

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Gillian Walters
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is operated by a private organisation. The home provides residential and respite care and accommodation for up to four young people with learning disabilities.

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 **adequate**.

Young people receive a good quality of care and achieve good outcomes as a result of the consistent support staff offer. Parents and professionals are mostly very satisfied with the service offered and comment favourably on the support young people receive. One social worker said, 'no matter how small a young person's progress may be, they are always encouraged and praised.'

Young people benefit from the good relationships that have been established between the home and family members. This enables those most familiar with the young people to effectively contribute their knowledge and experience. This successfully assists effective care planning and ensures that the day-to-day care and support provided appropriately meets their individual and complex needs.

Young people enjoy positive and fulfilling relationships with staff who are patient and attentive to their needs. This enables young people to develop trust in their carers and feel safe and protected in their environment. Staff work hard to promote and develop meaningful communication with young people using a broad range of pictorial and signing communication systems. This is effective in helping young people overcome the barriers and challenges that exist as a result of their communication difficulties.

The absence of a consistent manager over a significant period of time has clearly impacted on the home's ability to sustain its previous high standards. A number of weaknesses have been identified as a result of this inspection, most of which centre around the current quality of leadership and management. Although the organisation

has started to remedy some of the concerns identified, it has been slow to identify and act on these over the period of time since the last inspection.

As a result of this inspection, identified areas for action and improvement include necessary communication with Ofsted on matters affecting the home; continuity of staffing, their supervision, guidance and training; fire safety; completion of Regulation 34 monitoring reports; key working and the review and maintenance of young people's records.

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
7 (2001)	ensure where the registered provider appoints a person to manage the children's home, he shall forthwith give notice to Ofsted of the name of the person so appointed and the date on which the appointment is to take effect (Regulation 7(2)(a)&(b))	21/12/2012
27 (2001)	ensure that all persons employed receive appropriate supervision and appraisal (Regulation 27(4)(a))	21/12/2012
30 (2001)	ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 5 take place, the registered person without delay notify the persons indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table (Regulation 30(1))	21/12/2012
34 (2001)	ensure that the registered person shall supply Ofsted a report in respect of any review conducted by him for the purposes of paragraph (1); observing guidance that such reports are completed at six monthly intervals, sent to Ofsted within 28 days of its completion and identifies any trends and issues of concern arising from monitoring of matters set out in Schedule 6 (Regulation 34(2))	21/12/2012
38 (2001)	ensure the registered person shall give notice in writing to Ofsted as soon as is practical to do so if a person ceases to carry on or manage the home. This relates specifically to the recent resignation of the home's manager. (Regulation 38(b))	21/12/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure all children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. This relates specifically to young people having individual time with identified staff, commonly known as keyworkers, who can creatively provide opportunities to enable young people to express and communicate their views (NMS 1.3)
- ensure staff actively promote the welfare of children living in the home. This specifically relates to routinely reviewing and updating young people's plans and risk assessments (NMS 4.2)
- ensure there is an emergency escape plan that all staff and young people are familiar with and have practised so they know what to do in an emergency, such as undertaking fire drills of a night (NMS 10.9)
- ensure the registered person makes every effort to achieve continuity of staffing so that children's attachments are not overly disrupted. This relates to the frequent use of bank staff in the home in recent months to cover permanent posts (NMS 17.8)
- ensure all caring staff have attained a minimum level 3 qualification or be working towards the Diploma within 6 months of confirmation of employment (NMS 18.5)
- ensure the operation of sound employment practices and good support for staff. This relates specifically to the provision of support to staff through regular team meetings (NMS 19.1)
- ensure there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and taking action when needed. This relates specifically to ensuring young people's files are consistently well maintained. (NMS 22.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Most young people are making consistent progress in all aspects of their lives. They receive a good quality of care and support from the home that enables them to grow and develop and explore their potential. The views expressed by parents and professional recognise the positive impact the home has made on their young people. One social worker commented of the home, 'young people's opportunities are maximised.' Young people benefit from a range of new experiences that parents recognise would be difficult to provide from within their own family network or without the support of dedicated carers. A parent speaking of her young person said 'she is now going out on activities that I knew she was capable of doing. This has built up her self-esteem and confidence.' Parents feel reassured that their young people enjoy their time at this home, are well cared for and as a result are experiencing stability in their life.

All young people successfully attend and are engaged with education. They are making good progress in their learning, developing their communication skills using a range of pictorial and signing systems. Young people benefit from the presence of

care staff that accompany them into school. This provides a consistency between the care and education setting that is conducive to young people's learning. Care staff are familiar with the teaching techniques employed at school and are able to bring these back into the home environment to continue the learning experience at home.

One social worker commented of the young person he has placed in the home, 'he has improved greatly in his ability to participate around the home, access different community activities, and is far more settled generally in terms of his presentation and behaviour.'

