

Inspection report for children's home

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| Inspector | Rosemary Dancer |
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This home is run by a local authority and is registered to provide care and accommodation for seven children with learning disabilities.

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 **inadequate**.

Children and young people progress well in this home in terms of developing skills. A social worker commented that the young person they work with has made 'small steps but very big ones for (young person's name).' They are cared for by staff who are dedicated to supporting them and their families through the provision of a series of short-term breaks. The time away from their family home provides children and young people with new experiences and they learn new skills and to be more independent away from their family. One social worker stated, 'He adores the home...he will find leaving there difficult.'

Overall, the care plans are detailed and geared to meeting young people's diverse needs. Plans guide the staff in providing care to the children and young people in a way that meets their preferences and good attention is paid to listening to young people so their wishes can be met, where appropriate.

The positive relationships that children, young people and their families have with the staff and the dedication that staff have to supporting families who may be in crisis, are real strengths. There is an integrated approach to providing support to children, young people and their family, with staff working closely with education and health professionals and parents.

A number of shortfalls are identified at this inspection. While there is some very good work carried out in the home, these shortfalls have led to the overall judgement of inadequate.

While children and young people's keenness to stay in the home indicates that they

feel safe, there are some shortfalls that mean that their safety and well-being is not being fully promoted. These include: the response to young people when allegations have been made; the recording of the decision making processes in relation to allegations; the approach to developing risk assessments following safeguarding and other incidents; and some of the arrangements regarding fire safety. These shortfalls impact on the safety and overall well-being of the young people. Additionally, there are shortfalls in relation to more general recording issues; while incidents of sanctions and physical interventions are made and maintained, they are not compliant with regulations. While this has a limited impact on the safety and welfare of children and young people it means a full account is not made of all of the circumstances surrounding each event.

The leadership and management of the home has been judged as inadequate. There are a number of shortfalls that impact adversely on the smooth operation of the home. These relate to: the instability of the arrangements for the management and staffing of the home; the frequency of the support to staff via formal supervision; notifications not being made to the regulator; the quality of the manager's monitoring arrangements and the lack of relevant people's views being taken into account during the monitoring; the response to an error in medication administration; and the frequency of the external monitoring of the home. Additionally, not all young people's files are kept up-to-date following incidents and not all staff supervision is recorded. There are longstanding issues relating to the staffing of the home that have impacted on the capacity of the service in terms of improvement and to offer short breaks to children in a timely way; some action has been taken very recently to try and address this.

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 |
|---------------|--|------------|
| 11 (2001) | ensure that the children's home is conducted to promote and make proper provision for the welfare of children accommodated there; with specific reference to maintaining and updating risk assessments for all young people accommodated at the home (Regulation 11 (a)) | 15/11/2013 |
| 17B (2001) | ensure that within 24 hours of the use of any measure of control, restraint or discipline in the home, a written record is made in a volume kept for the purpose of which shall include all details in regulation 17B (Regulation 17B (3) (a)-(i) and (4) (a)-(b)) | 15/11/2013 |
| 25 (2001) | ensure there is at all times having regard to the size of the children's home, the statement of purpose and the number and | 22/11/2013 |

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| | needs (including any needs arising from disability) of the children accommodated there a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working there (Regulation 25 (1) (a)) | |
| 32 (2001) | ensure the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 are complied with; with specific reference to keeping fire doors shut (Regulation 32 1A (b)) | 08/11/2013 |
| 27 (2001) | take reasonable steps to ensure that all persons employed receive appropriate supervision (Regulation 27 (4) (a)) | 22/11/2013 |
| 28 (2001) | ensure a record in permanent form is maintained in respect to each child accommodated in the home which is kept up-to-date (Regulation 28 (1) (b)) | 15/11/2013 |
| 30 (2001) | ensure if, in relation to a children's home, any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 5 takes place, the registered person shall without delay notify the persons indicated in respect to the event in column 2 of the table (Regulation 30 (1)) | 08/11/2013 |
| 33 (2001) | ensure visits made to the home under paragraph (2) of the regulation are carried out at least once a month (Regulation 33 (2) (3)) | 29/11/2013 |
| 34 (2001) | ensure the system established for improving the quality of care provided in the children's home is effective; specifically through ensuring any trends or patterns emerging are identified, evaluated and addressed (Regulation 34 (1) (b)) | 29/11/2013 |
| 34 (2001) | ensure the system established under Regulation 34 provides for consultation with children accommodated in the home, their parents and placing authorities. (Regulation 34 (3)) | 29/11/2013 |

