

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Michael McCleave
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This privately owned children's home is registered to provide care, accommodation and education for children. The home offers a specialised service to 26 children and young people with autism.

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 are provided with a good quality, caring service that works actively to bring about positive changes in their lives.

Staff are well trained in autism care. They work professionally to ensure that the children achieve positive outcomes both socially and educationally. A strong feature is the effective joint working relationship between the school and children's home.

The progress made by the children in learning daily-living tasks is good, with clear outcomes being achieved. Autism is not regarded as a limitation to the children enjoying themselves and learning new skills. The overriding ethos of the residential provision is that all the children can achieve their potential both socially and educationally. The impact of the care provided is significant. It enables children to change their behaviour and learn new skills. They make significant progress in many aspects of their social lives, relationships with their peers, and with their families.

The children are very well cared for in a calm, stable, homely environment. Staff are passionate about their work with the children and with their families. Equality and diversity is a strong feature throughout all aspects of life at the children's home where parents and children are treated with respect and dignity.

Children enjoy consistently high-quality care tailored to meet their individual needs. This is strengthened by staff who demonstrate a passion for their work. There is a 'can-do' culture prevalent among staff who aim high for each child. This is a positive child-centred environment.

The service is competently managed with effective leadership and direction provided by the manager. However, there are shortfalls in some aspects of monitoring records and the restricted movement of children in the building needs review. There is, nevertheless, a commitment by the manager to continually improve the service.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed (NMS 22.1)
- ensure that physical movement of children within the home is not restricted unless risk assessed as necessary to keep children safe. (NMS 10.4)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Children make very good progress in developing social skills that enable them to cope with the demands of everyday living in a residential setting. Their self-confidence improves and they learn how to form and enhance relationships with their peers, family and other adults.

The children achieve well at school and all have excellent school attendance records. This was not the case for most of the children prior to their move to the school. They achieve good outcomes at varying levels according to their individual abilities. Parents speak positively about the achievements and changes in their children since joining this school and children's home. For example parents said, 'There has been a massive improvement in his school attendance when previously he refused to go to school,' and, 'I am delighted with my son's progress.'

Children's communication skills has improved significantly and a range of communication tools and techniques is used to ensure that all children can express their views about their experiences at the school and children's home.

Children's self-confidence develops. This supports them to meet many of the challenges in the wider community beyond the school and children's home. They learn how to behave in public and through the intensive support and encouragement of staff, have the confidence to go outside of the safe and familiar boundary of the school. Some children have been able to experience a holiday with their parents, both at home and abroad. This is something that could not have taken place previously.

Risk-taking behaviour has reduced over time. The staff use positive behaviour strategies to reduce risk of harm to the children. This is an effective method of behaviour management and has contributed to the improved relationships between the children and their families. One parent said, 'We were at the end of our tether and could see no way forward until he came to this school; he has changed beyond our expectations into a calmer, loving son.'

Relationships between the local community and the school is good. The children regularly go out into the local town, and the public are invited to visit the school during organised events such as barbeques and the summer fair. This enhances the image of the school and creates a more positive understanding among the public of the children.

The relationships between children and their families is enhanced through regular contact. This is actively supported by staff who work to ensure that strong caring relationships are maintained. This is important for the children and their parents. Through the effective work of staff, damaged relationships have been repaired between children and their families.

Children are well prepared for the transition from the children's home to an adult setting in the community, as they become older. This process actively involves the child, parents and other professionals. Children learn how to manage some challenges away from the school setting. For example, using public transport and going shopping. They are supported by staff at each stage of the transitions process. This promotes their confidence.

Quality of care

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

The staff team have strong aspirations for the children. They work proactively to challenge any restriction that may impede their social and educational progress. Social workers from the placing local authorities hold positive views about the high quality care provided. For example some said, 'The care at the children's home is excellent. I have no concerns whatsoever about the calibre of the staff,' and, 'The staff have an excellent understanding of autism, they go the extra mile to support and encourage the children.' This positive approach demonstrates that staff place children's interests at the forefront of their work. They actively challenge any restrictions which may prevent children achieving their potential, educationally and socially. For example, one parent said, 'The staff at the home refused to give up and have worked tirelessly; they have given us back our son.' Children's achievements are celebrated. This promotes their self-confidence and gives a clear message that the children can succeed.

Strong and effective professional contacts are established with other agencies. This means that children benefit not only from the input of the care staff, but also from health care professionals, teachers, and children's mental health services. The children benefit from the expertise of an on-site speech and language therapist. This

important resource not only ensures that children are able to learn communication skills, but is additionally available to staff and parents. Each child has a personal communications profile giving a comprehensive assessment of all communication techniques to be used. The speech and language therapist works across the school and children's home, thereby ensuring a consistency of input. This means that children are given creative and resourceful opportunities to learn skills that enable them to enjoy life through being able to communicate their views and feelings to staff.

