

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Janice Hawtin
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is operated by a local authority and provides short-break care for up to six children and young people with a learning disability or combined learning and physical disability. The home operates for five nights each week spanning Wednesday through to Monday morning, with a maximum of six places per night. Packages of care vary in length and frequency. Most children stay for one night at a time but others stay for weekends. Where possible children stay in the room they are familiar with and with children of similar needs and interests. The building is single storey, providing level access. Enclosed play areas are provided outdoors where children receive support to access a range of play equipment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service 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**.

Overall there are good quality systems in place to promote the welfare of children and young people. Children and young people and those who act on their behalf are positive about the service and the care offered.

Parents report that their children 'love coming to this home', they are pleased with staff involvement in planning and review of the care provided. Children and young people benefit from an experienced and dedicated staff team who recognise and act on their changing needs to develop their potential. There is an emphasis on children and young people enjoying their time and developing skills, they benefit from spending time with peers and from the range of activities available in the home and in the community.

Monitoring of the service by the manager is robust and contributes to planning and review of developments. She understands the strengths and areas for development of the service and has plans in place to continually improve the care and support offered to benefit children, young people and their families.

The frequency of some of external monitoring of the service does not meet requirements which compromises independent review of the quality of care. The

team manager has already taken some steps to address this issue.

Some records following the use of restraint lack sufficient detail to demonstrate the need to use the restraint and the length of time the restraint is applied. Not all complaints are recorded in a central log kept for this purpose. This limits potential for monitoring and evidence of effective action and empowerment.

Areas for improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
33 (2001)	ensure that Regulation 33 monitoring visits take place at least once a month and provide a copy of the report produced to Ofsted (Regulation 33 (3) & (5))	01/06/2012
17B (2001)	ensure records of restraint include detail of the child's behaviour leading up to the restraint, the duration of the restraint and detail of any methods used to avoid the need to use that measure (Regulation 17B (3)(b)&(4)(a)&(b))	02/05/2012
24 (2001)	ensure that a written record is made of any complaint, the action taken and the outcome of the investigation. (Regulation 24 (5))	03/05/2012

Recommendations

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

- encourage children to take age appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up and where restrictions apply these are risk assessed and reviewed. (NMS 4.4)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people are helped to develop a positive self-view, there are pictures of children and young people in the home and evidence that their views and feelings are taken into consideration and have an impact on developing the service. Spending time at the home allows them to socialise with and spend time amongst peers and to develop friendships. Attention is paid to enabling children to develop their full potential by treating them as unique individuals. Consideration is given to

providing an inclusive service and there are notable improved outcomes for young people. Parents report that their children have improved ability to make choices, developed speech and other communication skills and have enhanced ability to socialise. Some young people have made exceptional progress and as such no longer require the short breaks service. A carefully planned gradual withdrawal of the service has enabled a positive transition to the family environment. Celebration of significant events also helps to build self-esteem and confidence. There is a birthday board on display and pictures of children and young people around the home.

The Registered Manager has recently reviewed and improved the format for recording development plans and measuring progress. Children and young people will benefit from clear targets and evaluation of progress to evidence outcomes.

The home provides a stimulating environment for children and young people who have access to a sensory room and a large well equipped garden play area. A computer room is provided and computers have internet access to support education and the development of information and communications technology skills. A portable laptop is provided for those unable to use a desk and chair computer station. Children and young people benefit from the help and support they receive from staff to engage in the range of activities offered and to enjoy different experiences. They are involved in some activities that may not otherwise be available to them. Young people who are moving into adult services have recently chosen and helped to organise a trip to take part in laser quest as a leaving activity.

Children and young people benefit from attending school; most going straight from the home to education provision. Staff attend 'team around the child' meetings enhancing the collaborative work with health providers, schools and parents. This practice identifies issues, contributes to effective planning and maximises improved outcomes for children and young people.

Staff are clear about the health needs of children and young people and encourage self-care skills where possible.

Quality of care

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

Children and young people benefit from a staff team who understand and provide for their needs; where possible and usually there is a careful mix of children and young people around age and ability to allow for the development of friendships and socialising. Staff numbers are high and significant amounts of individual time are spent with the children and young people dependant on their needs.

Prior to children and young people staying overnight, the staff are flexible around introduction visits. Parents, children and young people can visit and stay for tea as necessary to make them feel comfortable and confident in this environment prior to staying overnight. This practice contributes to the success of short breaks placements and the confidence that parents have in the service.

Children and young people benefit from attention to issues of equality and diversity detail of which is included in the home's care plans. These always include their likes and dislikes, preferred communication methods and routines especially around bedtime. Individualised methods to settle children and young people at night are identified and included staff singing and reading.

The views, feelings and wishes of children and young people are actively sort through a variety of measures. All are considered able to make choices and a range of communication methods are used. The staff take note of non-verbal communication and where these are very limited discussions in team meetings maximises potential to understand how choices are made. This could be a subtle as a glance or tap. Young people have been involved in the recent recruitment of staff and contributed by providing questions to be asked of candidates at formal interviews.

Positive outcomes for children and young people are consistently secured through proactive work with other agencies. Practice complements communication methods used in school and home environments to increase learning and development. The staff challenge partner agencies where necessary to improve the services they provide. Recent benefits from this include securing adult services which better meets the needs of young people who are moving on, resources have been acquired from occupational therapy services and taxi and transport services have also been improved.

