

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Michael McCleave
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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 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. 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 provided by the school as well as public transport, local shops and amenities.

Overall effectiveness

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

The home has recently been subject to a major staff restructuring process that has resulted in significant changes in the work responsibilities for most staff. Nevertheless, the main focus of caring for the children has not been diminished. Children benefit from staff who are committed to their welfare and there is a positive approach to ensuring good outcomes for the children. The staff work closely with their educational colleagues at the school within the same campus to support the children to achieve their potential. The children make very good progress in relation to their starting points with respect of their welfare and personal development.

There is a strong approach to equality and diversity whereby the religious, cultural or personal needs of the children are met. Disability is not regarded as a limitation for the children at this home. They are supported and encouraged to lead as full life as possible and to enjoy communal living. The home has a good range of communication tools to ensure that the children are kept informed about life in the home and for their views to be sought.

Staff are still coming to terms with the impact of the recent restructuring and there is a need to capitalise on the positive commitment of staff in their work with the children so as to develop a new team ethos and culture. This has been a difficult period and cover for vacancies is reliant on the goodwill of existing staff and agency workers. The positive care of the children however, has not been affected. The safeguarding of the children remains a central feature at the home and staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities in this area of their work.

There is a new management team in place who are aware of the challenges ahead facing the home. Staff are appropriately supported and supervised. The administrative systems are sound and records are well maintained. There is however, a lack of evidence to show children having had access to their personal case files.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure the staff numbers can fulfil the home's Statement of Purpose to meet the individual needs of all children resident in the home (NMS 17.1)
- ensure that children and their parents understand the nature of records maintained and how to access these. (NMS 22.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

The home works in partnership with the specialist school for autism on the same site to work towards achieving positive outcomes for the children.

The health of the children is well managed at the home. All medications are carefully controlled and stored appropriately. There is an emphasis on the children leading a healthy lifestyle through play and sports using the well-resourced school facilities on evenings and weekends. The nurse based at the school is available to offer advice and guidance on any health-related matters. The home has established good links with health service professionals who specialise in learning disability and autism. These resources positively promote the health of the children.

A strong feature at the home is the excellent attendance at school by all the children. They are taught by teachers who have a specialist knowledge of autism. In addition the children have access to professionals with expertise in communication techniques and psychology. Staff from the home support the children during the school day. This provides consistency of care for the children. The school provides a safe and stimulating learning environment to enable children to achieve educationally.

The home is not isolated from the local community and the children are encouraged to support local events such as festivities in the nearby village. Shopping and visits to the local hairdresser is a popular activity among the children. The emphasis at the home is on ensuring that the children are exposed to life outside the safe confines of the school campus. For many of the children this is a significant outcome in developing their self confidence. These positive measures enable the children to experience activities they previously did not have the confidence or opportunity to participate in. The children's disabilities are not regarded as a barrier to enjoying new

experiences and the home supports them to achieve their maximum potential and to make informed choices.

Children enjoy experiencing foods from other cultures and themed meals from different countries is a popular event.

Staff work closely with parents and other professionals during the planning process for a resident to move onto an adult placement. This is carried out in partnership with parents and other professionals to ensure a smooth transition. Staff provide strong support for parents and young people going through the transitions process. This can be a sensitive time for the young person. Some parents stated, 'it's wonderful what our son has achieved at this home we couldn't have managed to do what they have done for him.'

Quality of care

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

The staff at the home have established good relationships with the children. This is based on developing their trust with adults over a period of time at the pace of the child. The children have limited communication abilities and the staff work proactively to ensure that their views are heard. This is achieved through staff assessing the most effective form of communication with each individual child. The home has an extensive array of communication tools available for staff to use. These range from symbols, pictures, widget signs covering most daily living situations. Staff use their knowledge of each child and communication tools to determine if there are any concerns that may lead to a complaint, or if a change of strategy is required to support an individual child.

Although trained in behaviour management including restraint, staff rarely use this approach. They work actively to diffuse any confrontational situation through calm dialogue with the child concerned. There is a clear appreciation among staff that physical restraint is a very last resort to protect a child. This is a good demonstration of their understanding of how children with autism would react to being restrained.

