

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Putnam
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is registered to accommodate six children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home is run by a private company that operates several other homes in the locality. The company has separately registered schools to support the educational needs of children if required.

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 **outstanding**.

This home provides children, who have known considerable disruption, with the experience of a period of stability and continuity in their lives. Children make exceptional progress that is attributable to the care they receive.

An enthusiastic and motivated group of staff are effectively led by an experienced and dynamic Registered Manager. As a team they provide an excellent quality of care that positively impacts upon the outcomes for each individual child. Staff balance the need for children to have choices with their need for clear boundaries that help them feel safe. The life experiences of children are extended through extensive play within the home and interesting and new activities in the wider community. Children flourish as a result.

Without exception, children are positive about the care they receive and their relationships with staff. Children and young people feel safe and are safe.

The Registered Manager rigorously monitors the quality of care with a constant focus on improving outcomes for children and young people.

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Children who come to live in this home have invariably experienced poor starts in

life. Many initially present extreme and challenging behaviours, but all make exceptional progress to turn their lives around. Social workers from placing authorities say that children 'blossom' in the home as a result of being exposed to positive experiences they have not previously had. Children themselves acknowledge that they feel calmer since coming to live in this home.

Children achieve virtually full attendance at schools that are specifically selected to meet their individual and special educational needs. This enables them to learn in the most appropriate environment for them. Days are rarely missed, but when this does happen it is for genuine reasons. This ensures that children make the most of every learning opportunity presented to them. Their desire to learn extends beyond the school environment. Children enthusiastically engage with homework tasks on each school day as soon as they return to the home. Even when homework is not set, children ask to complete additional workbooks purchased specifically for them.

The health needs of children are clearly identified and addressed within the home. The direct support of a dedicated health professional within the organisation contributes to appropriate medication being administered and effectively monitored for individual children. As a result, children's behaviour is dramatically improved, enabling them to interact more effectively with other people, their environment and the wider community.

Children develop through a wide range of activities in the area where they live and further afield. This provides them with new and diverse experiences. Invariably staff are with children at all times, which helps children to feel safe and cared for. As a result, children do not engage in any risk-taking behaviours such as running away.

Some children take part in organised group activities, such as cubs and scouts. By working with the leaders of these groups, staff are able to slowly withdraw their direct support while still remaining nearby. This enables children to experience appropriate levels of independence while promoting their safety and well-being. Within the home there is a positive emphasis on play which supports children to grow and develop. Children eagerly make the most of opportunities missed earlier in their lives. They demonstrate excitement when talking about their play room and their favourite traditional toys and games.

Children benefit from positive experiences of contact with family members and other important people in their lives. An innovative scheme set up by the organisation enables any family travelling long distances to be provided with hotel or guest house accommodation in the area. This helps to reduce potential difficulties in arriving for contact on time, but also provides scope to extend contact where this is appropriate.

Children engage in age-appropriate chores around the home, developing basic skills that will help them in the future. For example, children help to keep their rooms clean and tidy, prepare food, set the dining table before meals and clear it afterwards. They enjoy the additional responsibility given to them and noticeably grow in self-esteem and confidence when they receive praise for doing something well. Children who do move on from the home are extremely well supported to make

positive transitions to new placements. Placing authorities confirm that positive contributions are made by managers and staff to ensure these transitions are successful.

Quality of care

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

A passionate and committed staff team effectively communicates genuine affection for the children in their care. In return, children feel comfortable to express themselves by cuddling or hugging staff. The overall well-being of each child is central to the purpose of the home and the work of all staff. Managers and staff clearly communicate to children that they want them to be the best they can be. As a result, children respond positively and make genuine improvements to their behaviour when compared to when they were first placed. Placing authorities confirm that they are 'really pleased' with the service provided. Because the children are known so well, small changes are noticed and celebrated. Placing social workers identify definite and positive changes in children following placement. They highlight that children are nurtured and given clear boundaries. As a result, they identify that children are more content, manageable, interact with other children more and have improved social skills. Children respond positively to the encouraging messages they receive.

Children are encouraged to grow through the experience of play. Children have many age-appropriate toys, books and art and craft materials. They like to spend time playing, reading and being creative. The children engage in these experiences, which help them to develop skills and thought processes and are often new for them. Although children have access to modern games consoles and television, these are not used extensively.

Each child is seen as an individual. Comprehensive and detailed placement plans are in place that link directly to care plans produced by placing authorities to ensure continuity. Staff actively encourage children to contribute to their plans through voicing their thoughts and ideas through creative key-working time. Children feel they can talk to any member of staff, but see their key workers and the Registered Manager as particularly important to them. Staff consistently seek the views of children and act upon what they say. As a result, children do not feel the need to make complaints, but are confident that their views count.

The staff team pass on their values with regards to the promotion of education. Positive relationships are formed with key people in each child's school. Regular face-to-face meetings take place with school staff. These are followed up by written communication outlining progress children make and any difficulties that arise. As a result of these close working relationships, children are supported to fully engage with their education and stretched to meet their potential.