Young people benefit from the well-organised and consistent management of their complex health care needs. Staff are familiar and well trained to deal with the varied and challenging behaviours young people may present. Their needs are appropriately prioritised by staff and are well understood and addressed. This ensures that they maintain good health and well-being.

Each young person has a communication passport that enables staff to learn and understand visual expressions and vocal sounds that express a variety of emotions of needs. This ensures that young people can successfully communicate their needs on a day-to-day basis without undue frustration or stress.

The home maintains regular and frequent contact with a parents and family members ensuring that they continue to play a significant role in their young person's life. Young people benefit from regular contact with parents, siblings and other family members, arranged and supported by the home. This means that they are able to sustain and enjoy those relationships that are most important to them.

Young people are encouraged to develop their independent skills within their age range and ability. With the support of staff goals are set for achieving basic independence living skills, such as collecting laundry, switching the washing machine on and collecting items for baking activities. This enables young people to learn new skills and take pride in their achievements.

Quality of care

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

Young people live in a warm and caring environment that focuses on their individual and highly complex needs. Staff are calm and patient and demonstrate genuine warmth toward the young people they care for. This ensures that young people feel safe and cared for and mostly settled in their environment. Social workers are complimentary of the good relationships that staff have developed with young people and acknowledge the good support provided to increase their independence. One social worker commented of staff, 'they are dedicated and patient, and would rather wait to encourage the young person to complete things for himself rather than do things for him, even though this would often be quicker and easier.'

Young people receive good support from staff to develop their individual

communication abilities. Given the challenges of their communication and the complexity of their needs the home ensures that they have good access to advocacy services. This enables their best interests to be served. Young people's families are routinely consulted on all aspects of their young person's care. Their knowledge and views are respected and fully taken account of during care planning, ensuring young people's needs and wishes are well understood. One parent said, 'the home provides a high standard of care, excellent communication, I can't fault it.'

Young people have previously benefited from individual time with staff that were most familiar with their specific and individual communication abilities. During this time young people's views were actively and creatively sought and documented. However, as a result of staff changes since the last inspection a number of young people no longer have an allocated keyworker to spend dedicated time with. This means that this opportunity to achieve some direct communication from young people about matters concerning their care and support no longer exists.

Young people are regularly involved in a wide range of activities that provide them with fun, exercise and stimulation. For example some enjoy individual activities with staff, such as colouring, trampolining, swimming and using the computer. Together, young people enjoy outings as a group to local safari parks and safe play areas; often joining peers from the organisation's other local homes. This ensures that they have a wider social network and have good opportunity to sustain school friendships. It also enables young people to feel valued and included their community.

Young people benefit from good assessment of their health care needs and detailed planning to ensure that those needs are most appropriately met. Staff are effective in promoting the health care needs of young people. They are consistent in supporting young people with routine health care matters and are active in encouraging young people to learn good self-care skills that will enhance their self-esteem and self-image. Staff engage well with a range of specialist health care services that ensures young people's most complex needs are addressed. Staff work inclusively with families, attending appointments and sharing health care information. This ensures that there is effective communication and consistency of management concerning all health care matters.

Young people are well supported in education on a daily basis by care staff that accompany and stay with young people school. This ensures a consistency of care and understanding of communication ability across the home and school provision. This further enables care staff to successfully support and promote their learning in the home environment.

The design and location of the home is ideal in meeting the young people's needs. They have a number of communal living areas, each with a particular focus. For example, a lounge to relax and watch television, a room being developed with sensory and stimulation equipment and another lounge offering room for games activity. The areas described ensure that young people can have their own space without the home feeling crowded. Young people's bedrooms are designed to be peaceful areas that cater for their individual needs. They are personalised with their

own family photographs and the personal items that meet their needs. The home benefits from an enclosed garden and drive area that provides a safe play area for the young people. They are in close proximity to their school and have easy access to many places of interest and activities.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people live in a safe environment where they are adequately protected and safeguarded from harm. External doors remain locked for young people's own safety with a key pad entry system in place. This means that young people are not made more vulnerable by having possible opportunity to leave the home without sufficient staff to support them. It also ensures that uninvited visitors cannot enter the home while staff are occupied in caring for the young people. All visitors are required to sign in on arrival and provide a valid reason for visiting the home. Staff ensure that those visitors with credentials are checked and those without are appropriately chaperoned within the home at all times. These measures ensure that young people are not exposed to unsuitable individuals who may do them harm.

Young people's complex needs and behaviours have been clearly assessed and all known risks identified and suitably addressed. However, some plans and risk assessments had not been updated in the timely manner that had been originally planned. Delays were attributed to some of the changes in staffing and lack of consistent oversight as a result of management changes and systems. This shortfall does not appear to have had an impact on the immediate safety or care afforded to young people. However delay has occurred which has the potential to undermine young people's safety.

