

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 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 **good**.

Children and young people are relaxed, safe and secure and 'really love' their short breaks at this home. They enjoy excellent relationships with the staff and benefit from highly personalised care which meets their unique and complex needs. Consequently, they are making exceptional progress especially in developing their independence skills and boosting their confidence and self-esteem by accessing a wide range of stimulating and challenging activities.

Parents are highly appreciative of this particularly responsive, flexible and needs led service. This has a direct impact of ensuring families successfully stay together and long term foster care placements are sustained.

Managers are clear about the many strengths of this service and the key areas for development. Appropriate development plans are in place to address the latter.

Four requirements and three recommendations have been made at this inspection. These relate to ensuring that: all the required documents are on children and young people's files; the admission and discharge register and medication records are satisfactorily maintained; the views of social workers, independent reviewing officers and other professionals are regularly ascertained about the quality of care provided in the home; staff receive regular formal supervision; and, their appraisals include the views of the children and young people they care for. A key issue to be addressed is to ensure timely transitions for young people to adult provision.

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
29 (2001)	ensure that the admissions and discharge register includes all the required particulars and is satisfactorily maintained (Regulation 29, Schedule 4)	31/08/2013
4 (2001)	ensure that the children's home is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose (Regulation 4(6))	31/10/2013
27 (2001)	ensure that all staff receive appropriate supervision and appraisal (Regulation 27(4)(a))	31/08/2013
28 (2001)	ensure children and young people's files include all the particulars specified in Schedule 3 and in particular: a copy of any statement of special educational needs and school reports. (Regulation 28, Schedule 3(12) and (16))	30/09/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure the views of social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers are sought regularly on the quality of care provided in the home (NMS 1.4)
- ensure there is a written record of all medication, treatment and first aid given to children and young people (NMS 6.15)
- ensure the staff appraisal system takes into account any views of the children and young people the service is providing for. (NMS 19.6)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Children and young people love their short breaks at this home and the opportunity to establish positive relationships with their peers. This service actively enables them to feel sufficiently comfortable and confident enough to widen their horizons and have positive experiences not previously accessible to them. Consequently, many are overcoming significant difficulties with transitions and are now enjoying a excellent range of stimulating activities and trips. For example, in August 2013, a number of

young people are taking part in a three day certificated out-of-bounds experience. Activities include, raft building, go karting and rock climbing. Another young person particularly enjoys archery and many are in a local football team. These opportunities significantly increase their social interactions and boost their self-esteem and confidence.

During these short stays children and young people have demonstrably improved their sleeping and eating patterns, personal hygiene and toileting which in turn increases their self-confidence. Significant challenging behaviours including aggression and self-injury have noticeably improved and parents are astounded by the positive changes in their children. One young person has recently tolerated going to the barbers and sitting still to have his hair cut. This is outstanding progress given his starting point.

Children and young people love receiving public recognition of their achievements and efforts. This significantly raises their self-esteem and gives parents a huge sense of pride.

Children and young people also have the opportunity to try a wide range of new foods. Previously one young person would only tolerate beige coloured foods which had to be separated on the plate. Recently he made and ate his own pizza which is significant progress.

None of the children and young people smoke, drink alcohol, take illicit drugs or commit offences. Their school attendance is excellent. Consequently, they are making outstanding progress.

One parent highlighted, 'The staff are very keen to promote independence and self-help for all the youngsters staying.' Consequently, many are developing excellent listening and other social skills and they are all consistently developing their independence skills. They are noticeably polite and well-mannered and caring and sensitive to other children and young people's specific needs.

Children and young people regularly have the opportunity to help in the kitchen, which for some is a new and very exciting experience. They particularly enjoy the opportunity to plan menus, shop for food, cook and bake.

The established gardening club remains a firm favourite. Young people grow fruit, vegetables and flowers and produce beautiful hanging baskets for sale. One young person said, 'I love to garden. It makes me very calm and happy.'

Children and young people are also given opportunities to consider the needs of others through active involvement in charitable events. They are currently planning a 'world disco' to raise funds for an orphanage in Uganda. One young person ran a stall at the recent garden party held at the home. She really enjoyed the autonomy and was rightly very proud of her achievements. She said, 'One member of staff was very kind to me. She won a men's shower set so she gave it to me for my dad because she is a lady.'

Some young people are developing excellent computer skills and are sharing their expertise with their peers and staff. Their art work is also prominently displayed in the home providing them with a genuine sense of belonging.

