

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspection date	28/11/2012
Inspector	Elizabeth Barrett
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Residential special school (>295 days/year)

Date of last inspection	19/01/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This setting is an independent residential special school registered as a children's home. The school offers specialised education and care for up to 20 children on a full-time basis, and two children under short-break arrangements. The school cares for children who are diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder and associated complex needs.

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**.

Young people with autism and associated complex needs, make excellent progress in this school. Overall, this school achieves outstanding outcomes for young people, in relation to improving their personal communication skills, building positive attachments with staff and in developing independence.

Young people experience outstanding care and are safeguarded, because staff provide consistency, stability and a safe and nurturing environment. Young people are treated with respect and dignity and full consideration is given to each individual's unique preferences and learning abilities.

Multi-disciplinary teams ensure that young people are provided with bespoke person-centred care and education, that is flexibly supported within a structured environment. Positive feedback was provided by families and professionals regarding the quality of care provided. Observations at this visit demonstrate that young people enjoy stimulating relationships with staff, enabling them to develop in their confidence and identity. Staff are well trained and enthusiastic, and have significant knowledge and understanding of the complex needs of young people in their care.

This school is well managed and staff are highly committed to improving the lives of young people by enabling them to reach their full potential. The Registered Manager and provider are proactive in ensuring the school continuously builds upon all areas of good practice and evolves with the needs of the young people as its primary

driver.

There are two requirements and one recommendation made at this visit. These are in relation to ensuring all young people's case records are robustly monitored and that they contain current local authority paperwork and that copies of Regulation 34 reports are forwarded to Ofsted as required.

Areas for improvement

Statutory 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
28 (2001)	ensure in respect of each child who is accommodated in a children's home a record in permanent form includes the details and result of any review of the placing authority's plan for the care of the child, or of his placement plan (Regulation 28(1)(a)(b))	31/01/2013
34 (2001)	ensure the registered person shall supply to the HMCI a report in respect of any review conducted by him for the purposes of paragraph (1). (Regulation 34 (2))	31/12/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure the manager regularly monitors, in line with regulations, all records kept by the home to ensure compliance, and to identify any patterns or trends, with reference to ensuring all children's case records contain up to date local authority paperwork, and immediate action is taken to address any shortfalls. (NMS 21.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people with autism and associated complex needs make outstanding progress in this school. They are enabled to progress in their learning and maximise their personal potential and independence.

Young people benefit from consistently applied daily routines that provide a supportive structure which enables them to feel safe and make sense of their

surroundings. Young people are provided with greater opportunities to understand daily tasks and to make progress in achieving them. Examples of these include, self-regulating challenging behaviours and developing their social skills, such as being able to sit and eat lunch with their peers in the communal dining area.

Young people thrive because they are treated as individuals and are enabled to channel their personalities through positive learning and development. Through the staff's increased knowledge and understanding of autism, young people are provided with clear school and free-time transitional plans, which reduce levels of anxiety and resistance. These plans help young people develop a sense of predictability and trust with the adults who care for them.

Young people receive uniquely assessed and bespoke educational programmes that consider their learning abilities and aspirations. For some young people this means they are taught on a one-to-one basis to help stabilise their presenting behaviours and to support their meaningful participation. All young people are achieving educationally from their individual starting points, with some making significant progress with their written work, language and communication skills. Parents speak positively about the achievements of their young people including, 'My child is making excellent progress educationally. She is starting to read and write, engage in her reflections, and loves to explore her surroundings; she is particularly excelling in science.'

Communication with young people is given the upmost consideration at this school. Staff work creatively, identifying those methodologies that meet individual preferences and encourage understanding and interpretation of actions. This ensures young people are supported to communicate their feelings and views, and they are provided with assistance to complete daily living activities. Young people make effective and efficient use of symbols and other non-verbal aids, to enable them to make informed choices, for example, in choosing specific activities. Young people are further supported to express their views through participation in one-to-one sessions with a key worker. Staff use various approaches and day-to-day tasks, including interactive play and repetitive picture exchanges to encourage and support progress. These sessions enable young people to work towards specific targets that promote the development of their life skills and independence.

A range of activities stimulate and encourage young people to extend their diverse emotional and physical boundaries, sensory needs, special interests and love of routines. For example, young people engage in activities including arts and crafts, computer games, the use of a sensory room and soft play area and outdoor activities. Health needs are promoted by strong links between the school's nurses, care, and education staff to enable young people's good health and well-being to be effectively planned for and supported. This includes promoting, healthy eating and the use of homeopathic medicines to maintain specific diagnosed conditions. Some young people are making significant progress in managing aspects of their personal care, such as toileting and bathing.