Children are well cared for in an environment that values their disability and cultural differences. The wishes of parents on the care of their child is fully taken into account at the home. Parents are treated with respect and seen as equal partners in the care of the children. Information is shared with parents and the school to ensure that the children are at the focus of the care provided and that the appropriate strategies and resources are in place.

The home values the views of the children. Through the use of the various communication techniques children can indicate their choices of meals, activities, what play activities they want to engage in and to indicate requests for assistance. Care plans are imaginative and make good use of pictures and photographs to describe the plan and progress being made. This enables the child to play an active part in reviews by seeing clearly what has been recorded about them.

Parents are positive about the quality of care provided for their children. Comments from parents included, 'I feel confident in the staff's ability to care for my child and I am comfortable leaving him in their care', another said, 'we have been very satisfied with the care our child has received whilst she has been there.'

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The home employs staff who have been subject to a robust recruitment and selection process. In addition, staff are selected for their understanding and commitment to working with children who are autistic. The home provides annual safeguarding training endorsed by the Local Safeguarding Board (LSCB) for all staff. This ensures that staff are familiar with procedures and of their responsibilities to maintain a safe environment for the children. The manager has established positive links with the local authority designated officer (LADO) for child protection. This is an effective relationship that enables the staff to seek advice and guidance on safeguarding matters. There is clear evidence to indicate that investigations into allegations or suspicions of harm have been handled appropriately and procedures followed.

The children rarely go missing from the home due to the vigilance of staff. There are however, appropriate procedures in place to cover any incident.

Staff are alert to situations where aggressive behaviour may be evident between children. This is not seen as bullying. Such occasions are dealt with sensitively by gently guiding the children away from each other. This works well and ensures that the children concerned are not alarmed by sudden actions from staff. This is a consistent approach adopted by staff when managing such situations.

Care plans identify risks for individual children with appropriate strategies to be followed to ensure their safety. These are regularly monitored and reviewed by managers. Staff are aware of the care plans and individual risk assessments for each child.

The home is located on a large school campus with appropriate safety and security measures in place to protect the children. A secure fence with gates restricts entry to unauthorised persons. The entrance door to the home is electronically controlled. Consideration has been given to all health and safety matters to ensure the safety and well-being of the children. Fire evacuations are regularly practised and the plans have been approved by the Fire Officer. The measures in place positively promote the safety of the children and staff.

Leadership and management

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

The home has recently been subject to a significant restructuring process that has had a major impact on staffing. The management team has been strengthened with two deputies appointed to support the manager. Care staff have been assigned other responsibilities providing support to children in the school in addition to care tasks at the home. This promotes consistency of care. The home is currently experiencing a shortfall in staff numbers and this is made up through existing staff working extra shifts and use of agency workers. This is not an ideal situation. It is recognised by the manager that this needs resolving as it is currently based on the goodwill of staff to cover for the vacancies. There is a nevertheless, a positive commitment at the home aimed at focussing on making the restructuring work to improve life for the children.

The Statement of Purpose has been updated to reflect the changes and staff are clear about the aims and objectives identified in this document.

Management monitoring of key records takes place regularly and this is complemented with a monthly unannounced visit from someone independent of the home. Records are well maintained and good use is made of child-friendly communication tools in children's case files. However, there is no evidence to show that children have made a contribution to, or read their records.

The management team are aware of key areas requiring improvements. These involve resolving staffing shortages and to establish a new team identity and culture following the major changes that have been experienced.

Staff receive regular supervision from a line manager where their training and development needs are identified. Training opportunities are readily available with additional access to specialist expertise located at the school. There is a positive commitment towards training and development of staff at the home. This ensures that children are cared for by skilled and competent staff.

The home is emerging from a period of uncertainty and the management team are aware of the tasks ahead to build up a new ethos and culture at the home. There is a positive willingness to embrace change and to move forward with the aim of providing the children with a stimulating caring environment.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.