Recommendations

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

- ensure, when having made an allegation of abuse, children and young people are immediately protected from potentially suffering further significant harm and ensuring any decisions made are recorded (NMS 4.1)
- ensure a record is kept by the home detailing the time and date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff. Ensure the record is signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision (NMS 19.5)
- ensure the registered person takes action to address any issues of concern that they identify or which is raised with them; with reference to ensuring that a timely investigation into any medication errors is carried out. (NMS 21.9)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Children and young people make good progress in many areas of their lives. They develop a better sense of self, look forward to going for a stay and have good relationships with staff. A social worker stated, 'All the young people love it there.' A parent said, 'He loves it, has done from the first day.'

Children and young people stay a set number of days a month at this setting and the children and young people's education remains the responsibility of their parents. However, children and young people, with support from staff, have improved their concentration skills, for example. This has had a positive impact on their learning abilities.

Children and young people make their wishes and feelings known, using the communication method that suits them best. This means that young people's wishes are established and that they are cared for in the way that they prefer. For example, their preferences in relation to which bedroom they use during their stay and the activities they take part in are sought and where possible met.

Children and young people make progress in developing their self-care skills. This is achieved through work done in the home and with their parents. They also learn about healthy eating and begin to make healthy eating choices while staying in the home; the use of visual menus support young people in making their meal choices.

Meeting children and young people's overall health needs remains the responsibility of their parents. For most, their understanding about health issues is limited due to their level of functioning. However, children and young people do develop their skills in some areas to better support their own health and well-being. For example, some become more self-managing in their personal hygiene routines and some have learned to make more healthy choices in the foods they eat.

Children and young people learn from their trips in the community about the wider world and can follow things that interest them as well as trying out new and stimulating activities. For some young people, spending time in the community is a real milestone. A social worker stated that it is a, 'Very challenging complex situation, but what they (the home) have achieved with him out in the community is amazing.'

Children and young people make progress in learning skills such as helping with the preparation of dinner and spending their pocket money in the local town; these are skills that they can carry into adulthood and which provide them with an increased level of independence.

Overall, children and young people develop good relationships with their peers. Careful consideration of grouping children for each short-break stay means that compatibility issues are considered as a part of the planning for stays. This also means that young people learn to make and maintain relationships and socialise with their peers. A social worker stated that a young person she works with attends the home with, 'A couple of peers who he goes to school with which is proving beneficial as he is learning how to maintain friendships out of school hours.'

Quality of care

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

The short-break service is part of an overall support service young people and their families receive and is provided by the local authority. Close working with families and other agencies ensure that an integrated and consistent approach is taken to the care of a child or young person. A social worker commented that the placement is a, 'Great success, there is a really good multi-disciplinary approach taken.' An independent reviewing officer wrote to the home to say, 'Mother is full of confidence with the service and very relaxed and a more confident mother.' The home has begun to hold coffee mornings for parents and they have found this useful to share ideas with each other. Getting together as a group also helps them see that there are many other parents in similar situations to them. For parents whose children are about to attend for stays, the time to get together with other parents reassures them that the children and young people do enjoy their time in the home. One such parent stated, 'It really put me at ease talking to the other parents.'

The relationships children and young people develop with staff are a strength of the home. Staff care about the children and families they work with and children and young people are comfortable and confident in their company. They are able to make their views known through key work sessions and house meetings. Staff communicate effectively with young people, in a way best suited to their needs; this ensures that they better understand what is expected of them. A parent said, 'Her key worker is so good at working out what she wants.' Communication methods include the use of picture formats for young people, and this means that house meeting minutes, for example, are accessible to them. Responses to children and young people's requests can also be explained to them in this format. This means that they understand why decisions have been made.

