

Inspection report for Children's Home

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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 part of a special school, which provides education and residential care for children with autism and complex learning and social difficulties. These include challenging behaviours, autism and asperger's syndrome. As an independent school providing over 295 days of residential care per year, the whole school is registered as a children's home.

The school offers residential provision on two sites for up to 30 children. One house at the school offers care for 52 weeks per year to 16 young people. The other house is some distance away and provides care for up to 14 young people from Monday to Friday during school term time.

Each children's home is set within a local community. All have access to transport belonging to the school for the young people as well as public transport, local shops and amenities.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

At this unannounced full inspection, all key standards were inspected. The young people are very well cared for by staff who demonstrate a positive approach to their work. The staff team are very well supported by the acting manager and team leaders.

Strong links have been established with other professional agencies to promote the health and education of the young people during their stay at the home. This is enhanced through the support provided by staff for young people to lead healthy lifestyles and to achieve their potential through education.

Staff work seamlessly as a team to ensure that safeguarding of the young people is at the forefront of the activity at the home. There are excellent relationships established with young people and staff work positively with them to achieve and improve outcomes for them.

This is a service that values the contribution that young people can make to the life of the home. It is a very well managed service with effective leadership from the management team. The current acting manager is in post on a temporary basis. This information however, is not currently included in the Statement of Purpose.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the service was asked to ensure that full employment histories of new staff were obtained. The human resources department has taken steps to comply with the recommendation. This enhances the safeguarding of the young people with any gaps in employment being identified.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There is a positive emphasis on healthy eating and the catering staff are aware of what makes up a good balanced diet. The menus are assessed for nutritional values via a computer programme and this enables the catering team to ensure only good healthy meals are prepared. The school catering has achieved a gold award for excellence in providing healthy meals to the young people. This is commendable. Staff are aware which of the young people are on special diets and their dietary needs are fully met. All care staff have completed food hygiene training. Young people are encouraged to take part in food shopping trips as part of life skills learning. A strong feature at the home are the themed meal nights held to celebrate different cultures. These are enjoyable occasions involving the staff and young people decorating the dining area with items from a particular country. This is an excellent example of equality and diversity.

Individual health needs are clearly identified in the young people's case files. This information is recorded for each young person detailing how their specific and general health issue are to be addressed. Where specialist medical resources are required, the school nurse will ensure that the appropriate health professionals are notified. There are excellent professional links established with various health service providers. These include the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) and clinical psychologist. It is clearly evident that the holistic health needs of the young people are very well met.

The home has a rigorous medicines policy, procedure and practice guidance in place. Staff are only trained in medicines administration once they have completed the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young people. This is excellent practice. Medications are safely stored and administered to protect young people from harm. Clear records are kept on all medication brought into the home and a well established stock control and disposal system is in place. Staff are trained in first aid. The school nurse is available during the school week to support care staff in dealing with any medical issues affecting young people. The young people's health needs are very well met and their welfare is safeguarded by the home's policies and procedures for administering medicines. This promotes the safety of the young people ensuring that only the correct medicines are administered to individual young people.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Staff have a good awareness of the rights of the young people to their privacy. This is promoted with due regard for the safety of the young people and their emotional abilities. They each have single bedrooms where they can be alone if they choose with discreet staff oversight. All confidential records are kept in secure conditions to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. This promotes the safety of the young people.

There is an effective complaints procedure in place that enables the young people to indicate their concerns using a specially designed user friendly complaints form. This is a good example of equality and diversity. Issues expressed by young people are generally dealt with informally by staff. Parents would be informed of any situation that could lead to a complaint being initiated. Parents indicated their full confidence in the home to manage any complaints professionally. The young people are regularly consulted about their feelings and staff are sensitive to situations whereby a complaint may need to be initiated. This is excellent practice.

Effective systems are in place for ensuring that the young people are protected. Staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding and they demonstrate a clear awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities. Past incidents demonstrate the effective role of staff in recognising child protection concerns. All staff are required to attend mandatory annual safeguarding training. This is very good practice. This ensures that staff are kept up-to-date on safeguarding and promotes the safety of the young people.

Staff are alert to the risk of bullying taking place. However, the high staff ratio and vigilance of staff, generally precludes this from becoming an issue. Nevertheless, staff are clearly aware that the behaviour of some young people can have a detrimental effect on others. Staff work closely with young people to encourage socially acceptable behaviour and to show care and respect for each other. Absences from the home without authority are also rare due to the close oversight of staff on duty. Staff are aware of the actions they are required to take should an incident occur.

The behaviour of young people towards each other is closely monitored due to the risk of tensions occurring between them. Staff are trained in behaviour management and they have the experience and skills to recognise situations that may lead to confrontations. There is an awareness the children may not always be aware of their actions. Full restraint is rarely used. Staff are able to defuse situations with gentle persuasion, guiding the young people away from each other if required. All incidents where some form of restraint has been used are recorded. Sanctions are not imposed at this home as there is a clear understanding that the young people may not always be aware of their actions.

The physical safety of the building is well managed and effective systems are in

place to promote effective health and safety. Fire evacuation drills are carried out and clear records are maintained. Where young people refuse to participate in evacuations, advice has been obtained from the fire officer. However, the risk assessment to cover these situations has not been formally approved by the fire officer. All fire safety appliances have been properly checked by the appropriate contractors. The home has good quality doors and locks to prevent unauthorised entry and all windows have restrictors. This helps to keep young people safe.

