

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Keith Riley
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a service that is run by the local authority providing care and support in a purpose-built facility for up to three children with severe learning disabilities.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service 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**.

The home's extensive engagement with health, education, social services and other professionals result in excellent outcomes for children. Intense support and therapy into the lives of children who exhibit extreme challenging behaviours is successful. Children are reintegrated successfully into their family environment or other placements and their education setting as a result of living in this home.

Children make exceptional progress in terms of behaviour management, education, diet and communication. Children are safe and well cared for. High-quality and experienced staff are able to obtain the views of children with severe communication difficulties and this is central to their practice. Relationships between children and staff are very good.

Professionals describe the home, and the unique service it provides, in very positive language. This is a home that is effectively managed, knows its own strengths and weaknesses and has a culture of continuous improvement.

One breach of regulation was found at inspection around the handling of medication and one recommendation is made to retain the high standard in keeping information confidential.

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
21 (2001)	make suitable arrangements for the recording, handling, safekeeping, safe administration and disposal of any medicines received into the children's home. (Regulation 21 (1))	30/06/2012

Recommendations

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

- consider how information about individual children is kept confidential especially when there are visitors in the staff office. (NMS 22.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Overall, outcomes for children are excellent. Children benefit from highly individualised support which helps them develop their life and social skills. Their life experiences and confidence are enriched in a caring and nurturing environment at a pace suitable to their cognitive ability. They receive carefully and sensitively delivered support. For example, children on the autistic spectrum, who struggle with change because of their disability, have their anxiety minimised through consistent systematic practice, routines and communication tools. As a result children make substantial positive progress, they know the boundaries that are consistently applied. This has a very positive impact on reducing their anxieties and improving their emotional well-being. There are excellent outcomes, such as children disengaging from self-harming and destructive behaviours and re-engaging with people who are important in their lives and with their education.

Children feel comfortable with staff and interact well with them. They are at the centre of practice and there is a culture of respect and security. Their life experiences and confidence are enriched. Staff's excellent knowledge of children's unique needs and support enables children with complex needs to express themselves in as calm an environment as possible. As a result significant incidents are reducing.

Children's psychological, physical and health needs are met. They have the best possible care and support through staff engaging with a variety of other professionals to ensure each particular need is met. This includes a clinical psychologist who is readily available to the children and to give guidance to staff. There is a cohesive approach giving children who live in this home the optimum opportunity to progress. There is a history of success in behaviour management, communication skills, improved diet and education.

Children are supported in their independent living skills and make exceptional progress, for example, accessing the community safely. Those who have struggled to access the community in the past now engage constructively with the wider community on a daily basis. Children are encouraged to express their own individuality and to develop their own individual interests. Staff provide good support and supervision to enable children to go to a range of activities that they enjoy and develop skills such as swimming. The range of activities undertaken includes working with the neighbouring local authority home to support children who struggle with social integration, to cope within a group environment.

Children have excellent contact with their parents and staff are accessible to discuss the current and future needs of the children. Staff are committed to working to support parents to have regular and positive contact with their children; this includes fostering relationships with professionals, such as child and adolescent mental health services, to aid understanding of conditions such as autism. This provides children with the consistent approach they need.

Overall, children are receiving excellent levels of support and nurturing from a staff team who know their strengths and vulnerabilities extremely well. Parents said '(child) has learnt, with the help of staff and the procedures put in place, how to cope with different experiences.' Other parents describe their child as 'being happy now'.

Quality of care

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

Children who have profound communication problems and learning difficulties are supported by staff who communicate effectively with them, each other and other professionals. Staff's excellent communication skills are encouraging children to express their wishes and feelings and make choices using their preferred method of communication, such as gestures or picture symbols. Staff also learn and use key words in other languages for children who do not have English as their first language. Staff are attentive to what children are communicating through their behaviour. The daily practices create a positive environment and allows the voice of children to be heard.

