

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 a 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.

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 provides personalised, planned short breaks which are responsive to the immediate and long term needs of children. The service demonstrates outstanding practice in the outcomes for children. Progress is discernible across personal, social and emotional aspects of their development. There is exceptional progress for children in interpersonal skills following the introduction of specialist communication systems. The introduction of these systems has been fundamental in improving consultation, choice and independence skills.

Children enjoy spending time in the home and parents report that they are, 'very impressed with the service' and feel it, 'definitely meets their child's needs'. Staff are committed to children and their families, clearly understanding their varying needs; they have an enthusiastic and positive approach to sorting out problems and overcoming disadvantage. A parent commented, 'I can just turn up at the home if I have a problem and I know the staff will help.'

Monitoring of the service by the manager contributes to the planning and review of developments. The management team understand the strengths and weaknesses of the service and a plan is in place to ensure continuous improvements benefit children and their families. The secondment of an experienced deputy manager to this home and the sharing of effective practice has been instrumental in securing many of the improvements reported.

There are gaps in the monthly provision of formal supervision for some staff. This

compromises what is otherwise a robust system for ensuring staff receive the support, guidance and training required to fulfil their role and provide a high quality service to children.

Precautions against the risk of fire include early detection systems and doors throughout the building which open automatically if fire is detected. Individual evacuation plans and opportunities to practise drills ensure that both staff and children know what to do in the event of a fire. A locked gate in the garden fence, between one exit from the building and the assembly point, could extend evacuation times in the event of a fire.

Recruitment records are maintained in the organisation's central office. The home's summary of the vetting and recruitment checks for staff contains some gaps in the information required. Consequently it is not possible for the Registered Manager to evidence appropriate checks which contribute to ensuring the fitness of workers at the home.

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
26 (2001)	ensure that full and satisfactory information is available for each member of staff in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 2 (Regulation 26 (3)(d))	03/05/2013
32 (2001)	provide adequate means of escape by ensuring that all doors leading to the assembly point are kept unlocked or open automatically in the event of a fire. (Regulation 32(1)(b))	03/05/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure staff receive regular supervision (NMS 19.4)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Children are helped to develop a positive self-view in this home where they are

valued and treated as unique individuals. Photographs around the home demonstrate the range of activities children are involved in and contribute to children feeling valued. Each has their own 'photo journal'. This is often used as an aid to communication, to show parents what they have been doing, and in reviews to demonstrate progress and skills learnt.

The service is inclusive and all children are enabled to participate and develop their full potential. There are notable improvements in the development of independence skills. One young person, who has made exceptional progress and developed sufficiently so that he no longer needs this service, wrote the following in a letter to staff: 'Since I came to No 1 I have learned the skills to help me in life and how to keep myself clean and cooking and having a laugh, thank you for giving me the courage to do a lot more things in life.' Parents confirm that their children make steady progress in lots of areas, including communicating, personal care and acquiring practical life skills such as cooking and cleaning. Staff are clear about the health needs of children, encouraging and enabling self-care skills wherever possible. Some are dressing themselves for the first time; others effectively brush their teeth or wash their own hair.

It is clear from the interaction and enthusiasm of children staying at this home that they have formed and sustain positive attachments to the staff. This improves their emotional resilience and instils feelings of security, enabling progress and the confidence to try new things and different activities. Children are benefiting from recent additions to the communication systems used in the home. As a result, significant progress has been made in interacting with others, making choices and gaining independence skills.

The home provides a stimulating environment for children who have access to a wide range of play, sensory and craft equipment. Children enjoy spending time in the large garden area which is well resourced. Specialist equipment allows children with a range of disabilities to participate in activities that are not usually available to them, including nest swings, sports equipment and the use of a trampoline. Activity planning and evaluation has improved and this is impacting positively on the range and frequency of community activities. This supports children's access to stimulating and different experiences, where they can gain social and practical skills.

Young people benefit from attending school. Their attendance is exceptional. During term time most children come straight from school to the home and return to school the next day. Issues, concerns and progress are shared between the home and children's schools to maximise their safety, security and development.

