

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Maire Atherton
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is a resource centre for children with disabilities and their families and is owned and managed by the local district council. One of the services offered at the centre is residential short break care for children with a disability. It is this aspect of the centre's activity that is regulated under the Children's Homes Regulations 2001. The centre is registered for five young people aged between eight and 17 years who have a learning and/or physical disability; many of the children also present challenging behaviour. Other services offered include day care, after school care, outreach services and a domiciliary care service registered with the Care Quality Commission.

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**.

This short break service continues to offer highly personalised and well planned care that meets individual needs exceptionally well, achieving outstanding outcomes for children and young people. Staff are skilled at gaining the views of children and young people which are central to all aspects of their care and activities while at the unit. They enjoy an active and stimulating experience during their short break and parents say they 'get a proper break, safe in the knowledge that she is being looked after and watched as well as if she were at home - better probably!'

Excellent relationships exist between children and young people and staff. A parent describes staff as 'inclusive, caring and very respectful towards my daughter.' Children and young people talk fondly about staff, actively seek their company and readily show their pleasure during their interactions with them. The long-serving, skilled and committed staff team understand the needs and wishes of the children and young people extremely well, notice when they are out of sorts and make every effort to put things right. This enables children and young people to grow in confidence and develop as independent individuals as far as possible. They enjoy a very wide range of stimulating and fun activities. Staff effectively support the education of children and young people, through promoting attendance and liaison

with schools. The health and safety of children and young people is very well promoted so that they feel safe during their short break.

Professionals are complimentary about the excellent partnership working achieved by the staff team. One commented 'I have witnessed and heard about excellent professional relationships being maintained and built upon at the home. The manager especially works conscientiously to achieve good relationships with all the parents of young people attending the service.'

The management of the home is highly effective, robust and secure. They work well together as a team and have a clear improvement agenda that is inclusive in its approach. The sole recommendation in this report relates to reviewing the potential impact of care packages and the rota on the time available for the off site activities that take place.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- consider how to address the time constraints on some off site activities caused by the agreed care packages and the rota (NMS 7.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

The outcomes for children and young people and their families using this service continue to be exceptional. Children and young people develop excellent warm relationships with staff that support and promote increasing self confidence and the acquisition of more adept social skills. For example a transport escort observed of one child 'You're a new man since you started coming here', reflecting on the significant improvement in the child's social interactions and calmer behaviour. A significant benefit for the children and young people is making positive peer group friendships. Professionals recognise that 'staff always consider the best groupings for the young people so that their experience at the home is as positive as possible.' Sharing and taking turns in making a cake and playing games provides opportunities to establish and maintain peer relationships. There is a good sense of fun and enjoyment evident in the interactions that take place between the children and young people themselves and the staff team.

Health is exceptionally well promoted by staff. Staff are very knowledgeable about the individual health needs of each child and young people and are trained to meet specialist needs where this is required. Staff know the children and young people so well that they are attuned to their behavioural nuances and are proactive in addressing health needs as they arise. Mealtimes are social occasions at which

children and young people are encouraged to try new foods and as a result many have increased the range of foods they are willing to eat.

Children and young people benefit from the highly effective consultation which leads to their successful involvement in decision making in the home, for example what they want to eat and drink, which activities they would like to do, and within wider community, getting involved in choosing play equipment for example. This supports children and young people to learn skills that promote their independence as far as possible. These range from self care skills to experiencing a wide range of activities that provide some challenges that aid personal development.

Quality of care

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

Children and young people enjoy excellent relationships with staff, shown by their broad smiles and much laughter. Staff demonstrate strong communication skills and a thorough understanding of the behaviour and body language of the children and young people, responding promptly and sensitively to their needs and wishes. Staff are very familiar with the necessary boundaries for each child and young person and consistently apply them. Staff effectively implement the individual positive handling plans so that children and young people know what is expected of them and behave well.

The staff are exceptionally proactive in seeking the views of children and young people. They interact with children and young people using a variety of communication methods tailored to each individual's needs thus ensuring that all have a voice in decision making. A parent said 'The staff have really embraced my daughter's alternative methods of communication and so she feels involved, heard and in control'. Another parent commented positively on the consultation board in the dining room that is constantly in use with a photographic record of actions taken as a result. For example photos of bedrooms taken before and after decoration following consultation with the young people on the themes they would like. Staff take complaints seriously, both verbal and non-verbal expressions of dissatisfaction, and address them to the best of their ability. Where an issue takes a long time, for example sorting out an internet connection for the new interactive screen, children and young people are kept up to date with progress until the problem is resolved.

The detailed care plans, devised as a result of partnership working between the family, staff and social worker, are live documents that underpin the care provided by staff and are regularly updated to reflect changes. A parent stated 'I felt part of a team, and at times was the team leader'. The care plans set goals for each child and young person and the work required by staff to help them achieve their goals is clearly identified. There is also strong partnership working and information sharing with schools to achieve a consistent approach to working with children and young people. A professional said 'Staff ensure that methods of learning and communication used at school are also used at the home.' This sharing promotes smooth transitions for children and young people and supports their learning. Staff

also support children and young people in their learning through activities. For example in weighing and mixing ingredients for banana cake, which was thoroughly enjoyed by the bakers.

