

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Gavin Thomas
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

This large Victorian house is within close proximity to a nearby town with good rail links and other local amenities. This is a six bedded home which is owned and managed by a local authority. The service is registered for 6 boys or girls from the ages of 6 to under 14 at any one time. The service usually accommodates up to five boys or girls and the sixth admission would be at the manager's discretion. This ensures a balance in meeting the needs of existing young people and those referred to the service for potential placements.

Young people enjoy taking part in a wide range of activities in a homely environment. They are also active in taking part in community-based activities and projects.

This home provides medium to long-term care. The principles and values of this service are set out in the Statement of Purpose.

Five children were present during this inspection.

Summary

This was an unannounced key inspection, during which time all key national minimum standards under the Every Child Matters outcomes were assessed. The overall judgement of this service is outstanding for a variety of reasons. Management and staff are good at advocating, challenging and addressing the children's needs. For instance, they work very closely with health, education and social work professionals. This ensures that children's needs are not just understood but met appropriately.

Four surveys were completed by external professionals for the purpose of this inspection. These gave very clear indications about the quality of the service and positive outcomes for young people. Two of the many goals that staff aim to ensure are, in their words, 'to prepare children for a happier future' and 'making a positive difference to the lives of children'. These comments are echoed by one external professional who said 'Staff manage to give a number of children a positive experience and enable them to learn to trust'.

Staff are often faced with challenges within the team and complex situations involving the children. However, they support each other through these situations with strength and determination. Staff and the children can also rely on the strength of the management team who are always reviewing and developing practice.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the previous inspection, the Registered Manager was asked to improve some of the records for behavioural management under the outcome 'staying safe'. These have been done. As a result, the duration of all physical interventions with young people is much clearer. Behavioural management records also includes a child's right to be examined by a registered nurse or medical practitioner within 24 hours following an incident of physical intervention.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The children are fully supported to select healthy foods. These are reflected in menus which include children's choices. Menus show that children eat a wide range of foods including fruits, vegetables and fresh produce. There are opportunities for children to participate in preparing meals. This widens children's knowledge not only about how to cook meals but also to learn about safety in the kitchen. Meals are sociable times, whereby staff and children engage in light-hearted conversations. Staff say that children enjoy eating out on occasions. These arrangements are sometimes 'ad hoc' and part of every day life in the home.

Outstanding work is undertaken in addressing the children's holistic health needs. The children benefit from this work because management and staff are persistent in accessing the relevant services. The quality of children's health records is excellent. These records include details of correspondence, outcomes of assessments and appointments. Relevant information is disseminated through care planning processes. This means that children can rely on the benefits of having their health needs addressed in this way. The therapeutic ethos enables staff to understand children's emotional well-being more effectively. These aspects of health care are supported sensitively and with great empathy. The children benefit from these processes because care planning takes into account the types of support each child requires at vulnerable times of the day.

Overall arrangements for the management of medications are effective. The storage facilities for medications are well managed and closely supervised. This ensures that medication stocks are appropriate in accordance with children's prescriptions. Management are good at obtaining parental consent for children to receive emergency treatments including dental care. Staff are very meticulous when completing medication administration records. This ensures that all medication given, prescribed or homely remedies are accounted for.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The children's privacy and dignity is promoted well by staff. This is done by giving children maximum privacy when assisting them with personal care. The children's wishes and feelings are also considered when supporting them with personal care tasks. For example, children are asked about the types of support they require before staff intervene. There are clear policies and procedures in place on intimate care and confidentiality. These are known to all staff. A telephone is available for children to use in private and in line with agreed contact arrangements. All of the children enjoy the benefits of their personal space by having their own bedrooms.

Any concerns or complaints are taken seriously including those raised by the children. There are different approaches to addressing complaints. This includes the children having access to professionals outside of the home. The complaints procedure and forms are easily accessible to the children. This means that they don't have to always speak to staff at first instance. The numbers of complaints received by the home are very low and no complaints have been received for some time.

Robust systems are in place for safeguarding and protecting the children. The children are safe because the implementation of safeguarding policies are effective in practice. Staff achieve this because they are knowledgeable about the children's vulnerability and how this could

impact on their safety. In addition, vigorous management monitoring processes are place. This embraces the holistic approach to providing a safe and nurturing environment for the children. Staff are guided through regular training and development on keeping children safe. Lines of communication with other agencies and professionals are also effective because management demonstrate their determination to ensure the children's safety at all times. Examples of these practices are illustrated in records which are of an exceptional quality.

Innovative approaches are used to address issues of bullying with the children. For example, this was part of a recent theme event in the home. The children benefit from these initiatives because themed events are adapted to their age and abilities to comprehension. Visual displays are also colourful and interactive. The children are very playful with each other but staff are quick to intervene if behaviours are likely to escalate. Staff say that children are reminded about expressions and use of words which may be offensive to others. This is an example of how children are supported to understand the value of relationships and friendships with others.