Quality of care

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

The staff fully understand the needs of each child. Where possible there is usually a careful mix of children around age and ability. Carefully matching the children staying means that some have developed friendships and it is clear they get on well

together, enjoy going out on activities and make good use of the play and craft equipment. Careful matching of children also avoids potential difficulties, such as bullying.

Staff numbers are high and significant amounts of individual time are spent with the children dependant on their needs. Where the needs of children are complex, the number being offered support can be limited, or additional staff employed so that the experience is still positive for all the other children staying.

Prior to children staying overnight, the staff are flexible around introduction visits. Parents and children can visit and stay for tea as necessary to make them feel comfortable and confident in this environment. This adds to the success of the short break placements.

Children are well cared for by staff: warm, friendly and attentive relationships are evident. Staff are enthusiastic about their work and take pleasure in children's achievements. All staff have a good working knowledge of each child and can describe their likes and dislikes. They understand children's abilities and limitations and how best to manage their care to avoid difficulties and make short breaks as positive as possible. Individual targets are known to the staff and where possible are applied to children's activities to maximise their progress. Staff are very patient, allowing less able children the time needed to participate to the best of their ability and develop new skills.

Children benefit from practice which is underpinned by comprehensive planning documents and risk assessments, covering all aspects of the service provided. These documents have been audited and improved to ensure that information is precise, concise, up-to-date and readily accessible. Children are benefitting from the introduction of independence planning and detailed assessment of their self-help, personal and social skills. This assessment allows for focused target setting and skills development. It can also be used to demonstrate and measure progress. Care plans are detailed and include triggers to difficult behaviour, how to avoid these and what to do when a child's behaviour becomes difficult.

Wherever possible, children are encouraged to participate in decision making. Their views and wishes are sought using a range of communication methods. The increased use of symbols and pictures is helping children to make more choices and increase their independence. One child recently ordered food in a restaurant for the first time using picture communication methods. This practice often compliments and supports communication methods used in children's school and home environments to maximise their learning and development. Children value the use of 'scheduling', a method of informing them of plans for the day and helping them to meet targets and make choices. This system has been particularly beneficial for children with autism who have shown reduced anxiety and improved behaviour.

A good range of activities are provided. Children can choose which ones they want to do. Some of their favourites are watching DVDs, using the internet and creating art and craft work. Activity planning has improved and this is beginning to increase the

range and frequency of children's activities in the community, broadening even further their experiences. One parent commented that the staff are, 'never fazed by the difficulties presented, they take my child out to places I would never attempt to go.'

Children can make a complaint and most have parents who will act on their behalf if needed. Complaints are few and have been dealt with appropriately and to the satisfaction of the complainant. Consultation questionnaires received from parents are positive and confirm they are pleased with the quality of care provided. One parent described the home as, 'very impressive' and providing one of the few opportunities their child has to be independent of their family and spend time with peers away from school.

The home is purpose-built; it is spacious, homely and there is on-going investment in its maintenance and refurbishment. All children have their own bedroom which can be personalised and furnished with equipment dependant on the needs of the child using the room. There is a good mix of showers and bathrooms which are equipped to overcome physical difficulties and allow full use of the facilities.

Arrangements for dealing with medication are safe and effective. Staff receive appropriate training in this respect and two are always involved in the storage, administration and recording of medication to avoid any mistakes.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children are kept safe in the home and there is careful planning around the mix of children. Whilst this practice encourages friendships, it also tries to avoid any power imbalance, limiting the potential for bullying or abuse amongst children. Staffing numbers also allow for close monitoring and any issues to be dealt with quickly. No incidents have been reported and bullying has not been a problem.

Placement plans and risk assessments identify children's particular vulnerabilities relating to their diverse needs to reduce and avoid unnecessary risks to them. Children benefit from these plans which are regularly monitored and reviewed and agreed by parents so that any changes in children's needs can be identified and acted upon.

All trips, activities and visits are carefully considered and assessed to protect children and manage unnecessary risk. Managing, rather than avoiding, risk allows children to safely participate in a wide range of activities. They are supervised well both inside and outside of the home allowing them to take age-appropriate risks which build their confidence and supports skills development. Good, safe use is made of equipment in the garden, including a large trampoline and adapted swings. Routine night time monitoring of children has reduced and is now subject to an assessment of need. This protects children's rights to privacy and dignity.

