

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Barbara Davies
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is registered to care for five children with learning difficulties and associated disabilities. The home is run by a private company and can offer the flexibility of short breaks in addition to long-term placements.

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 **outstanding**.

Children benefit from the commitment, professionalism and innovative practice of the Responsible Individual and Registered Manager. Together, they role model high standards of practice and generate enthusiasm and commitment to their staff team. There is an expectation that staff perform to high standards and robust action is taken in the light of poor practice. Staff are trained and competent in their roles and display the same enthusiasm for their roles as their managers do. Senior managers are not complacent and the thirst for continual improvement remains.

Relationships between staff and children are extremely positive and nurturing. As a consequence, the environment is relaxed and the conduct of the children is excellent. The contribution of children to the home is highly valued. Staff encourage them and their families to play an active role in making decisions about care delivery.

Children make exceptional progress in all aspects of their development. Parents, carers and professionals are extremely positive about the transformation in children, particularly in relation to their health, since making the transition to the home. They report that: 'The expertise of the managers has helped children to make an incredibly successful transition.'

No breaches of regulation have been identified. Recommendations for improvement are made in relation to some of the policies and procedures and transport arrangements.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure children are provided with information on how to contact the Children's Rights Director (NMS 1.5)
- ensure the home has a written development plan, reviewed annually, for the future of the home. This refers specifically to considering the need for the home to have its own transport arrangements (NMS 15.2)
- ensure new staff undertake the Children's Workforce Development Council's induction standards, commencing with 7 working days of starting their employment and being completed within 6 months (NMS 18.3)
- ensure the home's complaints procedure is updated to provide an accurate description of the home's practice. (NMS 21.10)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children quickly settle into their placement as a result of an extremely effective pre-admission process. Staff gain a thorough understanding of each young person's needs prior to their admission and ensure resources are available to meet them.

Education is very well supported and promoted by staff and all children have exceptionally good attendance at school. Children thrive and make exceptional progress, from their starting points at the home, as a result of the positive links that staff have established with schools. Information is regularly shared with use of a 'home to school' diary. Staff attend parents' evenings alongside parents. Through working in partnership, staff are able to monitor progress and work consistently to help children achieve agreed targets.

Children also make exceptionally good progress socially, due to the range of stimulating activities provided. Children develop social skills and confidence by being supported by staff to access a range of activities in the home and the community. The home does not currently have a vehicle and this limits the potential for some spontaneous activities. However, arrangements are in place to facilitate planned outings and excellent use is made of public transport, which helps young people integrate into their local community. A parent said: 'It is amazing what the staff have been able to achieve, things that I was never able to do, such as taking my child on trips out. My child is happier and accesses a greater range of activities than they have ever done previously.'

Children learn skills that develop their mobility, personal care and independence by participating in activities in the home and the community. Through consistent

application of care plans, staff support children to perform any tasks that are assessed as being within their capabilities.

Staff are attentive to the health needs of children, as a result of which their health improves during their time in the home. Parents and carers said: 'Within a short period of time in the home my child was sleeping better, eating better and incidents of behaviour were a lot less;' and 'I cannot praise the home enough for the positive impact they have had on my child. Overall, my child is more relaxed and at ease with themselves.'

Staff welcome parents, carers and siblings to the home and actively involve them in the care of the children. This approach is extremely effective in helping children maintain contact with people who are important to them and helps them to gain an understanding of their lives. Parents and carers are very appreciative of the support and activities that are provided for siblings and the extended family, such as the planned Christmas party. Through this acceptance and inclusion, children and their families spend positive time together which results in an overall sense of well-being and belonging. A social worker said: 'The home manages the challenges presented by some parents extremely well. They involve them while at the same time reinforce any boundaries that are necessary.'

Quality of care

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

Comprehensive pre-admission assessments inform the day-to-day practice of staff. Staff are well informed about the individual care needs of children and implement care plans confidently, consistently and sensitively. Children mostly co-operate with their daily routines as a result of the highly personalised approach adopted by staff. Staff maintain the dignity and respect of children, for instance by attending to their needs in the way they prefer.

The managers are aware of the skills and competencies of the staff team and source additional training should a child be admitted whose needs require a different set of skills. One placing social worker said: 'The staff have risen remarkably to the challenges presented by my young person. They obtained a thorough understanding of their needs prior to admission and ensured staff were equipped to deal with these. We are extremely pleased.'

Social workers said that they have witnessed children make considerable progress as a result of the professional, committed and knowledgeable manner in which care plans have been designed and implemented by the senior management team. Specific equipment, adaptations or aids required by children are obtained as a priority. This proactive approach helps children progress and develop to their potential, as well as enabling them to be active participants in organised activities within the home and the local community. A range of stimulating activities helps children become confident in social situations. Staff support children to reach the same milestones as their peers and to enjoy the same experiences. For example,

making the school 'prom' a very special occasion with the purchase of dinner suits, full length dresses and taking pictures that were later shared with families.