Absence from the home without authority is an extremely rare occurrence. There has been one 'attempted' incident in recent months. This incident was managed appropriately and children are reminded about their safety and protection through various forums.

Notifiable incidents are rare but when they do occur, management intervention is effective. This ensures that all relevant parties are informed and children's safety is a priority. All incidents deemed as 'serious' are clearly documented, with details of action taken. These well-managed processes enhance the children's safety in a range of situations including settings outside the home.

The children are provided with outstanding support strategies to help them manager their behaviour and emotions. This is successful because staff are consistently supported to help them understand possible reasons as to why children might exhibit different behaviours. The types of support the children receive are carefully planned and monitored for effectiveness. The outcomes for children are evaluative and at most times, very positive. Staff say that the needs of the children are often unpredictable and challenging. However, they also enjoy sharing the benefits with the children as they respond to the boundaries and care planning strategies in place. Sanctions are used to help children understand the consequences of unacceptable behaviours. These are monitored by management to ensure that sanctions imposed are relevant to the situation although two entries remain incomplete. All staff receive regular training in the use of physical intervention. Where possible, this is avoided and children's behaviours are redirected. This also ensures more positive outcomes and helps children to reflect on what is acceptable or not.

Vigorous visual checks are carried out to ensure that the environment is safe for children, staff and visitors. The outcomes are recorded for monitoring purposes. Children are familiar with fire safety procedures because these are carried out at regular intervals including a night-time drill. In addition an up-to-date fire risk assessment is in place which is reviewed periodically by management. Routine health and safety checks are carried out to ensure that appliances and facilities are safe. However, two designated fire doors were propped open. Although this was only done intermittently, these doors are not fitted with closing devices as the other fire doors in the building.

The robustness of the recruitment process helps protect the children from the risk of potential abusers. In addition, regular visitors to the home are vetted to enhance the children's safety. Recruitment records demonstrate the depth of work to ensure the suitability of prospective staff. This includes the verification of suitability references and obtaining Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks prior to new staff taking up employment. Existing staff have their CRB checks renewed every three years. This contributes to the safeguarding protocols in place to keep the children safe.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The children benefit from excellent support both individually and as a group. The key and co worker system is effective in practice. This enables children to develop relationships with adults whom they can trust and rely on to talk about anything that worries them. Staff are good at developing 'safe' relationships with the children. They also know how to approach children sensitively, particularly when children find it difficult or challenging to adjust to different living arrangements. The effect of the therapeutic work undertaken by external professionals with individual children is highly valued. This is because children gradually change over time and begin to enjoy life more as a result of the therapy. Furthermore, the therapeutic way of working with children by staff, is a positive influence on children's lives. Staff who undertaking the Foundation Degree in Therapeutic Childcare speak glowingly about the positive impact this learning is having on their work their children.

The input from management and staff in support of children's education is unquestionable. Management and staff work very closely with education professionals to ensure the best outcomes for the children. When appropriate, staff spend time with children at school to help them settle into these environments. One external professional says that staff are good at communicating and cooperating with regards to children's educational needs. The benefits of extended learning opportunities are fully promoted in a number of exciting ways. The children are active members of the community. They visit the local fire station annually to refresh their memories on keeping safe. They are also keen to promote sustainable development by recycling and plan to grow more of their own vegetables in the future. Camping holidays are popular with the children and they learn about their environment through these holidays. The children are currently planning an international event to celebrate the football world cup.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The children's holistic needs are thoroughly assessed and comprehensive care planning records detail how these needs will be met. A new care planning system has recently been introduced and this process is still evolving. However, existing care planning documents are indicative of the intense work undertaken to plan and meet the children's assessed needs. The children's individual 24 hour management programme includes very specific procedural guidance for supporting the children at crucial times. The detail of these plans contribute to a consistent approach when supporting the children with key routines.

Children's reviews are carried out within the required timescales. Staff say that independent reviewing officers are supportive and are very proactive in engaging the children with their reviews. This includes meetings with the children before and after their reviews. Staff contributions towards children's reviews are significant. This includes the preparation of reports,

attending reviews and providing feedback to the home's management team. The children benefit immensely from work undertaken by management following their reviews. This is because management are extremely committed to ensuring that decisions and recommendations are within the children's best interests.

The support given to children for rebuilding relationships or maintaining contact with families and significant others is exceptional. This is achieved through management and staff advocating the holistic needs of each child with external professionals and partnerships. Children are also offered therapeutic support to help them cope with past experiences and how to cope with current contact arrangements. These support systems are integral to each child's emotional development and attachment needs.