Excellent relationships with other external agencies further ensure that children receive the help and support they require. The organisation employs qualified health

professionals to help plan for and meet the individual health needs of each child. Professional liaison with external consultants results in the necessary and appropriate provision of health care. For some children this follows extended periods when this had not been available to them. Consequently children make outstanding progress in leading more healthy and fulfilling lives. When appropriate, specific therapeutic provision is identified to meet the needs of individual children in a planned way.

Managers and staff maintain effective communication with placing authorities. Social workers describe the communication from the home as 'excellent'. They particularly appreciate the thorough monthly reports produced for each child that keep them informed of the progress children make and any problems or difficulties that arise.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children have an extremely strong sense of safety and well-being. This is in contrast to earlier experiences some have had. Children use their own words to communicate that they feel safe because staff keep them safe. They go on to explain that their home is secure because people who should not come into their home are unable to do so. Children do not identify bullying as a problem. They acknowledge that sometimes there are arguments or squabbles but these are quickly sorted out by staff and things return to normal.

While the home does not shy away from admitting children who present as challenging, the safety of all children is carefully considered when contemplating new referrals. Preparation for placement invariably incorporates detailed information gathering, face-to-face meetings and planned introductions. Introductions only take place when it is decided the home can meet the child's presenting needs in a way that will not negatively impact upon others already placed. As a result of this meticulous planning, a high proportion of placements are successful.

Individual risk assessments are prepared prior to each placement. These highlight potential hazards or areas of difficulty and provide staff with clear strategies that minimise risks to manageable levels. Risk assessments are reviewed regularly and updated as necessary. Additional documents comprehensively detail how each child is cared for on a daily basis and how specific behaviours will be managed. All staff sign to confirm they have read and understood each document. Consequently, children are cared for and managed in a way that provides them with consistency and continuity.

Children and young people do not engage in behaviours that put them at risk. Although children and young people do not go missing, the home maintains positive links with the police. A signed agreement or protocol is in place between the home and specialist officers. Leaders and managers also share information with the local police about the children placed in the home. This incorporates an assessment of their individual vulnerability and further ensures a prompt and effective response

should a child go missing in the future.

The positive behaviour of children is promoted through extensive praise, encouragement and compliments throughout each day. Each child has their own individual targets which they work towards. These are reviewed and updated frequently.

At first glance it would appear that there is an unusually high number of restraints within this home. However, upon closer examination it is apparent that many of the recorded incidents relate to straightforward interactions between children and staff. For example, guiding children away from difficult situations or providing them with physical contact that offers reassurance are recorded in the home's restraint log. Such interventions actually help children to avoid danger or assist them to manage their feelings and emotions more effectively. Placing social workers confirm that they receive detailed records. As a result, they view the responses of staff positively and do not consider all these incidents to be full restraints. Records of restraints are extremely detailed and include all elements required in the Children's Homes Regulations 2001. The Registered Manager comprehensively monitors the use of, and records relating to, restraint, including weekly analysis covering a wide range of factors. Each incident is followed up in conversation with the child concerned and the member of staff involved. As a direct result, the frequency of restraints has been reducing significantly in recent months.

Recruitment practices and records are robust. They demonstrate that the organisation does all it can to ensure that only the most suitable applicants go on to work with children placed in this home.

Leadership and management

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

Children live in a home that is overseen by an experienced and dynamic Registered Manager who is supported by an established senior management team within the parent organisation. Leadership is demonstrated by all staff, who are actively encouraged to share their ideas for improving the service and the experiences children and young people have.

Thorough recording is completed to an excellent standard. This provides a detailed account of each child's stay in the home. This helps to identify change and inform the review of care plans. It also ensures there is a comprehensive narrative that children can read now or in the future to add to their understanding of this period in their lives.

No statutory requirements or recommendations for improving the service were made at the last interim inspection. However, the Registered Manager makes excellent use of monitoring to assess the effectiveness of the home. Monthly independent visits help to review the experiences, progress and outcomes of children. Quarterly reviews of the quality of care by the Registered Manager help to identify the particular

strengths of the home. At the same time, particular areas for improvement are recognised in a way that maintains high expectations for the quality of care provided. The views of children, parents and placing authorities are sought and incorporated into formal plans to develop and improve the service.

Sufficient staff are employed to ensure children and young people receive a consistent service. The staff group works effectively as a team to provide stability and continuity that is fundamental in delivering positive outcomes for children. A policy of not employing agency staff within the home means that children are only ever cared for by staff they know.

New staff complete a comprehensive induction and training programme. The continued development of staff is supported through annual appraisals that review performance and set targets for personal development. Training needs are recognised and opportunities to meet these needs are identified. All core training for staff is up to date. Children are cared for by staff who either have or are working towards completion of the expected minimum qualification. Staff also receive regular supervision of a high standard. All these factors help to improve the overall service children and young people receive.

Senior managers within the organisation demonstrate an attitude of openness towards learning. They proactively drive an attitude of sharing best practice. This enables the Registered Manager to keep up to date with current thinking and changes in the sector and contribute to a model of good practice in the wider organisation.

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.