

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Merryl Wahogo
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

This home is a short break and respite unit which provides day care and residential short breaks for children and young people with disabilities or additional needs. There are 50 children and young people who currently use this service. The home is registered to accommodate a maximum of eight children between the age of five and 18 years at any one time. Children and young people using the service are carefully matched according to age, friendships and ability and are placed in groups accordingly. The various groups use the service at different times. Overnight breaks are offered from Monday to Thursday during term time and additionally at weekends during school holidays.

The home is purpose-built and is situated in a quiet residential area with an enclosed garden and play area.

Summary

This is the unannounced key inspection covering all outcome areas. The home continues to achieve particularly high standards, as well as making innovative improvements in most outcome areas. Young people say they love being here. Parents confirm this and only complain that they cannot use the service even more and staff demonstrate extremely high morale. Thus the home has maintained its overall outstanding judgement.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no actions or recommendations raised at the previous inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

When young people arrive after school, staff offer them drinks and a plate of attractively chopped fruit, as well as biscuits. The young people clearly enjoy the meals created by the cook. She carefully tailors these to the religious and dietary needs of the particular young people who are in each evening. Young people who are taking part in the independence group get the opportunity to plan meals, shop and cook. Some also help with cooking on nights when the home celebrates non-English cultures. Young people have therefore enjoyed Mexican and Hawaiian meals, for example.

The cook takes all possible care to ensure that foods are stored and prepared safely. As a result, the home has scored four stars on the Scores on the Doors food hygiene scheme.

Staff work closely with parents to ensure that young people are provided with the correct medication during their stays. Their procedures are meticulous so that, despite some young people being on ever-changing prescriptions, staff are absolutely up-to-date at all times. They also store medication carefully and according to requirements. Only trained staff are allowed to administer medication and they do this with great care and attention. Also, when young people are demonstrating unusual symptoms, they keep in close touch with parents. This is to ensure both that they are well informed and also that they can make decisions about continuing

care. Nurses attend on those weekends when the young people with high dependency and medical needs make use of the service. This means that staff are very good at maintaining the health and safety of the young people in relation to their medication.

Staff also help young people to improve their health by accessing the sports and leisure schedule of activities run by the health and well-being team.

Staff carefully record any accidents or incidents that cause injury, although there have been few since the last inspection. The manager reads all of these records and makes comments if the incidents suggests a change in behaviour management is necessary. This means that staff are able to prevent unnecessary repetitions of accidents or incidents.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Staff adhere to robust policies and procedures in relation to privacy and confidentiality. For example, they cover how staff go through the young people's night bags, sent in by parents. All intimate care is performed privately. Staff treat young people with great respect, but also show them affection in entirely appropriate ways. For example, young people do get cuddles if they seek them and as long as this is done in communal areas. This means that young people can receive all the reassurance and affection they need, while being kept entirely safe.

The home has a large complaints and compliments book, prominently displayed in the entrance lobby, but it is full of thank you cards and no complaints! Staff are aware of both the existence of a whistle blowing policy and how to access it. Parents can therefore be confident about their children receiving care in this home.

There are robust policies and procedures in place to safeguard young people while they are in the care of the home. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of safeguarding. For example, they are aware of their responsibilities, as well as the relevance of new information. The manager is up to date with recent developments in how the local authority wants accidents and incidents recorded and so, therefore, are her staff.

There are also robust policies and procedures in place in relation to bullying, but none has occurred since the last inspection. The same is true of leaving the home without permission.

Staff develop excellent care plans which, in some cases go into great detail about how to manage young people's behaviour. They are especially good at recording precisely how to communicate with each young person. As a result, sanctions and restraints are extremely rare, but are appropriate when used.

Staff ensure that risk assessments are thorough and up to date. Parents confirm this by saying, for example, 'risk assessments are regularly and thoroughly carried out and updated - excellent'. They also cover unforeseen events, such as epidemics. The home's staff, together with external companies, carry out all safety checks diligently and according to the recorded frequency schedule. This means that young people are kept safe at all times and during all activities.

This is an exceptionally stable staff group and there has been no recruitment since the last inspection. This is, however, due in part to their having to wait five months for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks to come back.

There is new guidance about most children using short break services now being considered as children in need (CIN) as opposed to looked after children (LAC). In the light of this, senior managers are working with staff to develop robust CIN reviews. This is to ensure that the level of safeguarding is not compromised by the loss of LAC reviews. This demonstrates an excellent commitment to safeguarding, at all levels.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

One parent says 'Larchwood is an excellent resource, our daughter loves to go there'. Another says 'My child enjoys spending time at Larchwood and they provide for his interests/hobbies'. Young people certainly enjoy a wide range of activities, both inside and out in the play area. Photos show young people enjoying making items appropriate to whatever country is being celebrated on themed evenings. For example, recently the home celebrated St. George's day and young people drew and made dragons. On these evenings, staff teach the young people about these countries and cultures.

