

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Ann-Marie Born
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's resource unit is operated by a local authority. It provides respite short breaks for up to nine children with learning disabilities and complex health care needs, and for children who have autism. The service is provided from two sites.

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**.

Children and young people are happy with their personalised care and enjoy good relationships with staff and each other. They are treated with warmth, dignity and respect. This effectively promotes positive outcomes. Children and young people enjoy a range of meaningful activities which provide them with new life experiences while improving confidence and building self-esteem. Parents and social workers report very positively about the quality of care and experiences for young people. A parent stated: 'It is a brilliant place, it's great. I haven't got any complaints at all. He likes to go and is happy there; not many places he's happy to go to but he really enjoys it there. They take him out and let him do what he wants to do rather than having to follow. They ask him what he wants and he is able to express himself and they hear him.'

The management of the home is stable and proactive and an enthusiastic staff team provides good, consistent, dedicated care. A staff member said: 'I am very privileged to work in this field.' Staff are committed to keeping children and young people safe and they feel safe. Staff are knowledgeable of, and action, appropriate safeguarding practices.

This is a good home overall. The manager understands the strengths and areas of further development needed and is working hard to address those. However, the adequate judgement in the area of safeguarding reflects the areas to improve. These include the quality of staff recording after a restraint, capturing children and young people's views following any physical intervention or sanction and replacing some radiators.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a domestic setting, in particular the unsuitable radiators (NMS 10.3)
- ensure that where any sanctions or restraints are used children are encouraged, where they are able, to have their views recorded in the records kept in the home (NMS 3.18)
- ensure that entries in records are non-stigmatising and distinguish as far as possible between fact and opinion, in particular, recording following a restraint (NMS 22.4)
- ensure that the Statement of Purpose is individualised for the home and is available to any parent or person with parental responsibility (NMS 13.1)
- ensure that all existing care staff have attained a minimum level 3 qualification or be working towards the Diploma within 6 months of commencement of employment. (NMS 18.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people emotionally benefit from forming sustainable attachments and warm relationships with core staff members. Children and young people learn to recognise their own emotions and how to express these more positively. As a result they develop a confidence in their abilities to build relationships with their peers and form important friendships. One parent said: 'He is really progressing because he is able to make friends now; that is his playtime going there, he can't go out like other boys and he has made friends there.'

Children and young people's holistic health needs are met well and they enjoy a balanced diet which maintains healthy outcomes. Staff use imaginative 'taster sessions' to introduce children and young people to new tastes and textures, thereby expanding their food choices and diets. Where children and young people have complex health and behavioural needs, appropriate professionals regularly contribute to their plans and care. This ensures children and young people benefit from a multidisciplinary approach and perspective to their needs. A specialist nurse commented: 'Generally they are amazing and they work very closely with us in health. They work creatively and positively with young people.' Children and young people are encouraged and enabled to participate in a range of inclusive physical activities as part of their daily routine. This effectively promotes their social and physical development. Where possible staff encourage broader interests and think

creatively about what children and young people may enjoy. A social worker commented: 'She would prefer to sit on the sofa and do jigsaws but they are good at keeping her active, getting her out and about and improving socialising.'

Good liaison with schools ensures a consistent approach to learning and that children and young people are well supported to achieve personal goals, for example, using a visual timetable to choose activities and food. Children and young people make choices about their day, for example, which activity to do next, who they would like to spend time with, and decorations for the home. These have included cartoon jokes, in symbols, being chosen and displayed by two young people on their bedroom doors and the front door of the building. As a result, children and young people learn to contribute to their home and personal space while developing confidence in their skills and abilities. A staff member said: 'She has been learning negotiation skills and she has improved tremendously since she has been here. She likes coming here because she feels she has more choices.'

While children and young people are enjoying their short breaks their parents have the option of whether to visit or not. Staff maintain good contact with parents using the 'setting to home' books, regular telephone communication or face-to-face conversations to share views on outcomes of care. Children and young people develop confidence in their growing independence as they observe their parents' trust in the setting. One parent stated, 'I don't tell them when I am coming but she is laughing when I get there,' and another said: 'I never have had any concerns, which is why I don't need to visit when he is there. He has transport and I know he will be safe and happy there, enjoy himself and come back safe.'