Comments from parents include, 'We love it. The staff are lovely and the facilities are fantastic. It provides a much needed respite for ourselves and our daughter who loves coming here and has come on in leaps and bounds since starting' and, 'This home does an amazing job, caring for a wide range of different children. The reassurance we, as parents, feel when our child stays is priceless and it gives us the opportunity to relax and recharge knowing that our daughter is safe and very happy with friends and staff, having a ball and just being able to hang out with friends as any teenager should be able to do. It is far more than just a respite home, it is somewhere my daughter looks forward to going to and offers her a social life along with all the necessary care she requires. I really don't know what we would have done without it'.

Quality of care

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

Children and young people who access this short break service benefit from highly individualised care which meets their unique needs and personal preferences. This includes the timely provision of an outstanding range of appropriate specialist services to meet some very specific and highly complex needs.

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. They also have the opportunity to negotiate any sanctions imposed. Moreover, they 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 and are fully involved in the final decision. These established practices clearly demonstrate that their views and opinions are genuinely valued.

Excellent relationships are firmly established with parents who confirm that they are fully involved in care planning and their views are always listened to and fully respected. This ensures consistency in the care that is given to the children and young people at home and during their short stays. Comments from parents include, 'We asked to change something on my daughters care plan and the staff were so helpful and understanding and welcomed the change', 'The staff are always happy to hear from parents and to share how my child is when she is visiting', 'The staff always take into account our personal views about the type of care our daughter gets' and, 'Staff are always very approachable and welcome chats about our child. They always seem to have time for us as parents.'

Staff actively support parents in attending, often numerous health appointments, given their children's highly complex needs. The staff are strong and effective

advocates. For example: being instrumental in ensuring a child received a clear diagnosis and therefore the most appropriate treatments; and, ensuring a family were provided with adaptations at home enabling a young person to have her own bedroom.

Staff are very knowledgeable about the specific and diverse health needs of all the children and young people they look after and comprehensive, individualised and up to date health plans are in place. This service also benefits from the expertise of a paediatric nurse who trains and advises staff on how best to meet some particularly complex health needs. There are also robust and effective procedures to ensure the safe administration of medication. The vast majority of medication records are well maintained. However, the appropriate application of a prescribed cream had only been recorded in the daily running sheets and not cross referenced or repeated in the medication records.

Staff cater well for the diverse dietary needs of children and young people. These include food intolerances, religious and cultural requirements and specific preferences.

Sensitive and gradual introductions to this home, at individual children and young people's own pace, ensures a smooth transition and reduces anxieties for them and their families. Consequently, they settle quickly. However, the current organisational structures and practices within this local authority do not ensure young adults always move on to an adult provision in a timely manner. This means this service ceases and they leave education at the same time which can prove to be distressing, especially for those individuals who particularly struggle with transitions. Moreover, the current admission and discharge register does not include all the required information and it is not satisfactorily maintained. This is a breach of the Regulations, but there is no direct negative impact on children and young people.

This is a very flexible needs led service that is appreciated by parents. The vast majority of families would not still be together without this support. A recent thank you card reads, 'Thank you so much for accommodating my son at such short notice and at such a busy time. We know it was a tall order. We enjoyed a well needed break and he had a fab time too. We really do appreciate all your support, kindness and understanding and feel very lucky that our son can come somewhere so wonderful'. Other comments include, 'My child really enjoys his stays. The staff are kind and patient with him and he enjoys many experiences. As a parent I am very happy to leave him at this home. It gives us a much needed rest and time to spend with our other children who can get overlooked when he is around' and, 'The staff are fantastic and helpful. My son enjoys chatting to them and to the other young people. We have no worries leaving him and the respite allows us to spend time with our daughter. Overall it is a wonderful service.'

There is limited documentary evidence of regular consultations with social workers and independent reviewing officers and other professionals on the quality of care provided at this home. This is unfortunate because the feedback received via Ofsted is very complimentary. For example, an independent reviewing officer wrote, 'This

service gives parents a break and gives young people opportunities to get involved in activities they may not be able to do at home. The staff are caring and are flexible to support families.'

Staff have high aspirations for all the children and young people and actively challenge barriers to ensure their full participation in the local community. This includes access to a wide range of stimulating activities, in spite of their disabilities, which might not otherwise be available to them. Individual interests and talents are actively encouraged and supported.

Staff have established excellent links with all the schools the children and young people attend. They also actively support parents with, for example, morning routines to ensure excellent school attendance and with transitions to new schools. A social worker wrote, 'The family have benefitted enormously from your team's input. You stretch your service in the interest of the child and family and in this particular case prevented an out of borough residential school placement.'

