

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Lynn O'Driscoll
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Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	24/01/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This local authority home provides a short-break service for up to six children and young people at any given time who have a permanent and substantial learning disability and who may also have additional needs arising from behavioural difficulties.

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 **adequate**.

Children and young people feel safe and secure and 'love' their short breaks within a service that offers good quality care. They enjoy excellent relationships with the staff and benefit from highly personalised care which meets their complex needs. Many are making excellent progress in respect to self-care, eating and sleeping patterns, and behaviours. This impacts very positively on the whole family.

This home provides a highly responsive, flexible and needs led service and parents are very positive about the quality of care provided. They describe it as 'a god send' and 'an absolute life saver'. For some, this 'immeasurable support' has kept families together.

Social workers say the way this service responds in a crisis is a major strength, 'ensuring support is given, as required, over and above the package in place'. This includes, for example, extended stays. However, this is not reflected in the Statement of Purpose. Also, the children's guide does not include the current contact details of Ofsted and the Children's Rights Director for England who can advocate on behalf of individual children and young people.

This home has demonstrated a capacity for sustained improvement based on its performance over the last five years and the significant progress children and young people have made. However, five requirements and four recommendations have arisen from this inspection. This shows a recent decrease in attention to detail. This also suggests current monitoring processes are not sufficiently robust, including

informing Ofsted of significant events. Some shortfalls potentially compromise the safety of children and young people. This includes delays in some staff completing refresher training courses and not consistently undertaking fire safety checks at the required frequencies. Others relate to the lack of regular consultations with stakeholders and evidencing that the views of children and young people are acted upon. Moreover, not all staff are receiving regular supervision or timely annual appraisals which take into account children and young people's views.

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
32 (2001)	ensure adequate precautions are taken against the risk of fire, including documentary evidence that fire safety checks are consistently undertaken at the required frequencies (Regulation 32)	13/08/2012
27 (2001)	ensure all staff receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal of their work (Regulation 27(4)(a))	30/09/2012
5 (2001)	revise the Statement of Purpose to include the experience of the staff team and the provision of extended stays, and revise the children's guide to include the contact details of Ofsted and the Children's Director for England (Regulation 5)	30/09/2012
30 (2001)	ensure Ofsted is notified of all significant events (Regulation 30, Schedule 5)	31/08/2012
34 (2001)	ensure six-monthly Regulation 34 reports include the outcomes of consultations with parents and social workers. (Regulation 34(3))	30/09/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure there is clear documentary evidence that consultations with children and young people are positively acted upon and when this is not possible they are helped to understand why (NMS 1.2)
- demonstrate that the views of young people's families, social workers and independent reviewing officers are regularly sought on the quality of care provided in the home. (NMS 1.4)
- ensure all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at

least annually and this appraisal takes into account any views of the children and young people the service is providing for (NMS 19.6)

- ensure all the matters identified in Schedule 6 are closely scrutinised and immediate action is taken to address any issues identified following Regulation 33 and 34 monitoring. (NMS 21.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people love their short breaks at this home. Comments include: 'staff look after me really really well. They include me in everything. They take the time to understand me and my family's needs. We do lots of exciting activities. I love coming to stay' and, 'I am well looked after. Staff listen to me and always try to do the best for me. They make good food all the time and the beds are made neatly. I like being with my friends and taking part in the activities.'

They benefit from highly individualised care which meets their unique needs and personal preferences. An outstanding range of appropriate specialist services are also provided in a timely manner to meet their specific and highly complex needs.

They particularly love taking part in an excellent range of highly challenging and stimulating activities on offer both in the home and the community. This significantly increases their social interactions and increases their self-esteem and confidence. Recent examples include, camping, archery, rock climbing and canoeing. Many also take part in a local football team which gives them a genuine sense of belonging.

School attendance is excellent and they are making outstanding progress especially given their starting points. Some young people are now making genuine choices in the college they wish to attend.

100 per cent of the children and young people accessing this service do not smoke, drink alcohol or take illicit drugs. Significantly, challenging behaviours have also noticeably decreased.

The daily life within this home enables all young people to develop the practical and social skills needed for future successful independent living. This maximises their individual potentials, with some excellent outcomes. Examples include, significantly improved toileting, eating and sleeping patterns and competence and confidence in using public transport on their own. The vast majority are very involved in gardening and have successfully grown fruit, vegetables and flowers from seed. One young person said, 'it's good here. I like gardening with staff. I have grown some cucumbers, two huge courgettes and I have eaten one of my raspberries. It was good.'

Quality of care

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

Children and young people benefit from highly personalised care in line with their short break plans. Their complex needs are well met and they enjoy particularly positive relationships with their peers and the staff. Consequently, although they all know how to make a complaint, the need has never arisen.

A parent said: 'staff are really good and understand my son's needs. In fact, they are coping better than the school. He has been coming for nine months now and I cannot find any fault. I thought no-one could look after him as well as me but I've been proved wrong. The communication with us is spot on. We are very pleased.'

Children and young people's views, wishes and feelings are central to the day-to-day running of the home. They all exercise genuine choice in, for example, the meals they eat, the activities they participate in and the bedrooms they prefer to sleep in. Children and young people also influence the development of the service. This includes the recruitment and selection of staff. They are given full autonomy to ask their own highly relevant and challenging questions. Examples include, 'if I couldn't sleep at night time and I got up at 11pm, would you let me watch the television?' and, 'would you give me my friends mobile numbers who stay here?'

Although there is very clear evidence of different forms of consultation opportunities for children and young people, there is limited evidence that they have been positively acted upon or, if this is not possible, they are helped to understand why.