The effective and proactive partnerships between parents the school and other

stakeholders, ensures that young people are consistently cared for across their environments. The promotion of independence enables young people to develop life skills to assist with their transitional placements. This partnership ensures young people with autism and learning disabilities are fully supported to achieve their individual potential, to prepare for their transitions into adulthood, and where possible, as inclusive citizens.

Quality of care

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

Young people receive care and support within an environment that is warm, sensitive and nurturing. The staff work in close partnership with other people, to provide individual support that places the young person at the forefront of their care. Specific complexities and behaviours are robustly prioritised ensuring young people are treated with dignity and respect.

Young people thrive in this service due to the staff team's extensive knowledge and understanding of their individual needs. Young people benefit from a competent, well-organised and motivated multi-disciplinary team. Staff have high aspirations for young people and celebrate their progress in all areas such as in the development of their communication skills and achievements in education. As a result of this, young people develop in confidence and self-esteem.

Staff work in teams across three individual houses, with an additional purpose-built facility for young people receiving a short-break service. Each team provides a structured environment based on meeting each young person's diverse and unique needs. Staff work in partnership with young people to provide progressive support through robust daily routines and activities. Observations at this visit show attachments between staff and young people as being warm, personal, and developmental. Young people were observed interacting confidently with staff, sharing appropriate physical contact and communicating with them enthusiastically. Areas of personal difficulty and complexity, such as attachment and loss, are communicated openly and transparently, ensuring the emotional and psychological well-being of the individual.

The school adopts a partnership approach to all care and educational planning, which includes key services such as language and speech therapy and psychological support. Holistic care plans reflect the assessed needs of all young people. The implementation of regular multi-disciplinary 'child in mind meetings', review all young people's placement needs, to ensure achievable personal care and education needs are met. This partnership has further developed through staff undertaking training with the National Autistic Society. This training has enabled the implementation of a common framework for assessing and planning care and education programmes. Staff comment that their ability to understand young people with autism and to meet their individual needs, has significantly improved as a result of this training.

Detailed communication plans and in-house care plans, identify young people's

preferences and views to ensure they receive personal support packages. Staff have progressively improved their capacity to communicate with young people and ascertain their views by using basic sign language, prompts and a picture exchange system. These developments have further enhanced the voice of young people in the school. Additionally, young people have access to an independent advocate on a regular basis, who can act on their behalf and provides support with raising any concerns or complaints. There is an effective complaints system in place. Records of complaints demonstrate that they are responded to promptly, and in line with procedures. Parents and stakeholders speak with confidence regarding the willingness and approachability of the staff to discuss and resolve issues.

Commitment to education is a key strength of this service. Individual educational plans set achievable targets and challenges. Staff talk confidently of the impressive steps forward made by young people in relation to their individual achievements. The close working relationships between the school and care staff are flexible and effective, which optimises young people's personal education attainments. The routines in the house including bedtimes, getting up, mealtimes and staff supervision levels, are arranged in order to promote education and learning.

The school provides a healthy environment where young people receive quality health planning, tailored to meet their specific complexities and needs. All health needs are highlighted in thorough and well-organised health plans, and staff receive additional specialised training for more complex needs, such as epilepsy. Young people's health is fully supported by other specialist services including nursing and occupational therapy support. Medication arrangements are cohesive, organised, and managed by senior nursing staff and the Registered Manager.

Extensive alterations and re-modelling of the school and living environments have taken place since the last inspection. Young people now benefit from additional classroom space and other facilities including a separate entrance in and out of the school. Each individual house provides young people with en-suite bedrooms and homely living accommodation, designed to accommodate their sensory and challenging behavioural needs. The physical environment is designed for maximum comfort, safety and ease of use. Staff take seriously their responsibility to keep the houses in good order so that they are enjoyable and safe environments.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people are safe in this school; they receive a quality of care that is well structured and individually risk assessed. Observations made on inspection and comments received from parents and staff, indicate that young people are safe and happy. An example being, 'I know the young person is happy, even if they can't tell me, by their body language and facial expressions.'

Safeguarding young people has a high profile in this school and staff see this as an

essential part of their day-to-day care. Staff practice is underpinned by robust policies, procedures and safeguarding training. Staff are vigilant about following these procedures and are well aware of their roles and responsibilities, which include knowing when and how to report a concern. The Registered Manager liaises with the Local Authority Designated Officer when necessary and acts in accordance with organisational and local safeguarding procedures. The school has a very comprehensive set of personalised risk assessments for all young people. These cover aspects of their potential behaviour, the environment and the activities they wish to undertake.

Safeguarding is significantly important when caring for young people with communication difficulties to ensure their overall safety and well-being. Staff are alert to young people's individual vulnerabilities and closely monitor their welfare. An initial assessment of young people is undertaken by the educational psychologist, and through consultation with parents and other stakeholders. This information is used to develop behaviour support plans which build on young people's strengths and abilities. Strategies for managing young people's behaviours are shaped by identifying what is already working for each young person and supported by structured daily routines, boundaries, incentives and positive recognition. This provides staff with the guidance to manage behaviours in a person centred, supportive and consistent way.

