

## Inspection report for children's home

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## 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 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 children. It comprises four units that are all interconnected enabling the children to freely move between these to meet friends. The outside areas are equipped with modern play facilities. The children all enjoy single bedrooms with en-suite facilities.

The other house is some distance away and provides care for up to 14 children from Monday to Friday during school term-time.

There is access to transport provided by the school as well as public transport, local shops and amenities.

### 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 **good**.

This home provides the children with a safe caring environment to live. Staff are well trained in autism care and they work proactively to ensure that the children achieve positive outcomes socially and educationally. A strong feature of the home is the effective joint working relationship between the school and children's home. Staff from both settings work together as a well integrated team sharing information for the benefit of the children. The educational progress of the children is good with clear outcomes being achieved. Disability is not regarded as a limitation.

The views of the children are actively sought and they are able to make a positive contribution to life at the home. This encourages the children to develop their self confidence. Staff work proactively to provide children with a safe and nurturing

environment where they can develop self confidence and achieve social skills.

All aspects of care planning are highly personalised so as to meet the individual needs of the children. The home uses a range of communication tools to ensure that the views of the children are taken into account in all aspects of their care.

The home is currently experiencing some staff shortages and, as such, regular use is made of agency staff. This is recognised by the management team as not being ideal. However, every effort is made to use those staff who have skills in autism and who can provide a degree of consistency for the children. Positive steps have been taken to recruit to the vacant posts.

Safeguarding is at the core of the work at the home. Where any shortfalls are identified, the management team ensure that all staff learn from these situations. A recent safeguarding situation was not handled appropriately by some staff. However, when the manager became aware of the incident, it was managed correctly in line with procedures.

The staff at this home positively support and nurture the children as they progress through the journey towards adulthood. This is a very supportive environment for vulnerable children who are able to achieve their best with strong support and guidance from a team of dedicated staff. The management team provide staff with effective leadership and there is a commitment to continually improve services.

### **Outcomes for children and young people**

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

The children are positively supported and encouraged to develop their self confidence and to enhance their personal life skills. Staff work proactively to promote good outcomes for the children both educationally, socially and in their personal health. Parents welcome the support of the staff, and it is clear that the children benefit from their experience at this setting.

The strong links that have been established between the school and the children's home, ensure that the children benefit from this positive joint working relationship. The children are supported by the residential care staff to do well and to achieve positive outcomes at school. The impact of the support provided is clearly evident in their good attendance at school and educational achievements. All care staff work alongside teachers during the school day to provide the children with maximum support.

The children are actively encouraged to participate in a wide range of activities that enhance their wellbeing and self confidence. The social and emotional benefits for the children are clearly evident. For some children, going to the cinema, shopping or to a restaurant, has not been something they have previously experienced. They

enjoy these occasions and this has helped them to be more confident when going out into the community. There is a positive focus on encouraging the children to achieve their potential in whatever form that might be.

The staff attach a great deal of importance to enable the children to maintain regular contact with their families, some of who live a long distance from the children's home. This contact has been facilitated by the establishment of a visual communications system using a computer. This resource is very popular among the children and their parents.

Children are encouraged to experience the wider community beyond the children's home. They participate in local activities such as shopping, fund raising for worthy local causes, and having a presence at local events such as the annual village fair. This is a positive approach to enhancing the children's self confidence and meeting people from the local area.

A social worker responsible for a child placed at the home said: 'I have a great deal of confidence in the calibre of staff at this children's home. Their expertise in autism is impressive and I have seen a remarkable change in the behaviour and achievements of the child my local authority has placed at this children's home.'

## **Quality of care**

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

Children are well cared for at this home. There is evidence to indicate that warm and trusting relationships have been developed between staff and the children. Staff are able to communicate with the children using a variety of techniques, thereby ensuring that they are able to meet the needs of each child. This is a significant feature of the service. There is an expectation that all staff will become proficient in a range of communication methods. The culture at the home is that no child will be unable to communicate their views and feelings. This demonstrates a commitment to equality and diversity. Staff have a good understanding of the care and emotional needs of the children. They are skilled at managing challenging situations in a calm and caring manner. This approach promotes a more friendly and caring environment.

