

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Gavin Thomas
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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 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.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a short-break unit which provides day care and residential short breaks for children and young people with learning disabilities. It is owned and managed by a local council. There are 50 children and young people who currently use this service. The home is registered to provide overnight accommodation for a maximum of five children between the ages of five and 18 years at any one time. Additional numbers of children and young people use the service during the day only, as determined in the Statement of Purpose.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **outstanding**.

The ethos of this short-break service works extremely well in practice. Staff ensure that children and young people are safe and benefit fully from overnight stays away from their families. For example, the robustness of the short-break booking system ensures that young people are grouped according to their age and assessed needs. In turn, this helps staff plan and prepare the unit for children and young people's specific needs.

Staff deployment is excellent. These arrangements are coordinated in ways which enable young people to engage in meaningful activities for the duration of their stay.

Communication with and on behalf of young people is exceptional. Personalised communication systems are tailored and this means that staff and young people interact more effectively. In addition, the bold and colourful illustrations around the unit help young people familiarise themselves with the environment for the duration of their stay. Staff are extremely knowledgeable about young people's communication systems. As a result, staff are very observant of how young people express their needs, wishes and feelings.

Management and monitoring systems are robust, identifying key areas for development and improvement. Young people's safety at night is taken very seriously and demonstrated through personalised risk assessments.

Improvements need to be made to the fire risk assessment, demonstrating the safe evacuation of the premises at night.

Areas for improvementStatutory 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
5 (2001)	revise the Statement of Purpose to include the age range, sex and numbers for whom it is intended that accommodation should be provided and the address and telephone number of Ofsted. (Regulation 5 (a) Schedule 1(8)(a) and Regulation 3 (c))	30/09/2011

Recommendations

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

- update the fire risk assessment and record of fire drills demonstrating how staff are trained and prepared for evacuation procedures at night. (NMS 10.8 and NMS 10.9)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people participate in a very wide range of stimulating and fun activities. These activities have a very positive impact on young people's social skills, independence skills and environmental awareness. The celebration of national, religious and other special events including birthdays is popular with children and young people. In doing so, children and young people's individual wishes and preferences are also respected. Guidance is sought from parents when it is not appropriate for a child or young person to participate in an event or activity.

Young people benefit immensely from the excellent contact staff have with parents, school staff and social workers. These connections and relationships are strong, especially with parents as they often speak for and on behalf of their child. Parents say, 'I get the feeling that the staff love their job', and, 'My partner and I can relax knowing that our child is in safe hands.' Staff are good at listening to children and young people through what they (young people) say and how they react. For instance, care plans now include procedural guidance known as 'target ladders' for achievement. This step-by-step guidance is a development in helping young people gain skills at a pace suitable to their learning. It also helps staff to monitor and review children and young people's progress more vigorously.

All short-break arrangements take into account the very specific needs of the child or young person. The teenage group is a new initiative but in a short space of time, young people are demonstrating enthusiasm and enjoyment through the wide range of activities they take part in. Activities include: sporting activities, dining out,

shopping and managing small amounts of money, involvement in local current affairs, and socialising with other groups of people in the local community.

Staff keep abreast of what young people want from their overnight stays. The teenage group is an excellent example of how young people's wishes are taken into account. A dedicated night is allocated to teenagers and this gives staff the opportunity to focus on the specific needs of the young people while providing opportunities for developing their skills and abilities.

Quality of care

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

Children and young people's care plans are written in addition to their local authority placement plans. Where possible, young people are involved in their care plans, in particular decisions on activities and routines. The implementation of care plans is consistent with children and young people's assessed needs. Staff are meticulous in how they follow young people's care plans. This is an excellent example of how staff work consistently, avoiding disruption to children and young people's routines. Unforeseen changes are communicated to children and young people through the efficiency of shift planning and through the use of communication systems with young people.

Children and young people's wishes and feelings are respected and if necessary, planned activities or preferences such as meals are adjusted to meet these needs. For example, some young people respond exceptionally well to routine recreational activities such as watching their favourite DVDs alone. However, if they are demonstrating an interest in doing different activities with or without other young people, staff ensure that these choices are acted upon. Similarly, staff are familiar with young people's meal preferences. However, this is not taken for granted and alternative meals are provided in consultation with or on behalf of the young person. This process is managed sensitively and carefully, avoiding unnecessary distress to children and young people who have difficulties with changes to routines and preferences.

The complaints procedure is accessible in formats suitable for children and young people to understand. Parents and families also advocate any concerns on behalf of children and young people. There have been no complaints since the last inspection. Instead, a number of compliments have been received mainly from parents expressing their gratitude and thanks.