Overall, children and young people are cared for in line with their placement plans. These plans detail children and young people's preferred ways of being cared for and this means that their stays in the home are consistent with the care they receive at home and is in line with their preferences. Staff identify children and young people's needs in relation to any disability and their level of functioning. Placement plans and work with young people are geared to helping break down any barriers to opportunities they have; this supports them to enjoy and achieve during their time in the home. Plans also detail routine and more complex health needs such as those relating to epilepsy; health care plans provide staff with detailed information about how to deal with these needs. Likewise information about any allergies or intolerances are included to ensure that staff are aware of and cater for these needs. However, when needs change, for example following an incident, risk assessments are not always developed or updated and integrated into plans in a timely way.

The arrangements for introducing children and young people to the home are effective. For some this will be the first time away from their families and they can be anxious about this. Careful attention is paid to ensuring that staff get to know the

young person and the young person gets to know the staff. This is achieved through staff visiting the school and the family home and by the young person coming into the home for tea. A parent stated her child 'was so anxious about coming but staff did so much to help her settle'. There are photos of each member of staff on the notice board and each day the members of staff on duty are identified; this makes sure that young people are aware of who will be caring for them during their stay.

The consistent and integrated approach to caring for the children and young people means that they experience certainty and this impacts positively on their emotional well-being. A social worker said, 'They really understand his needs and work with him well.' Social workers also remarked on the good progress that some children and young people make. One social worker wrote, 'Parents have seen an amazing change in (young person) since he has been going to (the home).'

Managing young children and young people's behaviour remains a challenge at times. Staff take a calm approach to behaviour management and focus on positive reinforcement to encourage young people's development in this area. Some behaviours are predictable and behaviour management plans identify triggers and strategies for dealing with most known behaviours. However, often, some extreme and dangerous behaviours are exhibited by children and young people and this can result in injury to staff and others. Risk assessments relating to previously unseen behaviours are not always updated in a timely way or are not accessible to staff on young people's files.

Children and young people's educational needs remain their parent's responsibility. However, there is an integrated approach taken to children and young people's education. This, and the attention given to education in plans and staff's practice, supports young people's educational progress; the home takes an active role in helping young people to achieve.

The arrangements for the storage of medication are sound and, overall, medication is safely administered; incidents of errors are low, especially when considering the complexity of some young people's medication regimes. However, the response to investigating the circumstances of errors is not always carried out in a timely way to ensure that the same mistakes do not reoccur.

Children and young people enjoy activities in the community and have been on various trips of their choosing, for example, trips to theme parks for some and just enjoying shopping in town for others. From these experiences, young people enjoy their time in the home and some learn to understand the value of money better. Some parents and social workers comment that without the home the child or young person would not have had the opportunity to experience some of these things. However, the ability to go on ad hoc trips out has been compromised by staff shortfalls and as a result all trips require pre-planning; this limits the staff's ability to maximise young people's opportunities to go out into the community.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children are reported as happy to attend the service; this indicates that they feel safe and enjoy their time there. Parents and social workers also reported that they feel that children and young people are safe in the home.

Children and young people do approach staff if they are worried about something and staff do usually try and address the issue with the young person. However, on a recent occasion, a young person made a potentially serious allegation against another young person. The immediate response to this did not fully promote the young people's well-being and welfare. The records relating to this matter did not provide an account of the decision making processes and actions taken in the home which makes it difficult to understand why certain actions were or were not taken. It was, however, referred promptly to the relevant child care team within the local authority. The actions taken in relation to assessing any risks following this situation, and some other incidents, are unclear because risk assessments were not on the young people's files or had not been carried out. It is therefore not clear if all staff are always apprised of any changes in practice required to protect young people.

Behaviour management plans are individualised. However, the shortfalls in some risk assessments, as discussed above, means not all are underpinned by current assessments and there is the potential for incidents to reoccur.

Staff recognise the specific issues children and young people face as a result of their disability. Staff work with young people to ensure that the impact of their disability on their daily lives is minimised. This is achieved through good communication with children and young people and helping them to understand what is expected of them. Children do not go missing from the home and in the event of this occurring, staff are clear about the action to take.

The use of sanctions and restraints in the home are minimal. For many of the children and young people, sanctions have little meaning due to their level of functioning. Staff use distraction and other techniques to help diffuse situations. The instances of physical interventions and sanctions that have taken place have done so for appropriate reasons and have been as a last resort. The manager monitors the instances of physical interventions and sanctions; however, the recording of these matters is not as comprehensive as required by regulation.

