

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Michelle Oxley/Ruth Coler
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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* (December 2010) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

This home provides education and residential care for up to 29 pupils, from eight to 19 years of age who have severe and complex learning difficulties, associated with autism. All have communication difficulties, a number have additional impairments and all exhibit challenging behaviour to varying degrees. The home operates as a charitable trust, and being a school as well, it is approved by the Department for Education. Some of the children are accommodated in the main house, there are also four additional units three inside the grounds and one a short walk from the main building. The home has extensive grounds that are well used for horticulture and animal management, as well as leisure activities. It has its own indoor swimming pool.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness of the children's home is judged to be **good**.

For the purpose of this inspection, children and young people's views are ascertained through observations of interactions and the daily living experience. Verbal communication was not used to gather views as children and young people who were observed have little or no speech. The service offers a good standard of care to children and young people with some outstanding features. The home is operated by an enthusiastic and creative team of managers and staff. The attention to individual needs, the flexibility in the approach to care and education are excellent. The team has high aspirations for each child and results are clearly monitored and reviewed. The ongoing programme of training offered to all staff at the point of induction and beyond provides them with the skills they require to offer an outstanding quality of care at the point of delivery.

Five good practice recommendations are made following this inspection. Areas for development concern the approach to developing skills for independent living, more specifically the examination and reassessment of blanket practices at the level of the individual. A recommendation is also made regarding planning for adult life. The quality of the staff handover meetings does not reflect the quality of the care provided. Staff knowledge of safeguarding procedures lacks depth although staff do know how to proceed if they are concerned about welfare. Further work is recommended regarding devising a development plan to inform the future direction of the service in a more predefined manner.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- improve the quality of information passed between staff members at handover meetings to provide improved continuity of information at shift change (NMS 29.6)
- implement a clearer approach to the development of skills and the living arrangements in relation to preparing for adulthood (NMS 6.1)
- carry out individual assessments in relation to risks regarding security, safety and observations of young people in the context of preparing for adult life (NMS 7.9)
- review the safeguarding training to ensure the team have a holistic perspective of the wider protection processes (NMS 17.8)
- complete the development plan for the service taking account of the views of, children, parents and significant others. (NMS 33.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

The home's approach to educational attainment is excellent. Young people benefit from individual education plans which help them to achieve well. Young people also benefit from opportunities to take part in their preferred activities. Children and young people are encouraged, but not coerced, to participate and can sit out of activities when they wish; they are given the opportunity to re engage when they are ready. Written plans for care demonstrate the level of aspiration for each young person with long term and short term targets for learning being set for everyone.

Staff support children and young people to stay in touch with family and significant others. A weekly session is dedicated to letter writing. This involves young people creating a photographic record of their week. This enhances their own learning and communication skills, as well as keeping families up to date and informed.

Children and young people are supported to participate in community activities and outings which include joining a local Brownies group, visiting a nearby garden centre and shopping trips in to town. These activities help young people to develop skills; including their communication skills.

Staff support young people's physical and emotional health well. Young people's health needs are attended to. If young people experience poor health this is identified and appropriate action is taken. Routine medical services are routinely sought such as with a doctor, dentist and optician. The school employs a nurse who is on hand to ensure that health needs are well managed. Outside health professionals have praised the staff team for their support to young people. For example in achieving a high level of dental hygiene.

Children and young people are supported to develop skills in preparation for

adulthood. However, there are barriers which limit the opportunities young people have to explore their surroundings and develop their skills. These include a high level of security throughout the building and grounds with doors and gates being routinely locked and high fencing around individual units. Personal possessions are locked away in drawers and wardrobes. There are 20 minute observations, at night, of every young person through observation windows fitted to each bedroom door. These restrictions are not based on assessments of risk and therefore are carried out regardless of an individual's need. In addition, for some older young people, the decorations in their bedrooms are inappropriately immature and the expectations about times for getting ready for bed are restrictive; this does not provide young people with age appropriate experiences of daily living.

Quality of care

The quality of care is **outstanding**.

Children and young people respond positively to staff whose patience and committed approach helps them to build strong and effective relationships. Interactions between staff and young people are observed to be respectful and caring with young people demonstrating warmth and affection toward their carers. The approach to care giving is highly individualised and is facilitated through a range of effective communication methods. Staff work mostly on a one-to-one basis and have developed a range of flexible and creative care strategies. Every young person is supported to participate and the staff team have consistently high aspirations for all.

The approach to care is interlinked with the approach to education. Children and young people are supported in small groups by a dedicated staff team. There are no class rooms, children learn in the familiar surroundings of their own home environment and have access to the home's extensive grounds and facilities. Each child is encouraged to learn by participation in a range of preferred activities. Children and young people are skilfully supported to engage in these activities which help them to develop new skills and interests and communicate their needs. Staff work in an imaginative way to ensure that young people participate on their own terms.

The team work closely with children and young people, they take time to understand their unique needs allowing them to express themselves in their own way, taking time to observe, listen and respond positively in line with young people's wishes. Young people are actively encouraged to develop their communication skills. The primary method used is photographic communication books however the team adapt the approach to suit the individual using a range of methods including objects of reference and signing. The creativity and aspiration for young people regarding this aspect was demonstrated in relation to one young person who was observed using an iPad. This has served to increase communication dramatically and has therefore offered increased opportunities for participation in the wider community.