Support is accessible to children and young people in a variety of ways. Staff take time to plan their shifts, ensuring that children and young people are appropriately supervised without invading their personal space. The layout of the premises enables young people to enjoy time spent with others and time spent alone.

Personalised care and support are exceptional. This is because staff know when and how to intervene, giving children and young people reassurance and comfort when

they are unable to fully express or communicate their feelings. Parents say, 'Staff are approachable, loving and supportive', and, 'This is a fantastic service and the staff are good.'

Communication with young people is central to all aspects of care planning, while helping children and young people's successful transition between home, school and short breaks. Young people's personalised communication systems are impressive. Staff persevere with children and young people, giving them lots of time to adapt to different ways of communicating.

The structuring of short-break arrangements means that the unit is not overcrowded at any one time. The grouping of children and young people enables staff to focus on very specific and specialist needs. The service welcomes children and young people from all faiths, cultures and backgrounds. Extensive support is offered to families and this exceptional. For example, where appropriate, staff work closely with parents or the extended family ensuring that children and young people are being supported consistently. This includes consultation with parents and families on behavioural management systems, communication systems and supporting young people through transitional difficulties from situation to another. Parents appreciate this and make very strong comments about the positive impact this has on the entire family.

When necessary, changes to young people's care are acted upon swiftly and in consultation with the relevant professionals. Some parents commented that their children have received such a good service and have done well during their time at the unit, particularly, the support the children have received for developing their social skills, independence skills and communication. Parents are anxious about how their children will cope after moving on this year. However, staff work extensively with adult services ensuring minimum disruption to the quality of young people's care after they have moved on. When opportunities arise, staff stay in touch with young people after they have moved on and some young people return to the unit for social reasons.

Children and young people's holistic needs are identified in care plans. Staff are sensitive to children and young people's assessed needs and circumstances. For example, changes to respite arrangements are negotiated with parents if there are signs of a child or young person becoming distressed or anxious. Parents welcome these negotiations and the outcomes mean that children and young people are more settled on overnight stays.

The arrangements for the safe receipt, administration and storage of medication are very robust. Staff administering medication are appropriately trained and supervised, including the countersigning of controlled drugs. The rigorous processes in place ensure that young people receive the correct medication at the required times. It also ensures that all types of medication received into the unit are accounted for.

The ambience of the unit is very inviting and staff are aware of the very smallest of routines which are significant to children and young people on arrival and for the duration of their stay. Young people's diverse needs are considered at all times. This

includes creating an environment whereby young people can readily access play facilities, and maintaining 'low arousal' when children and young people are unable to tolerate too much activity at any one time.

The unit is immaculately kept and very well presented throughout. The building is secure but children and young people's liberty is not restricted. The numbers and deployment of staff on duty at any one time reflects the needs of the children and young people.

All facilities are situated on the ground floor and accessible to children and young people who are mobile or wheelchair dependent. Children and young people enjoy the outdoor space which includes large play apparatus and a trampoline. The provision of a Snoezelen room provides a range of stimulating, relaxing and sensory integrated activities. The premises are well maintained and replacement windows have been fitted recently.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Parents are very clear that their children are safe during their overnight stays. Staff take time in getting to know not just the children and young people but their families. This helps them understand circumstances and ways of supporting children and young people consistently. This is achieved through ongoing dialogue with families and schools. The home/short-breaks diary is used effectively by staff for communicating key observations about a child or young person's safety or well-being.

Significant work is undertaken by staff for ensuring the safety and protection of children and young people at all times. This includes the booking of short breaks, the quality of training undertaken by staff and their understanding of how each child or young person is cared for. Safeguarding policies and procedures are comprehensive and up to date. Staff are aware of these policies and how they work in practice. Communication between staff and everyone involved in the children and young people's care and welfare is effective. This ensures that any obvious changes in behaviour or circumstances are acted upon swiftly. One visiting professional visits the unit at short notice. They comment on their satisfaction with how children and young people are cared for. The visiting professional also comments on how staff exceed expectations in working with families of children and young people where there are safeguarding or welfare matters not related to the unit.

There are no issues or concerns regarding children and young people being missing from care. However, staff are familiar with the relevant procedures to be followed if this occurred.

The TITAN group is aimed at teenagers using the service. One of the activities undertaken by the TITAN group is to help young people develop a sense of personal

safety in different situations. This is integrated with off-site activities. This approach means that young people do not lose a sense of enjoyment when participating in off-site activities but increases their awareness about staying safe.