Quality of care

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

There have been a number of changes in staff and a high level of staff sickness over the past year. Nevertheless the commitment of the management team and core staff members has ensured that the quality of care has been maintained to a good level. A community nurse stated: 'The care approach of staff to meet young people's needs is fantastic.' Good quality planning ensures children and young people enjoy their respite stays together with their friends and staff who understand them. This extends to managing gender balances to provide children and young people with further opportunities. A social worker said: 'There are no male role models in his life, but he is paired with a male one-to-one, which is good positive attention for him.'

Irrespective of the communication and mobility barriers they experience, children and young people develop positive relationships with staff and each other. Their individual communication methods are understood and utilised to enable them to spend fun, social time with each other and on activities. One parent said, 'He gets on the majority of the time with the other children there and makes friends,' and another commented: 'He is a very solitary person and is alone a lot and it really does him good to be with other children. Staff are very good with him and patient and they meet all of his needs.'

Regular house meetings, communication with parents and one-to-one sessions with staff enable children and young people to effectively express their views. For example, children and young people choose the bedroom they want to sleep in, activities they wish to go on, and specific requests are met wherever possible. A staff member commented: 'They have a lot of restrictions in their lives and if we can give them opportunities for as many choices as possible that is great.' As a result, children and young people feel valued, that they will be listened to and understand the importance of expressing their views. One young person was really happy that her request for animals in the home was met with an arrangement being made for petting animals to regularly visit. A parent said: 'They ask him what he wants and he is able to express himself and they hear him.'

Good individual care plans, complemented by comprehensive 'This is Me' booklets ensure that personalised care is focused on achievable, appropriately tailored targets. Examples include going to the toilet independently, cleaning teeth, and preparing picnic meals. Staff work proactively and positively with other agencies, including health, education, social workers and speech and language therapists. This ensures children and young people receive continuity of care and achievements are shared and built upon. A community nurse said: 'They have fabulous communication with us and social workers.'

Children and young people's cultural and personal identity needs are fully identified in care planning and comprehensively applied in day-to-day care. Inclusive activities both within the home and community provide children and young people with enjoyable new experiences while building their social skills and self-esteem. A parent said, 'He's not able bodied and it's nice to know people have got the time for him to be a teenager and have fun,' and a social worker stated: 'He absolutely loves going there and they are really proactive at getting him to go out and doing things. Like taking him to the cinema; he had never done that before, he is a child that wants to do the same as other young people and not be constrained by his disability and they give him that.'

Children and young people enjoy staying in buildings that are fully equipped and maintained to meet their needs and offer good care facilities. Both properties have sensory rooms, shared living rooms and dining rooms as well as individual bedrooms and specifically adapted bathrooms. Outside space is well utilised by children and young people, for example, water play on sunny afternoons. One of the properties has a large purpose-built playground which is used by children and young people from both settings. This effectively promotes inclusion and a sense of belonging. These feelings are enhanced further by attendance at the annual garden party together with neighbours from the community. A parent said: 'He absolutely loves it there, he can't wait to get out of the car.'

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people feel safe and are protected from harm by the proactive staff team, for whom safeguarding is a priority. A staff member stated: 'Young people are safe in the environment and the fact that all staff have a good knowledge of safeguarding skills protects them.' Children and young people do not experience bullying, and staff promote their safety in and outside the home. Opportunities for children and young people to go missing are effectively minimised and there are agreed local protocols with police and partner agencies if required. A parent said: 'He is completely safe there and he can relax and I can relax.'

Some children and young people display challenging and complex behaviours which present risks and challenges to keep them and staff safe. Individual behaviour management strategies are consistently applied, allowing the majority of children and young people to understand the difference between positive and negative behaviours. A parent said: 'He has got a little bit calmer there so he is learning boundaries.' Staff are effectively trained in physical intervention procedures which accurately reflect legislation, including the opportunity to be seen by a medical practitioner. All restraint episodes are monitored robustly by the manager. Any concerns are identified and quickly addressed, providing further safeguards and a reduction in the number of physical interventions needed. However, children and young people's views are not recorded following a restraint and some records are subjective, stigmatising and reflect staff frustration rather than a young person's needs. In addition, although sanctions are fair and proportionate, children and young people are not offered the chance to comment. As a result, children and young people who are able, are not being provided with the opportunity to reflect on their challenging behaviours or learn the consequences of their actions.