Moreover, there is limited documentary evidence of regular consultations with parents, social workers and independent reviewing officers on the quality of care provided. This is unfortunate because the feedback that is received is extremely complimentary. For example, comments from parents include: 'I love this service. It is one in a million. The staff and the help they provide is fantastic. I can spend quality time with my other children knowing my son will be looked after 110%. He loves coming here' and, 'this service is excellent and our son loves coming here. All the staff are lovely and brilliant with parents.'

Staff have high aspirations for the young people and actively challenge barriers to ensure their full participation in the local community. This includes access to a full range of stimulating activities, in spite of their disabilities, which might not otherwise be available to them. Staff also successfully support individuals in school to maintain their school place and advocate on behalf of young people to attend the college of their choice. All achievements are celebrated and rewarded, which increases their feelings of self-worth.

Parents are fully involved in care planning. They also retain the main responsibility for ensuring timely health checks and arranging routine health appointments, but staff always keep in very regular communication over any health matters. Staff are very knowledgeable about the specific and diverse health needs of the young people they look after and comprehensive, individualised and up-to-date health plans are in place. There are also robust and effective procedures to ensure the safe

administration of medication. Moreover, staff cater well for the different dietary needs of children and young people. These include food intolerances, religious and cultural requirements and specific preferences.

Staff work exceptionally proactively and effectively with a number of other relevant agencies and professionals to secure some outstanding outcomes for young people. This includes 'excellent communication' between this home and all the schools the young people attend. Social workers say, 'they are resourceful and look at creative ways to manage quite challenging behaviours.'

This service is a purpose-built bungalow which is appropriately adapted and equipped to meet the specific and diverse needs of the children and young people who stay. Young people like their personalised bedrooms and confirm that, 'the beds are really comfy'. They describe the bathrooms as, 'cool, with a lift in the bath and a walk in shower, which is ace.'

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people feel safe and are very relaxed and comfortable during their short breaks. Parents also confirm, 'staff are caring and compassionate and so when I drop my son off I have complete peace of mind that he is cared for exceptionally well. This service is priceless for us.'

Young people enjoy exceptionally sound relationships with the staff. Good behaviour and effort is rewarded and is having the desired effect. Parent confirm: 'since coming here our son has calmed considerably and we have had no incidents of aggression since December. This means he can now also take part and is enjoying other community activities' and, 'our son has severe autism and is highly challenging, yet when he comes here he has a calmness.'

Staff have a very good knowledge of the children and young people, so they are able to recognise potential triggers and successfully diffuse challenging behaviours. Consequently, restraints are rare. A social worker described a young person accessing this service with significantly complex needs who initially could not tolerate being near any other people. This staff team has worked very hard to establish good sleeping patterns and daily routines and now he enjoys group trips in the van and happily eats with the other young people. This has a hugely positive impact on family life.

All the staff are trained in safeguarding to ensure they respond appropriately in the event of any disclosures of abuse. However, some have not completed a refresher course in a timely manner. This means they may not be fully up to date with current best practice.

There is very careful matching of groups of children and young people to ensure compatibility. Good staffing ratios also ensure close monitoring and supervision in

line with individual risk assessments. This means this service is highly effective in preventing incidents of bullying and children and young people going missing. Accidents are also rare. However, not all staff have completed first aid refresher courses to ensure safe practices.

All the required safety certificates are in place to evidence a safe and well maintained building. Specialist equipment is also regularly serviced to ensure it remains in good working order. However, fire safety processes are not sufficiently robust in that internal fire safety checks are not consistently undertaken at the required frequencies. This is despite being identified as a shortfall following two Regulation 33 visits.

There are well-established and effective recruitment and selection processes in place to ensure a safe and competent workforce. These include the renewal of criminal record checks every three years. Staff files are held and maintained centrally and have recently been audited to ensure they all include the legally required information.

Leadership and management

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

This home is adequately resourced to meet the needs of the children and young people having short breaks.

The current Statement of Purpose includes the aims and objectives of this service and the facilities on offer. However, it does not describe the flexibility this service provides, for example, extended stays. It also does not detail the vast experience of the staff team. The children's guide is in an appropriate pictorial format, but some of the information is out of date. For example, it does not include the current contact details of Ofsted and the Children's Rights Director. This means children and young people do not have direct access should the need arise.

No requirements or recommendations were made at the last inspection on 24 January 2012. The manager is very clear about the many strengths of the service and a rather superficial development plan is in place to ensure continued improvements. It particularly recognises the need to increase consultation opportunities to stakeholders. For example, six-monthly reports on the quality of care provided at the home in consultation with children and young people are forwarded to Ofsted. However, these do not include the views of parents and social workers.

Staff confirm monthly team meetings with open and honest debates. They also confirm that the managers are very approachable and accessible for ongoing advice, guidance and support. However, some staff are not receiving regular formal supervision and timely annual appraisals which take into account any views of the children and young people the service is providing for.

Young people are looked after by a highly competent staff team who have a wide

range of skills and experience. Consequently, this home is highly responsive to individual needs. They have also established excellent working relationships with other agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children and young people who access this service. Social workers describe the staff team as: 'extremely helpful, flexible and resilient with a vast amount of experience who are prepared to work above and beyond their remit' and, 'the commitment of the staff is second to none. Their specialist knowledge and views of the young people always contribute to the decision making in children in need and safeguarding arenas'.

Established monitoring systems are in place, but they are not sufficiently robust in that shortfalls are not identified and efficiently addressed. For example, Ofsted is not always notified of significant events. This includes children and young people requiring hospital treatment.

Children's files are in good order. These 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* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.