Children enjoy very close and positive relationships with staff that provide high quality care for them. They are treated with warmth and respect. Staff say, 'It is essential in our work that we form a positive relationship with the children otherwise they would not trust us.'

Staff demonstrate a strong, professional commitment to their work and this is reflected in the comments from parents who say, 'The staff can read my son like a book and know when he is going to act aggressively; they have the skills to manage his outbursts,' or, 'I only have the highest praise for the staff,' and, 'I can't speak highly enough about the care of our son at this school.'

There is a positive culture of ensuring that children's views play an important part in the life of the children's home. The staff use a wide range of communication methods and tools to ensure children's voices are heard. The staff ensure that no child is unable to communicate their views and feelings. This demonstrates a commitment to equality. Staff have an excellent understanding of all children's care and emotional needs. This means that children's needs are promoted and appropriate services are provided.

The children's home is well maintained and provides the children with a safe and comfortable place to live. All children enjoy single bedrooms, some with en-suite facilities. The bathroom facilities have been extensively modernised. Communal areas are comfortably furnished thereby enabling the children to enjoy socialising together. However, the units are separated by locked doors and this restricts the opportunity for children to visit all areas of the building. The children have access to a safe, very well-equipped playground and sensory room. These provide the children with safe places to enjoy themselves.

The quality of care provided to children is of a very high standard.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Safeguarding is a central feature at this setting. Comprehensive case records provide staff with clear risk assessments and strategies to manage unsafe situations. All staff are clear about their responsibilities to ensure the safety of the children. They are well trained and know the actions to take where any concerns or allegations of child abuse is evident.

Children rarely go missing from the home due to the vigilance of staff. Nevertheless, staff are aware of procedures to follow. They manage challenging behaviour very appropriately. This includes bullying behaviour towards other children. The children respond positively to staff's calm and caring approach. As a consequence, the incidence of bullying behaviour is low. Although trained in behaviour management, including restraint, this is only used to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children.

Robust recruitment and selection procedures for staff ensure that only those deemed suitable are appointed to work with children. Full checks are carried out on all applicants for work and no one is permitted to commence duties until all checks are satisfactory and clear. This approach positively promotes children's safety.

The safety of the children is further enhanced through the detailed risk assessments in place that cover activities and visits away from the school site. All safety checks within the school are carried out appropriately, including fire drills at periodic intervals. These measures ensure a safe environment for the children and staff. As pointed out by a parent, 'We can now sleep soundly knowing our son is safe.'

Leadership and management

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

One recommendation was made at the last inspection. This relates to ensuring that the person carrying out the monthly regulatory visits undertake a wider consultation process. This now takes place and recent reports clearly indicate all who have contributed to the report information. This is a demonstration of the home's capacity to improve.

The children's home has a manager in post and procedures for registration are at an advanced stage. The manager provides efficient leadership combined with an enthusiasm for continuing improvement in care practice at the home. Although in post for a short period, the manager has a firm objective to improve the impact-value of the care services provided to the children. The manager is clear about the home's strengths and areas for development.

Placing local authority social workers have a positive impression of the way the children's home is managed. Some said, 'This is a committed manager who will ensure that high standards are maintained,' and, 'The manager is very approachable and listens to other professionals.'

The staff are positively motivated to provide the best care for the children. They are well trained and experienced in autism awareness. This is a forward-thinking staff team who have a positive attitude and approach to their work with children. The team regard barriers as a challenge to be overcome. This is demonstrated in the enthusiasm staff demonstrate in their work with very vulnerable children who present daily challenges as a result of their disability.

The home continues to operate to the aims and objectives identified in the

Statement of Purpose. A guide to the home has been developed to meet children's communication abilities. This is a colourful, well-designed document that makes extensive use of easy-to-read words, complemented with pictures and photographs. The guide is very child centred.

In order to ensure consistent high standards, staff receive appropriate supervision and training. A strong feature is the positive commitment of the staff team to continually develop their skills and competences. Training and the development of staff is given a high priority. This ensures they are kept up-to-date with professional practice information.

Administrative systems are sound. Records are well maintained and indicate clearly the areas of work to be achieved for each child. However, some reports do not identify the person responsible for the information. Monthly external inspection of the home takes place in line with regulation and this enhances monitoring of work at the home. The home uses a range of recording methods to ensure the most effective means of conveying information about individual children. These are very well presented and make extensive use of pictures and symbols to enable children to have an understanding of their lives in the home. This is another clear example of a commitment to equality.

The manager of the children's home embraces change and demonstrates a positive commitment to continuous improvement. This is complemented by the strong culture of working together between the school and the children's home. This is encouraged and supported by the senior management of the school.

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.