Behavioural management systems are sound and all methods of intervention are agreed with families and social workers. Staff work well with external professionals when identifying and agreeing methods of intervention. These outcomes are well documented. Records of restraint and sanctions are accessible to all staff and monitored by the management team. Although staff are trained to use physical intervention, they use redirection strategies rather than restraint or impose a sanction. One sanction imposed since the last inspection was to distract a young person from a situation and not loss of privileges in any way. Staff are very vigilant about young people's safety and well-being. For example, any changes or signs of bodily marks are recorded and communicated with parents. This process is carried out in keeping with the home's safeguarding procedures and helps protect children and young people who are unable to verbally communicate.

Individualised risk assessments devised for children and young people are comprehensive and consistent with care plans. Risk assessments identify areas of vulnerability and methods of intervention. In addition, overarching risk assessments are equally as detailed. These cover a wider scope such as off-site activities, transportation and accessing community-based venues. Staff demonstrate that risk assessments work well in practice. For example, off-site activities are planned meticulously and well in advance, avoiding any unnecessary risks to children, young people or staff.

Fire safety procedures are sound and a new fire detection system has been installed. This enhances the safety of children, staff and visitors. Checks on fire safety appliances are carried out regularly and records of all checks and tests are up to date. The frequency of fire safety training demonstrates that all staff are kept abreast of best practice. Staff also comment on the appropriateness of this training. Four fire drills have taken place to date this year. Records show that response times are reasonable and there are no concerns.

Fire risk assessments in place are thorough, wide ranging and up to date. Fire drills do not occur at night because of the impact and distress this has on young people. However, the generic fire risk assessment does not fully include the procedures and preparatory work undertaken by staff if it is necessary to evacuate the premises at night.

Leadership and management

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

The management team comprises suitably experienced and qualified individuals. Management systems are effective in practice and include robust monitoring of provisions and outcomes for children and young people. Proactive measures are in place for the future planning and running of the unit. These are set out in

comprehensive development plans. Financial resources awarded to the service are used wisely and within the best interest of young people's learning, development and safety. For example, young people are now accessing additional community-based activities through the use of additional funding.

Visits required under Regulation 33 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 are carried out routinely. Reports of these visits are informative, giving a very clear overview of how outcomes for young people are achieved. Areas identified for development through these visits are explicit and include details of how these are followed up. Monitoring procedures are carried out as required under Regulation 34. Outcomes are recorded in detail, identifying that the vast majority of records and aspects of the service are of an exceptionally high standard. Staff are kept abreast of the revised children's homes framework and learning opportunities on the new framework are evolving.

Consultation with parents, children, young people and stakeholders is ongoing. This includes exit surveys when young people move on, and opportunities for families to comment on the service at review meetings. The outcomes of consultation exercises are used to inform and influence practice. For example, the recently fitted adapted bathing facilities were agreed with parents and relevant professionals.

Children and young people are supported and cared for by a very dedicated and stable staff team. Staff speak positively about peer and management support. They also appreciate the varying types of training available to them, which is also relevant to their work with children and young people. All but one member of staff have achieved a relevant professional qualification, either the National Vocational Qualification at level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People or equivalent.

Staff are highly trained and use their knowledge to support children and young people safely and according to their assessed needs. Staff are consistent and calm in their approach and this is comforting for children and young people who find it difficult adapting to new situations.

Staff work extremely well together as a team and this has a positive impact on young people. For instance, handover meetings are used constructively for planning when and how children and young people are supported. Staff describe the support they receive as reliable, accessible and reasonable. In addition to their day-to-day duties, staff also have key areas of responsibilities. This provides opportunities for staff to excel in their area of specialism. The effectiveness of communication among the staff team also ensures that important information is cascaded appropriately and promptly.

The quality of children and young people's records is exceptional. The content is clear and concise, and information relating to specific care needs is explicit and detailed. This helps staff access and communicate information to parents more easily. There are excellent examples of how staff are involved in children and young people's welfare from the point of referral and assessment through to supporting transitions to adult services. In doing so, staff support these transitions by helping

young people create and relate to their personalised 'social stories'. These visual aids support young people in relating to their time spent in different places, engaging in different activities and preparing to move on to new environments.

The aims and objectives as specified in the Statement of Purpose are consistent with practice. Parents have no adverse views about this service and how children and young people are supported. The Statement of Purpose is comprehensive but some very minor adjustments are required. These include the numbers of registered places, mixed gender and updating the contact details for Ofsted.

The children's guide is colourful and designed with pictures, symbols and words. Where possible, this information is discussed and shared with children and young people prior to admission. A DVD version of the children's guide is currently being updated. This is popular with children, young people and their families.

Equality and diversity practice is **outstanding**.