Children benefit from the consistent relationships that are in place between them and their key care workers. Key staff demonstrate motivation and continued interest in the welfare of individuals. Children are treated respectfully by their carers who understand their particular needs. The care planning clearly outlines children's needs in detail and highlights children's uniqueness. The approach to promoting each child's individuality ensures that equality and diversity is promoted to an excellent level. The individualised and personalised environment and calm atmosphere minimises anxieties for children with sensory issues and lessens challenging behaviours.

Excellent care and support with comprehensive interagency working provide for a

continual sharing of information about children's care. Staff said they are strongly supported by their peers, their management and other professionals, for example in reflective practice meetings with the clinical psychologist. The joined up working with other agencies, such as health and education, provide the best possible strategies to achieve the best possible outcomes. For example, children's health is looked after extremely well. Staff work hard to prepare young people for appointments they struggle with such as the dentist. They pursue specialist appointments such as scans. There is clear and easy access to other professionals including a clinical psychologist, speech and language therapist, physiotherapist and occupational therapist.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff show a good understanding in relation to supporting children from other cultures, for example staff learning keywords in other languages. Children receive support to take pride in themselves and develop a positive identity. Staff view children as individuals who, on occasion, communicate through their behaviours.

There is a robust procedure for the administration of medication. Children are administered medication safely in accordance with the prescription. All necessary consents are on file such as parental consent for covert administration with medical agreement. However, one cream found at inspection was not clearly marked for disposal, there was one missing signature on administration records and no formal stock reconciliation on a regular basis. Children are not at immediate risk from these shortfalls.

Education is highly valued and children's attendance at school is very good. Staff are unquestionably committed to ensuring children attend school, for example providing additional transport when necessary. Close attention is given to children who struggle to attend school by highly qualified educational staff within the home. There is collaborative working with schools so that children are not excluded; rather detailed transition plans are jointly developed to enable children to reintegrate into mainstream special education.

Children do not have the ability to understand the concept of making a complaint. Instead they use non-verbal communication and behaviour to show when they are feeling sad, unhappy or poorly. Staff are vigilant and identify when something is wrong and make every effort to find out what the problem is and sort it out. Parents feel they can talk to staff about their child's care as often as they like and that staff keep them fully informed of their child's progress.

Children live in a healthy environment that actively promotes their physical health and emotional well-being. They are fully supported to develop healthy lifestyles. Staff understand the importance of a well-balanced diet and children with sensory needs successfully expand their diet.

There is a commitment to provide a pleasant living environment and the home is maintained to a very high standard. Children's bedrooms are well-designed and furnished to promote children's privacy and meet any specific needs they may have

in relation to their health and disability.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children are safe in the home and say they feel safe. Their safety and well-being is at the heart of all practice in the home. The extreme vulnerabilities of the young people are understood by all members of staff and this ensures that their approach to ensuring their safety is conscientious and rigorous. A comprehensive knowledge of individual needs and excellent detailed strategies that are applied religiously safeguards children and manages risk.

There is meticulous recording of incidents involving children that are monitored by the management and other professionals such as a clinical psychologist. This provides feedback into practice and is effective in reducing the intensity, frequency and duration of incidents. Consequently, physical intervention is minimal, of low-level and short duration. Strategies are working to decrease the need for physical intervention and children make significant improvements in a short period of time in the home. Staff are fully trained in the home's approved behaviour management restraint techniques and apply these strategies professionally and only when really necessary. Non-verbal clues from children indicating how they are feeling are readily picked up by staff and acted upon. This means that de-escalation techniques are applied quickly and effectively. Measures to protect individual young people are given careful consideration as to the impact on other young people accommodated at the same time.

Risk assessments are incorporated into individual and specific behaviour management support plans which clearly identify the required strategies to keep children safe. These are reviewed on every occasion children access the particular activity. This ensures the most up-to-date risks are identified and the welfare of children continues to be promoted. Staff demonstrate excellent knowledge of procedures to be followed outside of the home, for example in the event of a child becoming distressed in a swimming pool. Children are not denied access to activities and their safeguarding is not compromised.