Excellent multi-agency working protocols ensure holistic, individualised support is maintained. For those young people who require high levels of support with personal care, care plans fully consider and incorporate the wishes and views of others, to ensure that intimate care is delivered in ways that maintain dignity and respect. Additionally, these plans also determine the use of specific monitoring devices to ensure individual safety needs are addressed.

Young people with autism and complex learning disabilities often display very challenging behaviours. They respond positively to the boundaries and routines that are effectively put in place by well trained and experienced staff. Sanctions are rarely used and young people are constantly praised for positive behaviour. Positive behaviours are recognised, encouraged and rewarded on an individual basis. For example, personal achievements such as sitting down for a meal or having some time out are celebrated. Incidents of restraint for some complex young people can be a feature of their daily lives and is likely to remain so. The school consistently reviews and assess these behaviours, to evaluate and develop flexible and consistent strategies to reduce the need for physical intervention.

Behaviour management records reflect how staff have intervened to reduce incidents and how new techniques have been adopted to minimise risk and injury to individual young people. Staff use re-direction techniques successfully to divert the young person to another activity, whereby, behaviour often improves. The social worker for one young person commented, 'My child is now significantly more settled, has a good rapport with the staff who understand his behavioural needs well. They have established clear and consistent boundaries, which have enabled my child to respond to routines and to reduce the need for regular restraint.'

Opportunities for young people to go missing are substantially reduced due to the high levels of staff supervision and the security of the school environment. This includes the use of individually computerised electronic door systems that are opened through the use of a key fob. This allows young people greater opportunity to move freely around their individual living space therefore promoting their independence and socialisation. Staff provide constant supervision for young people when outside the school to minimise the risk of them getting lost or running away. They also help young people to develop sufficient confidence to be able to undertake enjoyable activities with an element of risk, both in the school grounds and in the community.

Young people are protected by robust staff recruitment procedures. Staff are consistently selected in a way that supports the ethos of the service and ensures the safeguarding of young people. The school environment has established systems and structures in place to ensure safe practices and fulfil health and safety requirements. All fire, gas, and electrical appliances have recently been checked and there is a fire risk assessment and individual evacuation procedures in place for all for young people; these are regularly tested. Comprehensive individual premises risk assessments, alongside highly supervised visitor arrangements, ensure young people are safe and suitably protected

Leadership and management

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

The Registered Manager and staff team deliver an outstanding level of care for young people living in this school. Leadership is committed, accomplished and resourceful. The manager constantly communicates high expectations to staff, which in turn promotes excellent outcomes for young people.

Young people receive purposeful care from a professional and dedicated staff team. Staff observed at this visit were seen to treat young people with equality and respect, while providing them with opportunities for learning within a daily structure that is personalised and experiential.

The strong and visible management of the home positively promotes the school's person-centred ethos of care. Care staff work in close partnership with parents and other school personnel to ensure that young people receive versatile and imaginative care. The staff team demonstrate a thorough knowledge of their roles and responsibilities and observations at this visit showed that the individual needs of young people were consistently met.

The school provides dedicated staffing levels and the flexibility within the team ensures young people are cared for safely and securely across both their care and education surroundings. Staff are provided with quality training and support, with specialist training available to meet the needs of individual young people. Consistent supervision and staff appraisals provide good opportunities for staff to explore their

roles and to discuss individual development needs. Staff comment that they receive good training opportunities and that the management of the school is good. They say that managers listen to their views on the service and they feel that their views influence the development of some care practices within the school.

The home has a development plan and the Registered Manager is able to evidence developments that have taken place in the school and how these have had a positive impact on young people. Areas the manager identified for improvement of the service included the development of staff skills and knowledge in relation to specific behavioural management techniques, safeguarding, and relationship building; these are being actioned. Accreditation with the autistic society has been achieved since the last inspection, which has significantly enhanced the profile of the school.

All significant events are appropriately notified with records stored securely and in line with requirements. There are established monitoring systems in place, which include internal and external monitoring and quality assurance checks, with reports provided. However, not all records are monitored effectively, for example, not all young people's case records contain up to date documents from placing authorities such as minutes and recommendations from case reviews; this means there is a lack of clarity about current care plans. Additionally, Regulation 34 reports are not forwarded to Ofsted as required to keep the regulator up to date with developments.

The staff in this home have a clear sense of purpose, and observations at this visit showed that they achieve the objectives detailed in the school's Statement of Purpose. Staff understand the ethos and aims of the school and communicate these effectively to others, including young people and their families. One stakeholder commented, 'The school say in their mission statement that they want to do the best they can for individual young people. The school does this through really listening to parents and young people and in providing support and care that meets personal needs.'

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* and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.