

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Lynn O'Driscoll
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This home offers care and accommodation, for up to four young people, of both genders, who have severe learning disabilities compounded by significant challenging behaviours, autism and complex medical conditions.

It is part of a wider private organisation that offers transition from this home to adult residential provision registered with the Care Quality Commission. It also runs an independent 52 week school. It is co-educational and caters for pupils and students from the age of 7 to 19 years old.

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**.

Children and young people are very safe and secure and enjoy living at this home. They benefit from sound relationships with the staff and highly personalised care which meets their unique and extremely complex needs. Given their starting points they are making excellent progress. Examples include improved: self-care, eating and sleeping patterns, communication and mobility. The home's Statement of Purpose states that the primary aim of this service is to reduce challenging behaviours and to teach socially valued skills. All the children and young people are making outstanding progress in these areas and educationally.

This home provides a highly responsive, flexible and needs led service. Children and young people, their parents, social workers and other stakeholders are all consistently very positive about the quality of care provided.

The manager is very clear about the strengths of this service and the key areas for development and can demonstrate continuous improvement.

There are two breaches of regulation arising from this inspection and two recommendations. These are to: ensure more robust monitoring; consistently undertake water temperature and fire checks at the required frequencies; strengthen

the home's written development plan; and gain written agreements from placing authorities on the locking of doors.

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
23 (2001)	ensure all parts of the home to which children have access are so far as is reasonably practicable free from hazards to their safety; with particular regard to: undertaking water temperature and fire safety checks at the required frequencies (Regulation 23(a))	10/06/2013
34 (2001)	ensure an effective system is in place for monitoring all the matters set out in Schedule 6. (Regulation 34(1)(a))	30/06/2013

Recommendations

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

- demonstrate that physical restrictions on normal movement within or from the home are not used unless this is necessary to safeguard children and promote their welfare and development and such measures, namely the locking of doors, are agreed by the responsible authorities (NMS 10.4)
- ensure that the home's development plan either identifies any planned changes in the operation or resources of the service or confirms the continuation of the home's current operation and resource. (NMS 15.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

All the children and young people are benefiting from a long-term stable placements and excellent relationships with staff.

They have 100 per cent school attendance and are therefore constantly making excellent progress. This includes a young person who, prior to this placement, was not previously attending or engaging in education. Initially he would hide, yet at his last review staff showed a video of him sitting at a desk happily doing school work. This was a particularly proud moment for his parents. Some have progressed to the

national curriculum from especially low starting points. Significant individual achievements include, telling the time and learning patience and sharing. One child has joined the local library and particularly enjoys bedtime reading to staff. This has greatly improved his speech and vocabulary and he loves his key ring on which he adds the new words he has learned.

Other exceptional outcomes achieved, as a direct result of living at this home, include significantly improved dental hygiene, mobility, sleeping and eating patterns and appropriate weight loss. They are all fit and healthy and the need for medication has also reduced. None of the children and young people smoke, drink alcohol or take illicit drugs. Moreover, there are no offending behaviours and no incidents of children and young people going missing. This is particularly outstanding given some of their histories.

All the children and young people enjoy a wide range of stimulating activities enabling them to build positive relationships with their peers and develop their social skills. These include sponsored events for charity and local conservation projects which increase their sense of belonging. Firm favourites include swimming, trampolining, horse-riding and a sensory play centre. Recent trips they have thoroughly enjoyed include pantomimes, a monster truck show, a bird sanctuary, a safari park and an aquarium. One child was very proud of his ability to read the clues for the first time at their recent Easter egg hunt.

All the children and young people enjoy regular contact with their families; this maintains these important attachments and their unique identities.

The daily life of this home provides age and ability appropriate opportunities for all the children and young people to develop social and independent skills. This maximises their individual potential, with some excellent outcomes. Self-care skills have demonstrably improved. They also really enjoy cooking and baking. This is an outstanding achievement given that they would previously not be deemed safe in a kitchen, even under close supervision.