Children are protected by the vetting of visitors to the home. A visitors' book is signed to keep a record of those entering the premises. Recruitment records have traditionally been maintained in the organisation's central office. The home's summary of these vetting and recruitment checks for staff contains some gaps in the information required. Consequently, it is not possible for the Registered Manager to evidence proper oversight of records which contribute to ensuring the fitness of workers in the home.

Staff are trained in the use of physical restraint, should it be needed to protect children from serious harm to themselves or others. Children's behaviour is managed well, typically using guidance, distraction, modelling and praise. These techniques avoid the need to use restraint or sanctions to control behaviour and contribute to children feeling safe and valued in this environment.

Regular health and safety checks protect children's welfare. Risk assessments are in place and equipment such as hoists and lifts are regularly serviced to make sure they are in good working order. Water temperatures are checked and all taps have temperature restrictors fitted to avoid children being scolded. A fire risk assessment is in place as well as early warning fire detection systems. External doors to the building open automatically in the event of a fire and extinguishers and fire blankets are available to ensure the safety of children. Regular fire drills and fire alarm tests also take place. However, a locked gate in the garden fence, which stands between one exit from the building and the assembly point, could delay evacuation in the event of a fire. Regular checks are made to electrical appliances and gas installations to make sure these are safe and do not pose a threat to children.

All staff receive training in first aid and are qualified first aiders so that each child has someone close by at all times who can provide a quick response to medical emergencies.

Safeguarding of children is robust. All staff receive regular formal training in this respect and understand who they should contact and what to do in the event of a child protection issue. Suitable safeguarding policies are in place and followed. Records show that children do not go missing from this home. Taking into account children's needs and vulnerabilities, to safeguard them the front door is kept locked. However, all staff can open the door on request should this be appropriate. This arrangement has been agreed by children's placing authorities and their parents if appropriate.

Leadership and management

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

Children thrive in an environment that is well managed by a confident and experienced Registered Manager. The recent secondment of an experienced deputy manager from a similar service, and the sharing of good practice, has had a significant impact on developing the service. Managers have the support of a dedicated and enthusiastic staff team. The needs of the children, and their families,

is at the core of the services provided. All attempts are made to meet the children's diverse range of needs to enable them to make the most of their stay at the home.

A development plan is in place and the manager and senior staff have a commitment to continuous practice improvement to benefit service users. Regular monitoring of the service by the manager promotes the welfare of children and identifies progress made and development needed. Summaries of monitoring reports are provided to Ofsted contributing to proper oversight of the services provided. Parents are actively involved in discussions about the service and planning for their children. Information sharing sessions have been held for parents to update them about the improvements to the communication systems used with their children. This allows progress to be shared and maximises the potential for children to develop skills.

Children benefit from a staff team who are well trained and equipped to meet their needs. All are either qualified or undertaking the relevant qualification. All mandatory training for staff is up-to-date and they can readily access specialist training to further develop their proficiency. Working in partnership with other agencies has provided staff with additional training in autism and communication methods. Support for staff is provided in several ways, including team meetings, annual appraisals and personal development plans. Although staff report that they receive the support they need and guidance is readily available, there are some shortfalls in the provision of formal supervision to some staff. This undermines what is otherwise a robust support system for ensuring staff fulfil their roles and provide a high quality service to children.

The one requirement and the recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed to further improve the service offered to children. The home's Statement of Purpose now includes the details required so that full information is available to potential clients and their families. Action has been taken to improve normal movement within and from the home: additional communication systems now make it easier for children to access the garden area when the door to it needs to be kept closed. There is now a written policy signed by the staff which sets out the specific measures used to monitor children at night. This supports children's rights to privacy and avoids unnecessary intrusion. Information provided to the home in respect of agency staff now includes details of their qualifications, training and experience. This allows managers to confirm that all those working at the home have the necessary skills to meet the needs of the children. Agency staff are now required to complete an assessment of their shift, to help managers determine if they are competent and receiving the levels of support and guidance needed.

Registered provider visits to the home are completed to assure the quality of the service and further safeguard children and young people. Reports of these visits are provided to Ofsted in a timely manner.

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.