

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 service is run by the local authority, which is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to three children with severe learning disabilities. The home particularly accommodates children on the autistic spectrum and can provide shared care.

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**.

Children make significant progress as a result of living in this home. Highly motivated, well-trained and dedicated staff provide very individualised support to children with complex needs. There is extremely effective multidisciplinary working to provide the short periods of intense support as described in the Statement of Purpose. As a result, children have extremely positive outcomes, such as, engaging with education, managing behaviours and re-integration with families and placements.

Children, with severe communication difficulties, have a voice in this home. Staff use methods particular to each child such as picture exchange systems. Children are at the centre of practice. There is consistent support to meet their immediate, evolving and future needs. There are extremely positive relationships between children and staff. Children trust staff. They enjoy coming to the home and are safe.

The Registered Manager provides effective leadership with the needs of the child at the centre of practice. She understands the strengths and weaknesses of the home and there are clear plans for improvement.

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Children make excellent progress in many areas of their lives as a result of staying at

the service. This is as a result of highly individualised support, which enables them to have improved confidence, self-esteem and develop alternate ways to express themselves. This means that challenging behaviour is minimised, for example damage to the environment. Parents say they can see a big difference in their children and use the strategies developed by staff in their own family home. They say there are amazing results such as children, who have struggled to go outside, now able to play outside and access community activities.

Children develop an awareness of their behaviour and emotions, for example when frustrated. They are supported to express themselves appropriately. This lowers their anxiety and subsequent behaviour. The emotional well-being of children in the home is promoted to the highest level. Consequently, children are happy to come to stay at the home. They say it is, 'great.' Parents say they do not worry when their child is at the home as they are so happy to go there.

Children are at the centre of practice and there is a culture of respect and dignity. Children feel comfortable with staff and interact well with them. Staff understand the specific ways each individual child communicates. This means children with severe communication difficulties have a voice and relationships between children and staff are very good. There is an attention to detail, for example, changes to the environment or catering arrangements to meet individual preferences and needs. The life experiences and confidence of children are enriched. They are able to express themselves in as calm an environment as possible. As a result, significant incidents are infrequent or diminishing in their duration. Children are able to apply self-calming skills much more quickly because of the support provided in this home.

Children's educational achievement is enhanced through the culture of a total learning environment where skills learned are applied in everyday living. Teachers spend time in the home and community with children. Consequently, children's learning has considerable attention with specific targets unique to each individual. Attendance at school is excellent, especially given the starting points. Children, who have struggled to access special-needs mainstream education in the past, are now able to attend school. They are achieving in line with their peers.

Children have excellent contact with their parents. Staff are accessible to discuss the current and future needs of the children. Innovative strategies, such as parents joining community activities with their children, provide for extremely positive experiences for all. Children, who have struggled previously to access activities such as swimming or trips to the local park, are now able to do so. The effects are far-reaching, for example, parents report their child will now access the garden at the family home or interact by playing ball games outside.

Children are supported in their independent living skills and make excellent progress, for example, being able to brush their own teeth, use the shower or toilet appropriately. Children develop confidence in their independence, such as using a cup instead of a bottle. The home is extremely good at preparing children for transitions in their lives. Detailed transition planning takes place. Staff work very closely with parents and with a multitude of other professionals to give future

placements every chance of success.

Quality of care

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

The approach to planning is excellent. There is exceptional and effective multidisciplinary working. Staff ensure they work closely with other professionals such as the clinical psychologist, occupational therapist and speech and language therapist associated with the home. Innovative and creative strategies are developed to ensure that children make progress in every area of their lives, for example sensory stimulation is provided in everyday living. This means that children no longer have to seek sensory experiences through inappropriate behaviour. Strategies are shared with others, such as parents and education staff to ensure a consistent approach. Children with autism, who find it difficult to manage change, benefit from a consistent approach. This lowers their anxiety and maximises the opportunity for extremely positive outcomes, for example, challenging behaviour is significantly reduced and children go to school. Progress is documented and celebrated, no matter how small, for example children saying, 'Good morning' in place of other behaviours.

The dedicated staff team are committed to improving life chances for children. They support educational placements with strong communication between the home and school. Staff attend school with children to support transitions and provide consistency. Children who have struggled to access a school environment and have been at risk of exclusion, are now able to attend school.

Parents say, 'you can't meet a more dedicated staff team', and, 'they don't worry at all when their child is at the home.' They say their children see staff as people who make them happy and look forward to coming to the setting.

Children are provided with lots of opportunities to do things that they enjoy doing, both within the home and in the community. For example, trips to local parks, swimming and community soft play schemes. There is also excellent access for children to the on-site educational facilities and to a garden with play equipment, including a trampoline. Children's education and development of social skills continues outside of the school environment. They develop confidence, self-esteem and access activities that, at one time, were not thought possible.

Exceptional systems in place give children with severe communication difficulties the optimum opportunity to have their views, wishes and feelings known. For example the introduction of a pictorial 'moods' board allows children to communicate how they are feeling. As well as established systems, new innovative, creative methods using modern technology are used to listen to children. This means that as well as their day-to-day choices and needs being known and acted upon by dedicated staff, children are able to make a contribution to their formal reviews. Staff ensured that children were able to contribute to the inspection. They describe the care they receive as 'great' and the staff as 'great.'