Excellent work is undertaken to support children's admissions and arrangements for leaving the home. Staff work very hard to help children settle on admission. They achieve this because they are skilled and well supported by management in understanding the complexity of children's needs. Staff say that although some children present extreme challenges, children do adjust to boundaries and relationships which makes them feel safe. Extensive work is undertaken for ensuring that the children's plans for leaving the home are suitable and appropriate. In doing so, management are consistent in their approach with other professionals to promote the children's future needs and how these are best met.

There are excellent arrangements in place for consulting with the children. For example, the children are invited and encouraged to attend regular house meetings. Children's views and comments are taken seriously and they are given opportunities to comment on key matters such as food and activities.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

This home is registered to accommodate younger children, therefore it is unlikely that formal plans for leaving care are in place. However, children are given excellent support for preparing to leave the home. This support takes into account children's holistic needs and their abilities to cope with transitions and change. As part of their contribution to the running of the home, children participate in a range of activities such as cooking. These activities are supervised and contributes to the scope for children to learn new skills according to their age and abilities. One professional who completed a survey is of the opinion that more opportunities could be considered for children to learn independence skills. This observation is not dismissed by management who agrees that the older children may benefit from learning new skills as they prepare for leaving the home. However, extensive work is undertaken to help children develop in other ways. For example, children, benefit immensely from the types of support to help them cope with issues relating to loss and separation. This helps children to learn how to build positive relationships and learn how to trust others when they leave the home.

The children enjoy the benefits of an environment which is clean and well kept. The communal areas of the home are spacious. This means that children do not always have to spend time together as one group. The accommodation includes a family room, a soft play room, a lounge, dining room and conservatory. Outdoor space includes a football pitch and an extended garden area fitted with play equipment.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

An up-to-date Statement of Purpose is in place, which has been agreed and signed by an elected member. This document is comprehensive and clearly sets out the aims and objectives of the service. Substantial evidence is available to show how these aims and objectives are implemented in practice. The children's guide is an informative document and not too wordy. It is colourful and provides the children with all the key information they need to know about the home.

The children are supported by a very experienced and qualified staff team. More than 80% of the staff team have achieved the National Vocational Qualification at level 3 in the Caring for Children and Young People or equivalent, including 'hospitality and catering'. In addition, some staff are working towards the Foundation Degree in Therapeutic Childcare. The mix of qualifications within the staff team is excellent. This helps staff to develop the skills they require to meet the children's needs. Very clear lines of accountability are in place including suitable arrangements for staff deputising in the absence of the Registered Manager. In-house staff management procedures are effective in practice. However, some staff indicated their dissatisfaction regarding the length of time being taken by the local authority to provide an outcome following a recent staffing review.

Staff speak with confidence and sound knowledge about their roles and responsibilities. They are given proper time to plan their shifts for the benefit of the children. The children did not engage in lengthy conversations with the inspector. However, observations of different activities, show that the children enjoy spending time with the staff. Staff demonstrate very caring attitudes and a genuine commitment to the children. This is also the view of one external professional who says that staff are committed to the welfare of the children. The staff are also led by a very experienced and qualified management team.

Staffing levels are maintained in accordance with the staffing policy. At times, the staffing levels increase to accommodate the needs of individual children. The gender balance within the staff team is very good. This means that children benefit from a good mix of male and female role models. Staff rotas are designed to ensure continuity of care. This is an excellent example of how the children's 24 hour management programmes are implemented to avoid unnecessary disruption to the way in which children are cared for.

Staff and management have a very clear understanding about the needs of the children they care for. They also keep abreast of professional knowledge and expertise by attending undertaking relevant training. Staff are also supported through a well-established supervision and appraisal system.

Robust quality assurance and monitoring systems are in place. These systems take into account a wide range of practices and outcomes for children and staff. The annual development plan incorporates a raft of objectives and targets. These are clearly linked to legislative guidance and practice. The children benefit immensely from these systems because changes and developments are made in response to how their needs are being met. Reports for visits conducted under Regulation 33 verifies the key strengths of the service such as record keeping.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Excellent work is undertaken by management and staff to ensure that children's rights and assessed needs are considered by everyone involved with their care. The children thrive in an environment which is clearly focused on their needs. Practices are underpinned by written policies and staff's determination to give the children a real sense of 'belonging', 'acceptance' and 'inclusion'. As a result, the children enjoy taking part in a variety of community based projects. The children are members of organised groups and clubs, and activities closer to home, for example, fund raising for charity and participation in themed nights.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- ensure that all sections of the sanctions record are completed at all times (NMS 22.10)
- ensure that designated fire doors are fitted with suitable closing devices and not propped open (NMS 26.1)
- ensure that staff receive an outcome of a recent review within a timely fashion. (NMS 29)