Staff have comprehensive safeguarding training that is regularly refreshed. Staff have a thorough understanding of safeguarding procedures in order that they can appropriately respond to any signs or allegations of abuse. The management ensures that all the relevant agencies are informed of any safeguarding issues. This ensures that strategies and plans can be developed in the event of any concerns being identified. Effective management and adherence to robust policies ensure all are protected and supported. The culture embedded in the home ensures that the children benefit from a robust and rigorous approach which treats the children's emotional and physical safety as paramount.

The setting's low staff turnover provides stability and consistency for children. Staff

recognise that children's disabilities can make them extremely vulnerable if left unsupervised. Very good staffing levels provide close supervision, which enables children to feel safe and secure. Due to the close levels of supervision of the children missing from care is not an issue. There are specific risk assessments in place to ensure children are safe while accessing the community.

A robust recruitment process includes all the necessary checks before a new staff member commences work. This means that children are cared for by suitable adults.

The home is physically safe and appropriately secure. Health and safety certificates verify the safety of the environment. Children live in a safe environment that is regularly monitored. Staff take active steps to keep themselves, children and visitors safe from the risk of fire and other potential safety hazards. For example, children know how to evacuate in the event of fire and there is regular practice and test of the procedures to be followed in an emergency.

Leadership and management

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

The home is very effectively managed and monitored. Staff speak positively of their direct management support and of senior officials in the local authority who attend staff meetings from time to time. Other professionals such as the clinical psychologist as well as peer support allows staff to express their own emotions when dealing with challenging behaviour. This means that staff are emotionally in a good position themselves to deal effectively with the complex needs of the children in their care. Staff describe their team as, 'a massive great team'.

There is a culture of continuous improvement. The experienced and stable staff team are highly motivated to continually promote and improve the welfare of children in the home. The professional care, support and therapy means that children are able to move on successfully to other placements and reintegrate into education. This is exceptional progress made by children in relation to their starting points and is in accordance with the home's Statement of Purpose.

Regular audits of policies, procedures and practice take place, these are rigorous. For instance, monthly visits are undertaken by an external auditor, restraint logs, incidents and behaviour support plans are regularly monitored to ensure that systems operate in accordance with and above the minimum standards. Regular team meetings discuss the well-being of the children and their individual needs. This approach ensures that the conduct of the home and effectiveness of the care provided are being constantly assessed.

Robust vetting and recruitment ensure only suitable adults are employed. There is excellent training throughout all levels of the team and all members understands the individual and personal needs of the children they care for. Behaviours that challenge are understood by all and children are treated with dignity and respect. The detailed, individualised and positive intervention behaviour management plans provide the

platform for a consistent approach and the subsequent positive outcomes. Comments from social work professionals include; 'staff are very patient' and 'staff are very good at working with children and challenging behaviours.'

Records are comprehensive and stored securely and staff have a good understanding of confidentiality. However, it was noticed during the inspection that one visitor was left alone in the staff office for a short period. This could compromise the robust systems that are in place. Care plans contain all relevant information and are kept up-to-date and under review. There is an extensive referral and admissions process that gives placements every chance of success and this is evident in the progress that is being made.

Staff are subject to a comprehensive induction programme and must satisfy the management of their competencies during a probation period. They undertake regulatory and service-specific training which provides them with the skills and knowledge required to meet the demanding needs of the children. This means that children are cared for by staff who are well trained and up to date on all current practice issues.

The effectiveness of behaviour management strategies are continually reviewed by a clinical psychologist and the management. The home employs other highly qualified and experienced professionals who have a successful track record in their specialism, for example reintegrating children into mainstream special-needs schools. The close collaborative working ensures that staff and resources are channelled effectively. Consequently staff are highly enthusiastic about their role and the difference their support makes in the lives of the children they care for.

The home has very effective links with external agencies and promptly informs them of any incidents of note. This is a home with an open culture which reflects regularly on practice with a view to improving outcomes for children.

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.