The safety of children is further enhanced through the robust recruitment and selection procedures in place. These ensure that the children are safeguarded from inappropriate staff being appointed to work at the home.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The support given to the young people is excellent. They have a key worker allocated who is responsible for ensuring that all aspects of care and support is provided. Staff spend quality time with the young people to support them with their plan and to achieve positive outcomes. The individual situation of the young people is closely monitored by key workers and other staff in order to determine if extra support or resources are required. The home has established very positive links with the various health care services including direct access to a psychologist. This is excellent practice and demonstrates a positive approach to equality and diversity. Young people are actively encouraged to enjoy themselves and to participate in activities that increase their self confidence. A recent outdoors camping trip proved to be very successful. It was a new experience for the young people involved. The strong support given to the young people positively promotes their care and self confidence.

The education and care of the young people is actively supported and encouraged by the joint working relationships existing at the school. The support for the young people to achieve their potential is excellent. Residential care is seen as complementing the educational provision at the school. The residential unit staff are positive about their strong links with the teachers. They actively support the young people to gain maximum benefit from their education. During the school day, residential unit staff can provide active practical and emotional support to young people, who may have difficulty with school routines. Case records, clearly indicate how their care and educational needs are to be met. The residential unit staff and the teachers work together as a joined up team. This is commendable. Within the main school building young people operate a café facility where snack meals can be purchased. Although there is staff oversight, the young people take responsibility for the running of this imaginative enterprise. This enables young people to experience a working environment and additionally teaches them some commercial skills. This clearly helps to increase their self confidence.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The majority of young people have limited verbal communication skills. Staff have access to a range of tools to enable the views and opinions of the young people to be heard. Detailed assessments are in place. These assessments underpin the basis of the work carried out with the young people to ensure that the home continues to meet their care needs. The emphasis is directed towards clear and effective planning that is reviewed in line with statutory requirements. A strong feature is the positive support given to young people to participate in all planning and review meetings. Staff use a variety of communication tools to ensure that young people are able to make a positive contribution to their life at the home. This is an excellent demonstration of equality and diversity.

Children are actively supported to maintain contact with their families. Parents are very positive about the excellent communication that takes place with the staff. Some said 'staff are excellent at keeping me informed about my child' another stated 'I cannot praise the staff enough for the way I am kept fully in the picture about what is happening to my son'.

There is a careful and well planned admissions procedure that ensures the young people and their families are involved at all stages of the admission process. This is carried out at a sensitive pace to meet the needs of the young person concerned. This process can be extended over a lengthy period involving visits to the home, staying for meals, preparing their bedroom and meeting the other residents. It is recognised by staff that young people with autism do not react well to changes in their routines. A similar proactive approach is taken by staff when planning the next placement. Staff work closely with the transitions team to affect a smooth transfer to adult services.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The staff offer positive support to the young people as they progress towards adulthood. Throughout this period where possible, they are taught life skills and learn how to cope with challenges out in the community. Staff accompany them on visits out into the local area to experience shopping and coping with the every day demands of being among the general public. The key workers ensure that effective links are established with adult care transitions social workers as plans are evolved to move the young person to their next placement in an adult setting.

The home is very well maintained to high standards of cleanliness by the efficient domestic team. The young people each enjoy single bedroom accommodation with modern en-suite facilities. Bedrooms are comfortably furnished and young people are actively encouraged to personalise their rooms. The home comprises of four individual units each linked by corridors. There are comfortable lounges with

televisions and music equipment in each unit. The units have separate doors that lead out to a safe play area. There is a large playground in close proximity that enables the young people to enjoy the play equipment in safety. Any repairs are carried out promptly by the maintenance team. The residential accommodation is modern and provides the young people with excellent facilities.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The staff work positively to enhance the potential of each individual young person enabling them to lead as normal life as possible and to overcome the limitations of their disabilities. Staff have an excellent awareness and insight into autism and equality and diversity. This is clearly evident through their work with the young people ensuring that they are able to participate fully in the life of the home. Cultural and religious requirements are met and the wishes of parents are taken into account. Staff encourage the young people to enjoy other cultures through themed meal nights. Where possible they can take part in activities such as camping, swimming and trips out to places of interest. The home has developed an impressive array of communication tools using photographs, pictures and symbols to enable the young people to communicate their views. There is an inclusive culture at this home and staff together with the school, work proactively to improve the life chances of each young person.

The home's Statement of Purpose gives a clear indication of what the young people and their parents can expect from the home. This statement gives an insight into the purpose of the home and identifies the skills and experience of the staff. However, it does not have details about the current temporary management arrangements.

The staff work effectively as a team and through regular training they have developed the skills and competences to work with children who are autistic and who demonstrate behavioural challenges. The staff are required by the organisation to be trained to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. The required standard that at least 80% of staff must have achieved this qualification has not been achieved. This is due to the appointment of new staff who are currently undergoing induction training. However, arrangements are in place for these staff to complete NVQ assessment at the earliest opportunity.

The staffing at the home is appropriate to ensure that young people are well cared for and to keep them safe. The home's manager provides effective leadership and with the support of the team leaders, staff are appropriately supported and supervised. Although the management team are responsible for the day to day monitoring of records and standards of care, external scrutiny is carried out by an independent person each month. The young people's records are comprehensive and their progress is recorded by staff. Some records however, do not have the signatures of the authors.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the local fire authority has been consulted about measures involving young people who refuse to leave the building (NMS 26.8)
- ensure that the Statement of Purpose provides the required information in respect of the current management situation at the home (NMS 1.1)
- ensure that all written records are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (NMS 35.2)