The environment is well maintained, bright, colourful and child friendly, with specialist adaptations and facilities to meet a range of needs. A visiting professional said 'I am frequently asked for my advice as an occupational therapist on equipment/adaptations to the home that will improve the environment for the young people attending the service'. It provides a wide range of resources, creatively used by staff, that encourage and support the development of life skills through play. Staff continually review and update the resources available within the unit to ensure young people have a stimulating and enjoyable stay. Children and young people enjoy an excellent range of activities offsite and are actively involved in making choices about where they go and what they do. Staff evaluate the activity on a range of subjects, seeking the views of all participants or describing their reactions, and provide tips for the next visit. Some trips have been slightly restricted due to time constraints imposed by the agreed packages of care and the rota. Staff constantly review the composition of groups of children and young people receiving the service and includes consultation with parents. This leads to well considered changes which benefit all children and young people.

Staff have an excellent knowledge of the health needs of the children and young people. A parent commented in relation to a particular health need 'staff couldn't do more to ensure she is carefully monitored and safe'. Medication is very well managed. Staff keep up to date with changes and these are well recorded in the individual care plans.

Staff have high aspirations for the children and young people using the service. There is a strong culture of full inclusion and staff work to achieve this both in the home and in local community. Staff are committed to providing a service that not only meets the needs of children and young people but goes some way to meeting their hopes and wishes. 'Staff go above and beyond call of duty' according to a parent.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people are and feel safe in the home. They demonstrate this in their relaxed attitude and confident demeanour whilst in the home. A parent observed 'I have been very impressed and reassured that she is 100% safe at all times.' Staff are trained in and are knowledgeable and confident about how to protect children and young people. They also work with young people on how to keep themselves safe. A visiting professional said 'I feel that the young people's safety is high priority...and the staff encourage the young people to be aware of risks.'

Children and young people are further safeguarded by a staff team who are proactive and vigilant in their supervision of young people so minimising opportunities for bullying to occur and addressing any behaviour that may be seen as bullying. A parent commented 'Great care and thought is always taken to rota children who are compatible with one another. Again, this ensures that we as parents do not need to worry about our daughter's safety.'

Staff effectively promote positive behaviour, acknowledging and responding to good behaviour with praise and encouragement that the children and young people gain pleasure from. Positive handling plans provide staff with clear guidance in promoting positive behaviour and how to respond to undesirable behaviour. Any sanctions and physical interventions, which are used infrequently, are in accordance with the recognised behaviour management model used in the home, detailed in the individual plan and recorded as required by regulation. The behaviour management policy for the service is under review by the management of the home, with the aim of further emphasising the focus on positive behaviour.

Staff work from detailed opportunity assessments so that children and young people are enabled to try new experiences in a safe and planned fashion. This has proved very successful in enabling children and young people to participate in activities that they may have previously had difficulty accessing.

The management and staff team have a very robust approach to health and safety. All routine servicing and checks are undertaken as required, including fire alarm tests and drills, and prompt action is undertaken when there is an identified deficit. There are some restrictions on movement in the home through the use of electronic keypads on some communal and external doors. The risk assessed use of beam breakers on bedroom doors instantly alerts waking night staff to a child leaving their bedroom, so providing an additional safeguard.

Leadership and management

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

The established, highly committed and motivated staff team are effectively led by an experienced, qualified Registered Manager. A parent said 'They really care about all the children and take care of the whole family'. A visiting professional said 'I feel that the staff work tirelessly to meet the needs of the young people in their care. They are extremely child focused.'

The open culture means that parents are confident that if or when they make a complaint it is taken seriously. Staff respond to complaints promptly and to satisfaction of complainants.

The whole staff team have a clear commitment to continual improvement and know the areas they want to develop. The management team have a very detailed service development plan which is monitored for progress and kept up to date. Information obtained through robust monitoring by the manager and the nominated visitors

informs the development plan. These reports are produced in a timely fashion and forwarded to Ofsted as required. Current on-going developments include the amalgamation of care plan records across the short breaks service so that information is in one document to aid transitions and reduce the need to seek the same information from parents and a review of the staff supervision format which has been trialled by management on themselves before rolling out to staff team.

There were no requirements or recommendations made at the previous inspection. The staff team are extremely committed to providing an enjoyable experience for the young people. Children, young people their parents and visiting professionals all agree that they achieve this. A parent said of the staff 'They are inclusive, caring and very respectful towards my daughter. She feels safe and confident going for her overnight stay and greatly looks forward to it. The staff have embraced her high needs with enthusiasm and kindness...nothing is too much trouble.' A professional said 'I feel that it is evident at the reviews and when visiting the home that the staff want the young people to enjoy their time with them.'

The stable and knowledgeable staff team provide young people with considerable consistency and a possess a wide range of experience. The vast majority of staff have the relevant level 3 training or higher, others are working towards this. Training needs are constantly reviewed and the training plan is updated to reflect changing needs. Staffing levels reflect the individual needs of children using the service at any given time. Staff are very well supported, through regular supervision, both formal and informal, and team days in addition to training. This ensures that young people are extremely well supported by staff properly equipped for the role they undertake.

The statement of purpose is being reviewed and staff input into the new draft behaviour management policy is being sought at the next staff training day. Parents have a very good understanding of the service and what it can offer both their children and themselves one parent described it as 'a safety net'. For some it has enabled them to continue to care for their children at home.

Records, both written and in photographs, give an excellent account of a child's stay in the home. Parents particularly appreciate the diary that accompanies the child. One described 'a written report which is very helpful to us as our daughter is non-verbal and so it enables us to have a conversation about what she has done while at the home.' Confidential records are kept in locked cabinets with restricted access, ensuring young people's privacy is protected.

Reviews take place as required and parents and placing social workers are highly satisfied with the contribution of the home to reviews. Comments include 'I am always very impressed by the level of detail that goes into these meetings. Not a stone is left unturned!' and 'When appropriate young people are encouraged to attend their reviews - if they do not attend then their views are sought before a review and their comments are included in the review.'

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 the inspection of children's homes.