Children and young people's physical safety is promoted by identifying and meeting their assessed needs, for example, ensuring they have appropriate beds. Appropriate safety checks and fire practices further promote safety, including tailored plans to support all children and young people to take part in drills. Children and young people are individually safeguarded by auditory electronic monitoring measures that inform staff if they are at risk, for example, if they are having a seizure in their sleep. A comprehensive written policy sets out how the devices are to be used and how children and young people's legitimate privacy is protected. Children and young people's well-being is promoted by these measures. However, some of the radiators are not suitable for use in the home because of their bulky design and could prove hazardous.

Robust local authority recruitment procedures ensure that staff are carefully selected before appointment. Stringent monitoring procedures help prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children and young people. Staff are well aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and reporting arrangements. Staff's current knowledge is maintained through refreshing their training as well as exploring a different safeguarding scenario at each team meeting. Children and young people's safety and security are assured as a result. A social worker said: 'I have never had any concerns about safety.'

Leadership and management

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

The home is efficiently and conscientiously managed by the strong and committed manager who knows all of the children and young people in her care well. The manager is ambitious for children and young people to achieve the best they can within their abilities. This dedicated enthusiasm is communicated to staff, thereby continually improving care, and is acknowledged by parents and professionals. A parent said: 'The new management they have makes a difference, it's not just a babysitting service now but making that difference'. Very good arrangements exist for monitoring the quality of care and any concerns identified are swiftly addressed. Children and young people's progress is monitored from their starting points and the demonstrable improvements the home has made to their outcomes are identified. This effectively promotes and maintains high standards while contributing to children and young people's experience of being valued.

An excellent children's guide is available in a format that can be understood by children and young people and is personalised for them. This allows children and young people and their parents to have an understanding of the care they will receive. The home is operating in line with a comprehensive Statement of Purpose which outlines the aims and objectives of the local authority. However, the document has not been made readily available to parents and is not sufficiently individualised for the home. As a result, parents do not always know who is caring for their child. One parent said: 'You can have five different names in the sheet that comes home with her and you think who is this?'

There has been a high turnover of staff over the past 12 months, resulting in a decrease in the number of staff holding the necessary National Vocational Qualification. As a result, children and young people may not be being cared for by fully qualified staff. However, the manager ensures that staff are undertaking specific training to meet children and young people's needs and improve well-being, for example, autism, sleep disorders and stoma care. The manager and core staff team have worked hard to ensure that children and young people have not been negatively affected by the changes, and their care remains consistently high. A parent said: 'The staff are lovely, they keep getting new staff, new one there today and she was absolutely lovely with him. That makes me happy and so it also makes him happy.'

Children and young people's well-being, sense of belonging and feelings of self-worth are enhanced by the good care and attention they receive from the committed and enthusiastic staff. Staff members report positively about the staff changes and that they receive strong peer and management support. A member of staff stated: 'We work as a team very well and we have got a good set of people to work with. The new ones who have started within the last year are brilliant, lots of fresh ideas and things.'

The recommendations from the previous inspection have been fully met leading to an improvement in safeguarding measures. Children and young people are protected

by multi-agency decision making as the manager communicates with and notifies agencies of any significant incidents. Records are securely kept and chart children and young people's lives in sensitive and child-centred language for their future.

Regular independent monitoring visits include gaining the views of children, young people and their parents. The manager actively monitors the quality of care as required. Information gathered by these processes is used positively to further benefit children and young people and inform the very good development plan.

The motivation of the manager, with the full support of the committed management team, is driving forward the continuous improvement. This level of motivation ensures children and young people are provided with a safe, caring and stimulating environment where they feel valued and respected. As a result, children and young people develop and achieve in areas of physical and emotional well-being, sustain their educational attainment and build necessary social and life skills.

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.