Individual support is based on very detailed care plans. For example, these may contain a whole page on communication needs, if necessary. As a result, staff are able to form close relationships with the young people, which are clearly beneficial. This is bolstered by particularly close relationships with the local schools, such that staff are well aware of how to support progress. One parent says 'When homework and reading is set by the school and our child is overnight, staff support and help to do this and communicate/liase with the school.' Young people's progress and the development of their self-confidence are clear to see.

The home has initiated a new series of varied weekend breaks, funded by the government's Aiming High for Disabled Children scheme. The first one has been a major success, having been very carefully planned in all respects. One young person said 'I've never been to a hotel before...it's so posh! I've only seen one in the films!'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There is a very close working relationship between local authority managers and the home. As a result, parents can be confident that their children are appropriately placed. The staff then work hard to assess the needs of the young person and family in question and record these in detail. The only complaint about the service, from a number of parents, is that they wish their children could access it more often. This is particularly the case during holidays, when it is only open Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

During the last year managers, as well as key workers, attended all reviews to ensure oversight of progress. The deputy manager has created excellent booklets to facilitate young people's engagement with the review process. As noted under staying safe, the local authority is up-to-speed with switching to CIN reviews. Staff create folders, documenting young people's activities, mostly through photos. These are used both to support reviews and to act as a photographic record that young people can take with them when they leave. This is excellent practice.

As young people only have one or two nights a week away from their homes, there is no issue in relation to being able to contact their parents or carers. The home, though, uses a number

of innovative ways of establishing close relationships with parents. For example, they have regular coffee mornings, but also use the entrance windows to put up new information which might be of interest to parents. This means that they are more likely to spot it, than if it were displayed inside, along with regular leaflets.

Staff are thorough in their admissions procedures, ensuring that these are individualised to suit the needs of particular young people and their families. They are also extremely thoughtful about how to support transition to adult services. A good example for one young person has been setting up a meal at a restaurant with another young person, who has already moved on. Staff ensure that these young people get lots of opportunities to practice independence skills.

The manager makes use of both an internal consultation process with young people and an external facilitator, to establish their views about the service. As a result, for example, staff now facilitate some young people to do rock climbing. This is excellent practice because it is possible for a home's staff to think they know what young people think and want. Additionally, like most homes, staff facilitate choice in a more immediate fashion during the young people's stays.

Young people have warm relationships with staff. One young person says 'I like going to Larchwood. I like the helpers, they are very kind and nice.'

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The manager in particular has put a great deal of time and effort into supporting the development of the Aiming High program for the young people approaching adulthood. One parent says 'Recently [my son] had done more adventurous activities in an independence group. [He] benefited greatly from this and would like to do more.' They also said 'Recently [he] went on a train with staff and had to pay the fare, under supervision'.

Staff have also introduced independence targets into all care plans. This is really good practice in helping staff focus on progress as well as care. As yet, though, staff have not been requested to routinely record progress on these targets. This means that care plans may not indicate the most appropriate or up-to-date target.

The impact of having access to a maintenance worker is reflected in the much improved appearance of the whole premises. This man thoroughly enjoys the work, not least because of extremely good communication and relationships with staff. He is responsible for minor repairs and upkeep, which he does promptly. The only rooms that need some refurbishment are the bathrooms and these are already on the local authority's business plan.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Staff are able to cater for the diverse needs of young people with a wide variety of impairments. The new short break trips away offer these young people the same kinds of opportunities as their brothers and sisters. Staff fully understand the implications of the home's robust equality and diversity policy and know where to look for other particular policies. They cater for religious needs by, for example, encouraging young people to say their prayers where this is specified in the care plan. As

reported under being healthy, the home runs special evenings celebrating various countries and cultures. They do this on different days of the week, however, to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to be involved.

Management have changed care workers' job descriptions to cater for them being able to take young people away for weekends. It also allows them to provide increased support in the community. In line with this, the local authority is also redesigning the contracts. The home has produced a beautifully presented young person's guide, which offers on the back, versions in the five most common languages used in the area.

Staff report excellent support from their colleagues and from managers and this is reflected in particularly high team morale. The home has unusually high levels of appropriate qualification in this very stable staff group. Management use a well-known group of relief staff to cover any permanent staff absences and only occasionally resort to agencies. Even then, they are able to request particular workers who are already known to the young people. This means that the young people benefit from high levels of consistency amongst staff, with the result that they clearly feel very much at home in this setting.

Staffing levels are always sufficient to match the supervision needs stated in care plans. The home uses thorough induction procedures for all staff, which is followed by access to a comprehensive range of training opportunities. These include service-specific topics, such as epilepsy training, as well as courses to support more personal development, such as assertiveness training. This all goes towards the strength of team feeling and means that young people benefit from confident and relaxed staff.

The manager monitors all areas of the home's functioning regularly, as does the external visitor. As a result, it is possible to be assured that standards are maintained at the existing high levels.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- encourage staff to routinely record progress on the independence targets specified in care plans. NMS 6