Young people are closely supervised and supported at all times ensuring that they feel safe and protected within the home and when out in the community. All off-site activities are clearly risk assessed and documented ensuring that all staff know how to safely support young people in differing environments where there is the potential for them to be and feel more vulnerable. Young people benefit from high staffing ratios ensuring that they have the necessary support they require at all times.

The staffing levels employed have ensured that there have been no instances of young people going missing from this home. Staff are well prepared for any such event occurring and know what action to take to ensure young people are located and returned at the earliest opportunity. The significant presence of staff ensure that any opportunities for bullying or harassment are minimised.

Staff are clearly familiar with guidance concerning young people's individual routines and communication and follow this closely to promote positive behaviour within the home. Staff address challenging behaviour using various distraction and de-escalation techniques learned and practiced during mandatory training sessions. Restraint is only ever used when it is absolutely essential to protect the young person or others from harm. On such occasions it is applied in accordance with the legal

framework, ensuring that young people are managed in a way that keeps them safe and avoids injury.

The home takes care to ensure that all medication is safely and securely stored and that fire fighting equipment and utilities are regularly checked and maintained. Fire drills have occurred since the last inspection. However, these have not taken place with sufficient frequency or been practised at significant times of the day. This means that confidence cannot be assured that both staff and young people are sufficiently familiar with the required action should a real emergency occur.

The home has sufficient and robust practices in place for the recruitment and selection of staff. All staff are thoroughly checked and vetted before they commence work in the home. This ensures that young people are cared for by suitably skilled and experienced individuals and are not made more vulnerable by adults who are deemed unsuitable to work with children and young people.

Leadership and management

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

The lack of a consistent and permanent manager has been detrimental to the continued success previously attributed to this home. The manager appointed following the resignation of the former manager has also recently resigned and left her post. Interim arrangements have been made for her deputy to manage the home until a permanent manager comes into post. There was a delay in notifying Ofsted of this change and the new arrangements put in place. However, the organisation has successfully recruited a new manager and is currently awaiting the outcome of recruitment checks and vetting before she commences in post. At the time of this inspection, Ofsted were not in receipt of the required details of the appointed person or the likely date of when her appointment is to take effect.

A lack of sufficient management oversight and support was identified during this inspection. Examples of this included shortfalls in supervision arrangements and staff meetings. As a result staff have not benefited from consistent direction and guidance. This has left them feeling less supported in their role than was formerly the case. However, the staff team have remained well motivated to work together to achieve good outcomes for the young people in their care. High staffing ratios ensure young people receive the support and supervision they require to meet their identified individual needs.

There has also been a notable turnover of care staff in recent months. There has been an increase use of bank staff in the home to compensate for those that have moved to other homes operated by the organisation. A few parents and professionals have expressed some concern about the potential de-stabilising effect this may have had on the young people placed. However, the home has taken positive steps to remedy this situation by recruiting more permanent staff. This means young people will now experience fewer changes and benefit from a more consistent staff team. One social worker commented of the home, 'I can say that the company acted

quickly in finding a new manager in the most recent circumstances, but some of the previous changes had been planned around other services and staff wishes which at times I do not feel were in the best interest of the service; rather the organisation as a whole.'

The home generally provides a good quality of training opportunities for its staff. All staff are up to date with training requirements and have good access to other training opportunities that enhance their knowledge and skills in working with children and young people with complex needs. However, during this inspection it was identified that one qualifying member of staff had yet to be enrolled on the Children and Young People's Workforce Diploma programme. This is essential in ensuring that all staff have the necessary knowledge and skills and the opportunity to demonstrate their occupational competence.

Young people's records are stored securely ensuring that their privacy and confidentiality is maintained. They are mostly comprehensive in detailing individual needs, personal development and progress. However, some individual records have not been as consistently well maintained or reviewed in accordance with the home's expected standard. This means that in some cases staff do not routinely have ready access to the most up-to-date information required to assist them in their role.

The home has consistently maintained its internal monitoring programme and has recently updated its arrangements for monthly Regulation 33 visits by a person independent to the home. The quality of some recent visits was challenged by the home and action was taken to improve this part of the quality assurance process. The home has not yet successfully completed a Regulation 34 report that takes account of a review of the quality of care within the home. This means that a significant opportunity has been lost to review the quality of care over the period of time since the last inspection. Overall, weakness has been acknowledged with regard to effectiveness of the home's quality assurance systems and although not fully implemented, some progress is now being made in this area.

The home has a clear system in place for notifying Ofsted and other relevant parties of significant events that occur within the home or concerning the young people they care for. During this inspection it was evident that Ofsted had not received one notification that had been completed and received by other parties. Although the matter itself did not give rise to further concerns, it denied the regulator proper opportunity to review all significant events occurring within the home.

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.