Medication is stored appropriately and there is a comprehensive and thorough system to ensure safety when receiving medication, administering and disposal. Systems in place ensure that actual stock is checked against theoretical stock on a daily basis. This ensures that any discrepancies are identified immediately and appropriate action taken. Regular contact with health professionals and parents ensure staff have the most up-to-date medical information. There are up-to-date, detailed health care plans in place for conditions such as epilepsy. Staff are well trained and, in case of emergency, are able to administer emergency medication.

Accommodation at the home is of a very good standard and the downstairs area has recently been refurbished to meet the unique needs of the children who stay in the home. There are clear plans to refurbish the upstairs environment to the same standard. Children live in a warm and comfortable environment that meets their unique and individual needs, specifically children on the autistic spectrum, for example low arousal colours are worn by staff. Staff respect children's privacy and ensure their dignity is maintained, for example as they explore their emerging sexuality.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Staff understand children's individual needs and vulnerabilities and do all they can to protect them from abuse and harm. Staff are confident in processes to follow should they be concerned for a child's safety or welfare. They keep comprehensive logs where appropriate. Clear procedures provide a framework for the staff to act on if they need to share concerns with safeguarding agencies. Any issues that arise are robustly dealt with and investigated to the highest level. The Registered Manager considers if any changes are needed to further strengthen the robust safeguarding processes, such as bespoke training. This ensures the on-going safety of children at the home.

Staff are fully trained in the home's approved behaviour management restraint techniques and apply these strategies when only really necessary. Non-verbal clues from children indicating how they are feeling are readily picked up by staff and acted upon. Interventions guide children rather than restrain them. Children, who are finding it difficult to communicate or express their feelings, are able to do so while being kept safe. In this way children, with severe communication difficulties, are able to develop confidence they are listened to and their needs are met.

Staff are very skilled in supporting children to make significant and positive progress in relation to their behaviour. For example staff direct children to activities while assessing their mood. This provides the opportunity for children to develop their self-management and communication skills. Children who historically have damaged the environment no longer do so. High staffing levels ensure children are appropriately supervised at all times and incidents are very well managed. The Registered Manager

closely monitors all behavioural incidents in consultation with other professionals, such as the clinical psychologist and placing social worker. Social workers and parents say they have excellent communication with the home and report that they are fully informed of any incidents. This means there is an immediate and robust response and all are kept as safe as possible. Behaviour management plans reflect the most immediate of needs. Professionals say that the way staff manage children is, 'fantastic' and the commitment of staff is, 'brilliant.' Parents report that behaviours, such as self-injurious behaviour, significantly reduce because of children receiving the intense and individualised support provided by dedicated staff.

There are close levels of supervision due to the needs of the children and missing from care is not identified as an issue. There are specific risk assessments in place to ensure children are safe while accessing the community. The robust policies and procedures, underpinned by training and supervision, ensure children are safe. Children can take reasonable risks while having a strong sense of safety and well-being. For example, staff carefully plan trips out so children who have a fear of dogs access local walks and parks.

Bullying is not identified as an issue at the home. Staff are aware of the group dynamics and the effect any presenting behaviours have on others staying in the home. Children are allowed to make choices, such as eating alone, to minimise their anxiety.

Children are protected as far as possible from fire and other hazards as a result of thorough checks and procedures. The organisation's recruitment policy is thorough and ensures children are supported by suitable adults.

Leadership and management

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

Established systems ensure the home runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis, and up-to-date policies and procedures support and promote good practice. There have been no recorded complaints about the service. Parents and placing social workers are extremely positive about how the home operates.

Staffing is a real strength of the home, with an experienced team who are well qualified. They are enthusiastic about the work they do and are clearly very committed to the children in their care. They are described by parents and other professionals as, 'brilliant', 'committed', and, 'dedicated.' New staff follow a comprehensive induction programme and describe the experience as the best induction they have ever had. The staff group operate very effectively as a supportive team and they receive high quality supervision and training. Children benefit from a highly motivated, enthusiastic and well trained staff team.

Staff fully understand the functions and ethos of the service. Professionals say staff work closely with the school, social worker and parents and that the service meets and exceeds the aims and objectives that are set out in the Statement of Purpose .

Parents speak extremely positively of the Registered Manager and staff. They say they have confidence in them and communication is excellent. Parents say, 'From my point of view I only have positive things to say about the home.'

The Registered Manager effectively runs the service and is always seeking to improve. She is aware of where improvements can be made and works to implement changes as necessary. There has been a significant investment to improve the downstairs environment. This includes making improvements to the environment to suit the changing needs of the children in the home, for example, the relocation of cupboards or the installation of protective covers. There is attention to detail, such as the choice of paint and the colours that staff wear to work. This provides a low arousal environment to suit the needs of children on the autistic spectrum. The Registered Manager has clear plans to refurbish the upstairs environment to a high standard and clear plans to develop other rooms as the needs of the children change.

Records are clear, up to date and stored securely. They provide an understanding of each child's life, experiences and plans for the future. The Registered Manager ensures that all significant events are notified to the relevant authority in accordance with the regulations.

The previous recommendations to include a stock check of medication and complete the planned repairs have been met thoroughly.

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.