Children and young people can make a complaint or have parents who would act on their behalf. All families are given a welcome pack which includes detail of how to complain and parents report that they know who to contact if they have any concerns and are aware that they can contact external agencies if needed. One complaint made by a young person has been effectively recorded; detail was included in his file, but not in the complaint log. This has potential to compromise effective monitoring.

The home is purpose built: it is spacious allowing plenty of room for children and young people to play, and the use of wheelchairs and other aids. All children and young people have their own bedroom and have door signs which are individualised. There is a good mix of showers and bathrooms which are equipped to overcome physical difficulties. These allow access so that all children and young people can benefit from the resources available. The environment is homely, well maintained and decorated. A maintenance plan is in place and recently a bedroom has been completely decorated and refurbished, others have improved décor. All children and young people benefit from improvements to the outside area which has new fencing, bright and child-friendly garden furniture and additional play equipment.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people are kept safe in the home and there is careful planning around the mix of young people. Whilst this practice encourages friendships, it also tries to avoid power imbalance, limiting potential for bullying or abuse amongst children and young people. Staffing numbers also allow for close monitoring to deal with any issues quickly. Bullying has not been a problem.

Placement plans identify particular vulnerabilities relating to the diverse needs of children and young people so that action can be taken to reduce and avoid unnecessary risk. All trips activities and visits are risk assessed. Staff take some action to counter risk avoidance and this has reduced some restrictive practice. Where some restrictions apply these are not always subject to recorded risk assessment and regular review which would allow children and young people to take age appropriate risks depending on their development. Some restrictions apply to kitchen access and access to internet sites.

Children and young people are supported by behaviour management plans which detail triggers to difficult behaviour and preferred supportive strategies which have been agreed by parents. Change in difficult behaviour is encouraged using distraction, modelling, praise and rewards. Sanctions can be used to try and effect changes in behaviour and encourage children and young people, to take responsibility for their actions.

Staff are trained in the use of physical restraint should it be needed to protect children and young people from serious harm to themselves or others. The use of restraint is rare and all incidents are recorded, not all records include the information as required in legislation to provide clear accurate detail. The use of reflective practice considers all incidents and action is taken to reduce restraint where possible.

Careful vetting of visitors to the home protects children and young people. A visitor's book is signed to keep a record of those entering the premises should any issues arise. Recruitment and employment of staff involves robust vetting measures to ensure that as far as possible only appropriate adults have access to children and young people. All staff know how to respond effectively to any child protection issues and there is evidence of careful monitoring so that any issues can be quickly addressed.

Regular health and safety checks protect children and young people; a fire risk assessment is in place as well as fire detection systems, fire doors and extinguishers. Regular fire drills and fire alarm tests also take place. Checks made to electrical appliances and gas installations make sure these are safe and do not pose a threat to the safety of children and young people.

Although suitable policies and protocols with the police are in place children and young people do not go missing from this home. Taking into account the needs and characteristics of the children and young people the front door is kept locked. All staff carry keys and would be able to open the door on request should this be appropriate.

Leadership and management

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

Children and young people thrive in an environment that is well managed by a confident and experienced Registered Manager and deputy manager, who have the full support of a dedicated and enthusiastic staff team. The needs of the children, young people and their families is at the core of the services provided and all attempts are made to meet the diverse range of needs presented which enables all to make the most of their stay at the home.

The Statement of Purpose is clear about the aims and objectives of the service and the facilities it provides to inform those purchasing and using this service. A welcome pack is available to parents and the young people's guide is child-friendly and provided in several formats so that children and young people are enabled to access information. These documents are readily available with several being placed in the entrance to the home alongside other useful information.

Requirements and recommendations from the last inspection have been acted upon to benefit children and young people. All fire doors now comply with regulations; the format of Regulation 33 monitoring has improved to include discussion with children, their parents and staff to form an opinion of the quality of care. In recent months the frequency of these monitoring visits is not meeting requirements. Reports have not been forwarded to Ofsted within agreed timescales compromising external monitoring safeguards.

A written policy has been created to support the use of electronic monitoring which informs young people, parents and other stakeholders. Internet access is provided to children and young people increasing the range of educational resources which support and promote learning. Access to social networking sites is currently limited pending further consideration, risk assessments and E-safety training for staff.

The manager, who understands the strengths and areas for development of the service and has a development plan in place, completes robust monitoring of the service. This plan is in the process of being updated following recent evaluation of the service. Access to the local authority electronic recording system has allowed for access to up to date and sharing of information about young people and has improved communication between professionals. The staff take every opportunity to work in partnership with other agencies to maximise potential and quality of care for children and young people. They attend and contribute to planning and review meetings. Current collaborations with other professionals are compiling sensory assessments for children and young people to improve communication methods and pain threshold assessments to determine if pain management can be improved for children and young people who need manual handling support.

All significant events relating to the protection of children and young people accommodated in the home are notified to the appropriate authorities. Appropriate

action is taken following any incident. Most records are clear, up to date and contribute to an understanding of the child's life, all are stored securely.

The staff team are well trained and supported through regular supervision which includes reflective practice to develop skills. All new staff undertake the Children's Workforce Development Council's thorough induction programme. Permanent appointments to care jobs are subject to a probationary period to ensure the employment of suitable staff. Staff have annual appraisals and personal development plans in place. The local authority has recently introduced a more robust competency framework to improve identification of training and development needs.

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.