The children are supported and encouraged to take a positive role in the home. For example, the young person's council is a key forum where children and staff meet to share thoughts and ideas about how to develop and improve life at the home. Through this meeting the children have been involved in formulating questions to be asked at the recent recruitment and selection of candidates to work at the home. They have also been actively involved in deciding places to visit during the summer holidays. It is clearly evident that staff are committed to ensuring that the children take an active part in decisions that affect them. There is a culture at the home that does not regard autism as a restriction on children taking a full and active part in everyday situations. This approach promotes their self confidence and gives them a genuine sense of responsibility.

Care plans are in place for all the children. The home makes very good use of pictures, symbols and colours. This promotes their understanding of their individual plans. These documents are designed to meet the communication abilities of each child and to identify measurable outcomes that can be achieved. The children are individually involved with their key workers to develop their care plan. Where required, all religious, social and cultural needs would be included. These care plans demonstrate the imagination and skills of staff making use of computer based resources in order to produce a child friendly document.

Staff work collaboratively with the health services as well as the school to ensure that the children receive appropriate resources. The close professional links that have been established with these services mean that high quality resources are readily available for the welfare and development of the children.

Children enjoy a range of purposeful activities. These range from, trips out to places of interest, walks in the countryside, shopping, play, going to the cinema and meals out. These are intended to enable the children to experience life out in the community and to socialise as a group. Within the home, a range of fun activities are readily available. For example, aromatherapy is very popular as are dance club, music, film nights and arts and crafts.

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

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

The staff are trained annually on how to manage safeguarding situations. However, not all staff are fully aware of how to process safeguarding concerns. This was demonstrated in a recent incident where communication of information was not up to standard. Once this became known to the manager, a speedy response was initiated and the appropriate actions put into place. The manager has taken additional action to reinforce safeguarding procedures to all care and teaching staff. This has been further enhanced with a national child protection organisation being commissioned to provide care and teaching staff with safeguarding seminars. These actions are intended to promote the safety of children by enhancing a greater awareness of safeguarding responsibilities.

Bullying is not a feature at this setting and staff would ensure that if any bullying occurs this would be challenged. Young people rarely go missing and there are clear policies in place for staff to follow.

The behaviour management practiced at the home is based on sound de-escalation techniques in order to diffuse tense confrontational situations that occur between the children. Staff base their actions on having a detailed intimate knowledge of each child and the trigger situations that may escalate a situation.

Safeguarding of children is enhanced through the robust recruitment and selection policy in place. This ensures that staff appointed are suitable and safe to work with children. Staff are appointed following a rigorous procedure that includes Criminal

Records Bureau (CRB) checks, references checked verbally, interviews and probationary periods. All these processes promote the safety of the children.

## **Leadership and management**

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

This is a well managed service with a motivated staff team who are skilled and competent to carry out their duties working with children who have autism. All staff are expected to work at the school as well as within children's home. This professional crossover enhances the skills of the care staff and additionally means that the children receive a consistent service from staff who are familiar with them.

The staff are provided with good training opportunities that enable them to develop their skills and competences. This is further enhanced through the extensive combined training programme for teaching and care staff. The link between the school and children's home is strong. This ensures that through flexible working, the children are provided with high quality care from dedicated skilled staff. Staff development is complemented through formal regular supervision from a manager. The overall quality of work in the home is monitored by the Registered Manager and through monthly unannounced inspections in line with regulations. Any shortfalls in standards are readily addressed by the management team.

There is a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development at the home. A current issue is the regular use being made of agency staff due to shortfalls in the permanent staff team. A recruitment drive has recently been successfully completed and appointments have been made. However, when agency staff are used, these tend to be the same people each time in order to maintain a level of consistency for the children.

The home operates effectively to the aims and objectives identified in the Statement of Purpose. A guide to the home has been developed to meet the communication abilities of the children. This is a colourful document that makes extensive use of easy to read words complemented with pictures and photographs. It is adapted to include personal information about a child. This is a good demonstration of equality and diversity.

The management team demonstrate a commitment to improvement. For example, the setting up of a consultation meeting for all the children to explore a range of issues relating to life at the home, and learning from safeguarding situations.

The administration systems are efficient and ensures that records are easily accessed by authorised staff. Records are kept in secure conditions ensuring that only those authorised, have access to the children's case files.

## 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.