Staff recruitment files were not available in the home; they are held centrally at the Council's offices. However, criminal records checks are undertaken and updated for staff in a rolling basis. There have been no new members of staff recruited since the last inspection.

The environment is checked for safety issues, such as fire alarm testing and general maintenance issues. Those young people who need them have personal evacuation plans that are practiced with them. This means that they know, within their level of understanding, what will happen should they need to evacuate the building.

However, during the course of the inspection three fire doors were wedged open. This practice means that in the event of a fire, the fire doors would have no useful preventative effect on its spread and this could put anyone in the building at risk.

Leadership and management

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

The home does not have a Registered Manager. The previous Registered Manager, who was in a substantive post, left in December 2012. An interim manager was appointed to manage the home in February 2013, while a permanent manager was recruited; he was registered with Ofsted in July 2013. Due to organisational issues, recruitment activity for a permanent manager did not progress. A parent stated that it is, 'Not clear who is steering the ship, and so many managers come and go.' However, the home has made interim arrangements for management cover while a permanent manager is recruited.

The home has experienced staffing difficulties due to vacancies and sickness. While there are enough staff on each shift to adequately care for the children and young people, this is being achieved by some staff working excessive hours and by the managers working on shifts. These shortfalls have been reported on in the monthly monitoring reports as having impacted on the three managers' ability to carry out some of the management tasks. These issues are undoubtedly having an adverse impact on the home's capacity for improvement. While currently no visits have been cancelled as a result of the staff shortages, some have been moved to alternative dates. This has caused disappointment to some young people who use a calendar to track when they are due to stay. A parent said that the change in her child's stay, 'Upset him as he has a calendar that he uses to know when he is due to go and he so looks forward to it.' It has also caused some parents anxiety. One parent said, 'They are having to look at staffing to see if they can give enough support, makes for uncertainties for us.' Additionally, there is an expectation, on some parents, that if the staffing assessed as being required cannot be arranged, that parents would still have the choice about whether their child attends for respite or not. This is not appropriate as it is the duty of the home to ensure the safety and well-being of young people at all times during their stay there. By the time of this inspection, arrangements had been made to employ agency staff to support the staff team and these staff were due to start their induction shortly after the inspection.

No requirements or recommendations were made as a result of the last inspection. There are systems for monitoring the care provided. However, the manager's monitoring systems are not effective in checking patterns and trends, are not evaluative and have a limited focus on improvement. Additionally, the views of children, young people, their parents or placing social workers about the quality of the care are not obtained. This means that the manager's monitoring has a limited impact on driving up the standards of care. Issues identified are not always addressed in a timely way, for example investigating the reasons for errors in medication administration. The external monitoring system broke down over May and June 2013 and this meant that no external oversight of the operation of the home

took place during this period. Both monitoring systems have failed to identify some of the issues identified during this inspection, for example the shortfalls in the risk management processes.

There is evidence to show that the value of and impact on children using the service has been positive, especially in the improvement in family relationships and, in some cases, the prevention of a family breakdown. Staff are clearly committed to their role in supporting families, children and young people. They have shown dedication to ensuring that children and young people can attend the home for their stays and parents commented positively on the 'care and dedication of staff' and one parent said that they are 'excellent supportive staff'. A social worker commented, 'They are so proactive, they go the extra mile.'

The support to staff has not been in line with the frequency expected by the provider; this means that staff's work has not been underpinned by supervision as regularly as is expected. Additionally, supervision for some staff has not been recorded to ensure there is clarity about their roles and responsibilities. Staff identify each other and the deputy managers as supportive; one member of staff stated, 'The team pulls together in a crisis.' Another said, 'I take my hat off to the deputies, working on the floor and doing double shifts and then their management tasks.' There is a comprehensive training programme for staff and opportunities for them to gain appropriate qualifications.

Children's files are stored securely and contribute to an understanding of the child or young person's time in the home but, as detailed in this report, there are shortfalls in ensuring these are kept up-to-date.

A significant event was not notified to Ofsted which means that the regulator is not kept informed of all such matters so that it can take action if required.

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.