Staff act as advocates for young people identifying issues on their behalf and raising these with the management team. An example of this concerned a particular type of food which children did not eat. Staff raised the matter with managers who ensured

that meal did not appear on the menu again. Staff were observed interacting with young people in a flexible manner, their positive impromptu responses to children and young people's needs and choices confirmed a commitment to meeting individual needs and listening to children and young people's views. This approach was consistently demonstrated but particularly notable during activity sessions where young people preferred to engage in an alternative activity and were supported by staff. Another example concerned a member of staff who was observed opening the music room up after hours for a young person who enjoyed playing musical instruments.

The accommodation consists of a large period building set in extensive grounds. Accommodation is provided within the main house and within four additional units. Each area is well decorated and individual rooms are personalised. However, although individual rooms are personalised, young people's access to their belongings is restricted. Furniture and fittings are purchased from specialist providers with the needs of children in mind. The home has its own animal centre with a pony, donkeys, two rare breed pigs and a small flock of Sussex sheep. Children and young people help to care for and interact with the animals. They were observed participating with much enthusiasm.

Detailed plans of care are developed for each young person. These set out long term and short term objectives, along with education targets and health needs. Staff are involved in the assessment and development of the home's approach to planning for care. This is achieved through the monitoring and recording of patterns of behaviour and enables identification of triggers to changes in behaviour with a view to formulating strategies for future care planning in terms of reducing negative behaviours.

Handover meetings are held at the end of every shift. The meetings did not reflect the quality of care giving observed or the written information held. Although some pertinent information was passed on the quality of information was brief or not relevant in every case.

Children and young people are safe and feel safe

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

Staff recognise particular vulnerabilities related to diverse needs of young people and take steps to address these. They provide care in a respectful way and are sensitive to children and young people's needs for privacy and dignity. Care planning documentation involves risk management strategies. These are well supported by close working relations between staff and young people.

The use of physical restraint is minimal. Staff employ an approach which enables young people to receive support and gentle encouragement rather than punitive measures. Restraint is seen as a very last resort and when it is used, the interventions tend to be low level, protective measures. There are systems in place to ensure that each incident of restraint is examined with a view to developing strategies to prevent future incidents. Each incident is monitored by the management

team in order to identify trends and patterns. The team recognise the value of keeping young people engaged in enjoyable meaningful activities as a means of developing a positive approach to behaviour management and successfully adopt these strategies. Sanctions are not used at the home.

Staff receive regular training in safeguarding. This is carried out at the point of induction and then on an ongoing basis. All staff who were questioned about how to respond to an allegation or suspicion of abuse were aware of how to report their concerns to a senior member of staff. However, their awareness of the wider process involving external agencies and procedures is limited.

The management team have developed positive working relations with the local police who support them should a young person be absent from the home without authority. There have been no recent incidents of children or young people leaving the home without authority. This is attributed to the high staffing ratio and the particularly high levels of security throughout the premises.

Good procedures are in place to vet new staff before they start work at the home, including obtaining criminal record bureau checks. A booking in and out system is in place for visitors.

Leadership and management

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

There have been some significant changes to the operation of the home over the preceding twelve months. This has involved the restructuring of the living and learning environment in to eight small units, each providing dedicated support during the day for to up to four young people. Staffing arrangements have changed in response to this. Each unit is staffed by a teacher (living and learning manager) and a team of unit co-ordinators, mentors and living and learning assistants. A consultation process is currently underway regarding the possible restructure of night staff to fall in line with the new arrangement.

On admission young people receive a communication book containing photographs which is used as a means of communication. The book is expanded as the placement progresses. A Statement of Purpose is in place and this has been updated to reflect the new structure of the home.

The service is operated by a team of committed managers who provide creative leadership to a large team of staff. Managers keep up to date with new information and legislation. Staff say that they receive good support from the managers and senior staff and that staff supervision is carried out on a regular basis and in line with the required time frame.

The home employs around 180 staff. There is some degree of staff turnover but a good proportion of the team are established members who have worked at the home for several years. Staffing levels are high with most young people receiving one to one care. New staff are recruited and inducted promptly when vacancies arise.

Training opportunities for staff are very good. The school employs a training manager who oversees the training provision and an assessor who is responsible for the provision of the ongoing programme of National Vocational Qualifications. Staff say that they are offered excellent training and that additional training can be requested outside of the usual programme. Additional training opportunities are supported when managers identify a benefit to children and young people.

New staff attend induction training one day a week for four weeks. In addition to this, each new member of staff is assigned a mentor who will support them in their role. There is a dedicated arrangement in place for the management of the night team. Night staff are involved in the induction training and receive a days training every week. Their training covers all mandatory areas.

There is good evidence of careful monitoring of the service by the managers. Time is set aside each week to examine incidents and accident logs; patterns of behaviour are also monitored and recorded in order to examine the approach to care. The Regulation 33 and 34 processes are well established. An overall quality assurance report which take account of views of parents and significant others is not yet established although some early endeavours have been made towards formalising quality assurance systems by the currently embryonic creation of a development plan.

The promotion of equality and diversity at the home is good. The managers and team recognise the potential disadvantages that occur in relation to disability. They work with individuals to meet their specific needs and to develop skills in order to promote choice and access to the wider community. The staff team are a diverse group. The home employs team members from many nationalities and backgrounds. Policy guidance around equality and diversity is implemented in practice