Quality of care

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

All the children and young people benefit from highly personalised care in line with their up-to-date, comprehensive and particularly child-friendly placement plans. These provide very clear and detailed guidelines for staff on exactly how to support each child to ensure his safety and happiness at all times. Consequently, their unique and highly complex needs are extremely well met.

One parent wrote, 'The staff are friendly and professional and demonstrate a good understanding of my child's needs. A social worker said, 'This is an excellent service. The staff have an excellent knowledge of autism and severe learning difficulties which enables individualised care planning of a high quality. They have a real passion for what they do.'

Current examples of individualised care include: a mealtime programme to try to break a long standing regurgitation habit; the introduction of regular healthy snacks to avoid particular anxieties at meal times; a specific smaller staff team to work with one child; a flexible school timetable to enable a young person to prepare and arrive more relaxed and able to engage. These creative and frequently reviewed practices have resulted in a significant reduction in challenging behaviours.

Children and young people's views, wishes and feelings are central to the day-to-day running of the home. This reinforces the fact that their opinions matter and are valued, which in turn increases their self-esteem and confidence. Their parents are also actively involved in care planning and their views and wishes about their child's care are respected and positively acted upon. The detailed and creatively presented information for reviews also ensures they gain a real insight into their child's continued outstanding progress.

The staff are strong and highly successful advocates for the children and young people. This has ensured, for example, that all the children and young people benefit from regular quality time with their families and receive the required medical interventions to improve their health and well-being.

Independent reviewing officers confirm very good working relationships with the staff at this home and say they provide excellent information to inform statutory reviews. They are highly satisfied with the quality of care provided and the consequent continual progression all the children and young people are making. Comments include, 'He is settled, happy and thriving in this placement' and, 'This home provides an individual and flexible service to meet his needs. He is pushed to reach his potential and they are always looking at creative ways to engage him.'

Key strengths highlighted by social workers include the professionalism of the staff and the high quality activities provided. Individual interests and talents are actively encouraged and supported by the staff which increases children and young people's competence and confidence. One young person, who had never previously eaten out in public, now loves going to cafés and restaurants. He especially enjoys spicy foods.

Education is actively promoted by the staff. The company's school, where all the children and young people attend every day, was recently inspected by Ofsted and judged to be outstanding in all areas. The inspectors highlighted the excellent opportunities for involvement in the local community. This includes one child who studies and plays successfully with pupils in a local mainstream primary school one afternoon a week. This is significantly increasing his social interactions.

Staff at the home and the teachers work together throughout the school day so there is an excellent understanding of how each child learns. The education inspectors also noted, 'The staff demonstrate remarkable patience and resilience.' The curriculum is specifically and suitably tailored to meet the individual needs of each child. This includes developing appropriate and specific strategies to enable, for example, a child with intolerance to noise to learn and progress at an exceptional

pace.

Good health and well-being is actively promoted at this home. Children and young people and the staff particularly benefit from the expertise of a qualified nurse, employed by the company, who regularly visits the home. Consequently, she has secured a very good relationship with all the children and young people and has an excellent understanding of their individual health needs.

Another particular strength is the outstanding range of appropriate specialist services staff access for young people in a timely manner to meet their unique and highly complex physical, medical and behavioural needs. Company resources include a qualified speech and language therapist and specifically trained behaviour support workers.

There are robust procedures in place to ensure the safe administration of first aid and medication. Only experienced and fully trained staff administer medication. Rotas are also carefully organised to ensure there is always at least one qualified first aider on duty at all times to ensure an effective response to any minor injuries.

This home is tastefully decorated and furnished. The children and young people love their bedrooms which are personalised. One child is especially proud of his new desk. The home benefits from a dedicated and long standing housekeeper who has established excellent relationships with all the children and young people. She takes great pride in her role in ensuring a very clean and homely atmosphere at all times and, the provision of homemade, nutritious meals. The company's maintenance team also ensure any minor repairs are efficiently addressed.

One social worker commented, 'It is nice that the home looks like a normal home and doesn't stand out like a children's home. The bedrooms meet individual needs.'

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people are safe at this home and feel comfortable enough to express their innermost feelings. They are demonstrably more calm and happy. They are also more self-aware and are developing effective strategies to control their anxieties. As communication has improved, and therefore their ability to make more informed choices, frustrations and aggressive incidents have lessened.

