necessary. Children and their families are consulted as part of this visit to ascertain their views and feelings about the service. This ensures they have a positive influence in the way in which the home is run and managed. A parent said, 'this is a well run and well-managed service'.

Children are cared for by a sufficient number of qualified and experienced staff. The home has a strong commitment towards staff training and development. There are good opportunities for all staff, to further develop their knowledge and skills through training. Staff are well supported in their day-to-day practice to ensure they are clear about their roles and responsibilities and how the individual needs of children are to be met. However, formal supervision does not take place regularly and only a limited number of staff have personal development plans which are formally appraised annually. This means staff are not given the opportunity to develop their potential

and enhance their performance in a planned and appropriately supervised manner.

Children's files and individual records are stored confidentially and securely. Records are very comprehensive and are regularly updated ensuring care planning is individualised and relevant to children's needs.

Equality and diversity practice is **outstanding**.