Positive behaviour management strategies assist staff in achieving the best outcomes for children. Staff establish positive relationships with children and negotiate the completion of their routines in a calm and reassuring way. Plans are in place to address any behavioural issues and staff work consistently and successfully to these.

Professional relationships with partner agencies are extremely effective, with the needs of the children being the foremost consideration. Placing social workers said: 'We have been impressed by the professional approach. The managers have worked extremely hard and co-operatively with us to deliver the service we wanted. They have helped children to make a difficult transition in a seamless manner.'

The home consults regularly with children, parents, carers and social workers, and their views significantly influence the running of the home and care delivery. Staff consult with children by using a variety of communication techniques which maximises their ability to make choices. Children are routinely given choices about the food they eat and the activities they want to do.

Complaints procedures are well publicised in a variety of formats that children, their parents and carers understand and know how to use. They are, however, not fully consistent with the home's practice and information for children does not contain the contact details of the Children's Rights Director. These shortfalls are not currently impacting on service users due to the high levels of satisfaction with the service and other safeguards in place. Regular visits to the young children by an external advocate is an example of the strong commitment that the home makes to the protection of vulnerable children and provides an additional safeguard. Parents, carers and professionals associated with the service express overwhelming support and extremely high levels of satisfaction. No concerns about practice have been raised. One adult associated with the service said: 'I would expect any assessment of this service to receive a five star rating.'

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children reside in a stable and safe environment where their safety and welfare is paramount. Staff are trained in safe care practices and children are protected by the consistent application of these by staff. There have been no child protection concerns. Staff are, however, trained in how to recognise and handle these concerns should they arise. Managers have shown the ability to make difficult decisions in order to promote the welfare of children, such as terminating employment when practice does not meet the required standard.

Robust and regular health and safety checks on all of the home's equipment and appliances ensures a safe environment for children to live in. The involvement of

staff and children in regular fire drills ensures their familiarity with the evacuation procedures in the event of a fire. Comprehensive risk assessments and care plans inform staff how to safely care for children. Identified risks are considered in conjunction with social workers, health professionals, parents and carers. This enables thorough discussion and agreement of any preventative action to be taken.

High ratios of staff to children enable individual needs to be extremely well met. Routines are well established and staff work hard to help children understand the expectations of their behaviour and to acquire social skills. Staff successfully engage children in constructive activities of their own choosing which limits the potential for frustration and bullying. There have been no incidents of children going missing from this home.

Behaviour is very well managed with few incidents of any nature. Staff are informed, through their training, of circumstances which permit the use of physical restraint and work within these parameters. They are skilful in their approach to conflict. De-escalation techniques are successfully used, when necessary, as a result of which the use of physical restraint is a rarity. A calm, nurturing and safe environment is provided and parents, carers and social workers have great confidence in the ability of staff to keep their children safe. One said: 'I have complete confidence in the staff and know that my child is safer, more settled and much, much happier than in any previous placement.'

Leadership and management

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

The leaders and managers of the service are dynamic, innovative and in most respects provide extremely effective leadership. The Registered Manager and the Responsible Individual are a visible presence in the home and jointly provide clear direction to staff. Clear delegation of responsibility means that staff are fully aware of their duties and responsibilities and are held fully accountable. Poor practice is not tolerated and is robustly challenged.

Staff are competent and confident in their role as a result of their comprehensive induction training programme, on-going training and regular professional supervision. The home has yet to implement the Children's Workforce Development Council's induction standards to help newly appointed staff become familiar with their role. However, the home's own induction programme compensates for this.

Staff receive excellent levels of support. Professional supervision is regular, of a high standard and provides opportunities for staff to reflect on and develop their practice. The frequent presence of the Responsible Individual and Registered Manager provides excellent oversight of practice, enables issues to be quickly identified and addressed, and provides opportunities for spontaneous practice development.

The managers have vision and demonstrate a strong commitment to the continual improvement and development of the service. Thorough and robust quality

assurance systems inform their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. Immediate action is taken to rectify any shortfalls identified through the home's own internal monitoring processes, through Ofsted inspection visits, and as a result of feedback from stakeholders. The recommendation made at the previous inspection has been met. Prompt action was taken during this inspection to address minor shortfalls in practice, such as updating the home's complaints procedure to more accurately reflect the home's practice.

Targets for the development of the service are challenging and realistic. Managers are currently planning to register a home for adults, so that when children reach adulthood they can move into 'a home for life'.

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.