Good behaviour, manners and effort is constantly positively reinforced, which has the desired effect. This home ensures high staffing ratios and therefore close supervision at all times. The staff also have an excellent knowledge of each child's specific triggers and are extremely competent at diffusing challenging behaviours. This means that there have been no missing from care incidences, allegations of abuse, bullying or sanctions. Restraints have significantly reduced.

All the required safety certificates are in place to evidence a safe and well-maintained

building. Personalised evacuation plans for each child and regular fire drills undertaken at different times of the day and night ensure all the children and young people and staff know exactly what to do in the case of a real fire.

However, records suggest that the majority, but not all, water temperature and fire checks are undertaken at the required frequencies. Although there have been no incidents or negative impacts to date, any lapse has the potential to compromise the health and safety of the children and young people living at the home, the staff who work there and all visitors.

There are well established and highly effective recruitment and selection processes in place to ensure a safe and competent workforce.

Leadership and management

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

This home is well managed by a suitably qualified, highly experienced and child focussed individual. She is contracted to work four days a week but is very flexible in her working patterns to meet the demands of the service.

She ensures that the home is always very well staffed to meet the unique and highly complex needs and personal preferences of all the children and young people. This staff team is stable and strong and passionate about their respective roles and responsibilities. They confirm good support and clear direction including regular team meetings with open and honest debates. This company also provides a confidential counselling service to all employees.

Moreover, this company has a dedicated training officer who ensures an on-going programme of relevant training opportunities. This enables all the staff to continue to develop their knowledge and expertise. They are also actively supported in their career progression.

This home demonstrates a good capacity for continued improvement. This is based on the sustained outstanding progress of all the children and young people from their individual starting points. The Registered Manager has a realistic understanding of the many strengths of the home and the key areas for improvement. A child-focussed development plan is in place to address the latter. This has been shared with the whole staff team so there is a genuine sense of ownership. However, it does not clearly identify any planned changes to the operation or resources in the home. For example, addressing how the three current staff vacancies are covered. Moreover, although there are two deputies at this home it is unclear specifically how the manager's role is covered during her absence one day a week to ensure there is no impact on service delivery.

The four requirements made at the last interim inspection on 7 March 2013 have been satisfactorily addressed. Consequently, restraint records now include all the required information. There is also a more effective system in place to ensure all

staff, complete mandatory courses and required renewals in a timely manner and receive regular supervision and annual appraisals. Moreover, monthly reports of Regulation 33 monitoring visits and six monthly management reports on the quality of care provided in the home, include consultations with parents, social workers and other stakeholders to inform future practice.

The four recommendations made have also been positively acted upon. In response there is now an effective system in place to ensure all unqualified staff are working towards the level three Children and Young People's Workforce Diploma within six months of confirmation of their employment. The Statement of Purpose has also been revised to ensure it accurately describes the current aims, policies and practices of the home and the facilities and other services provided to children and young people and their families. All the children and young people have a personalised meaningful children's guides which meet their particular needs and abilities. Quality assurance processes now include closer scrutiny of restraint records to ensure safe and consistent practices at all times. A risk assessment is now in place in respect to the locking of doors and has been sent to parents for their signed agreement, but not to placing authorities.

New developments since the last inspection include the development of questionnaires for parents and a wide range of stakeholders. These have been specifically designed to gain more qualitative information about the care provided at the home. Previous surveys had an education bias. There is also a new and effective system in place for ensuring individual staff appraisals always include children and young people's views.

Established quality assurance processes include monthly Regulation 33 visits and regular nightly spot checks by the manager. The manager's monthly monitoring, however, is not sufficiently robust as some shortfalls are not identified, in particular the shortfalls in the health and safety checks. Moreover, some of the required information including medication records, staff files, individual supervision sessions and appraisals are not evaluated to inform future practice.

Children and young people's files are in very good order. They are extremely personalised and child centred, and provide very clear and detailed directions about their preferred care. They also provide an accurate and very positive account of their background, progress, achievements and future goals.

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.