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. Children and young people really like their personalised bedrooms which now include televisions. They are also currently enjoying shopping for new toys and equipment which they have chosen for the home. The kitchen has recently been refurbished enabling better accessibility for children and young people.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The children and young people enjoy excellent relationships with the staff, some of whom they have known for many years. Consequently they look forward to their short stays and feel safe and relaxed. They also know they have the opportunity and are trusted to take appropriate risks necessary for their continued development.

Staff have a very good knowledge of the children and young people, so they are able to recognise potential triggers and successfully diffuse some extremely challenging behaviours. Consequently, restraints are rare. Records also demonstrate that the few sanctions imposed are fair and proportionate to the particular misdemeanour.

Comments from parents include, 'This service is really good. These breaks make a big difference to the whole family and I have the peace of knowing he is well looked after. His confidence has boosted and his behaviour has improved. He is less aggressive', 'I am very reassured that the staff will do whatever is necessary to keep my daughter safe and free from danger' and, 'It is a very safe, caring, home from home place that treats each youngster as an individual and I am so relaxed when my daughter stays knowing that she is completely cared for.'

All the staff are trained in safeguarding to ensure they respond appropriately in the event of any disclosures of abuse. They have also established excellent working

relationships with other agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of all the children and young people who access this service.

There is very careful and highly effective matching of groups of children and young people to ensure compatibility. Good staffing ratios also ensures close monitoring and supervision in line with individual risk assessments. This means there are no incidents of bullying or children and young people going missing. This is a particularly excellent outcome for one young person for whom it was previously a daily occurrence. Accidents are also rare.

Seven young people were recently involved in a bullying workshop at the home so they can protect themselves in the community and on-line. One young person said, 'It was useful and fun. After it we had a party buffet to celebrate my birthday.'

All the required safety certificates are in place and fire safety checks undertaken at the required frequencies to evidence a safe and well maintained building. Specialist equipment is also regularly serviced to ensure it remains in good working order. Personalised evacuation plans are in place and regular fire drills undertaken to ensure children and young people and staff know exactly what to do in the event of a real fire.

There are well-established and 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 **adequate**.

This home is suitably resourced to meet the needs of the children and young people having short breaks. A recent increase in staffing levels has enabled children and young people to go out more and to try out a wider range of community activities. Children and young people benefit from being looked after by a balanced team of highly competent and experienced individuals and new staff team who bring innovative ideas and widen the range of skills and experiences. For example, one new member of staff offers a translation service to parents during reviews which is particularly well received and ensures they fully understand and contribute to the discussions and plans for their child.

The Statement of Purpose is regularly reviewed and revised to ensure it always accurately describes the current aims and objectives of this service and the facilities on offer. However, the wording about age range does suggest that it is exceptional for young adults to continue to receive a service. In practice this is more commonplace. The children's guide is personalised to ensure it is a meaningful document for each child. It also includes the contact details of Ofsted, the Children's Rights Director and other independent advocacy services. This ensures children and young people have direct access should the need arise.

Progress has been made in meeting the one recommendation made at the last

interim inspection on 21 March 2013. Children and young people were consulted about the qualities required of the staff which have been reflected in staff appraisals. However, these statements are very generalised, for example, 'They need to be good cooks', 'They need to be funny' and, 'They need to be able to use a computer.' Consequently, this does not necessarily enable all individuals to consider their own strengths and weaknesses and continue to develop their specific practices. Moreover, with the exception of their on-going training needs, most staff have not completed their section of the appraisal form prior to the discussion with their line manager. This means they have not reflected on their own practice and considered how they can personally improve.

Staff confirm monthly team meetings with open and honest debates. They also confirm that the managers are very approachable and accessible for on-going advice, guidance and support. However, mainly due to the long term sickness of a senior, some staff are not receiving regular formal supervision.

Overall, this home demonstrates a good capacity for sustained improvement. This is based on its performance over the last six years and the outstanding progress children and young people continue to make. The manager is very clear about the many strengths of the service and an appropriate development plan is in place to ensure on-going improvements. Suitable monitoring systems are in place and any shortfalls identified are efficiently addressed.

Children and young people's records are securely stored and generally satisfactorily maintained. 'Time away from home' files, in particular, really capture all their achievements during their short stays and are given to young people once they leave the service. However, the information in one health profile is now out of date given the significant progress the young person has made in the last five months. Also, files in respect to young people on extended stays do not include school reports and statements of special educational needs. These are important documents to ensure staff are aware of and actively support individual educational targets.

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.