

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Sharon Lloyd
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is a purpose built residential centre for children. This home is a large, detached, two storey building situated in large grounds on a housing estate on the outskirts of town. Transport, education, health, leisure and employment facilities are available within the local area.

There are three separate living units on the premises. One unit is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to eight children and young people, aged from eight years old up to 17 years old, who have a learning or physical disability. This is situated on the ground floor at the rear of the building. There are two large lounges, one of which has a dining area. One lounge opens onto a large playing field with swings and a slide. There is a separate kitchen and a playroom with access to a secure play area suitable for small bikes and scooters. Toilets and bathing facilities are sufficient in number to accommodate both sexes and to meet their individual needs. The home currently provides care and accommodation for one resident young person and approximately 20 children and young people who come to the centre for short breaks.

Two further units have, until December 2009, provided care and accommodation for children and young people with emotional or behavioural difficulties, including those who present volatile and challenging behaviour. Both of these units have closed down since the last inspection and the staff team has been redeployed with some staff joining the remaining unit. Children and young people have moved to alternative placements in accordance with their individual care plans. A large part of the premises is therefore now empty.

Summary

The inspection took place unannounced over two days. The home was assessed against the key national minimum standards and actions and recommendations raised following the last inspection were followed up. One young person and the staff on duty participated in the inspection. Two other young people were present during the inspection and observations were made of their care.

The home has made significant progress in meeting the regulatory requirements and national minimum standards. However, some breaches of regulations relating to the outcome area 'staying safe' remain. This means that the home does not safeguard children and young people effectively.

The home meets children's health needs well. There is one recommendation relating to recording of medicine administration. Children's education and leisure needs are promoted and they are well supported.

Carers encourage children and young people to make their views known and to participate in decisions about their care wherever possible. One young person participates in the Children in Care Council and contributes through this to the development of children's services. Shortfalls in the accommodation include institutionalised bathrooms for children and young people and no bath or shower rooms for staff.

Monitoring of the operation of the home and the services to children and young people has improved substantially. The staff team is well qualified but has not had sufficient training opportunities to develop the skills needed to deliver a consistently high quality service.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The home was judged inadequate at the last inspection and a notice to improve required twelve actions to be addressed where the home was in breach of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001. In addition, there were 14 failures to meet the national minimum standards.

The local authority has made extensive improvements to the service it provides to children in care and as a result a number of young people have been discharged to more suitable placements. Alderley and Mottram units have closed down so that only Langley unit remains operational. This provides respite care to children and young people with disabilities and accommodation to one young person.

Many of the previous actions and recommendations related to the quality of care provided to children living in Alderley and Mottram units. However, all have been followed up to ensure that the home is providing suitable care to all the children who use it.

Three actions relating to the outcome area 'being healthy' have been addressed. Comprehensive and detailed health plans guide staff in how to meet children's individual health needs. Children receive the medication they need and staff are proactive in recognising when children and young people with communication difficulties may be in pain and ensuring they receive the treatment they need. Young people who prepare their own food are provided with adapted facilities to enable them to do so safely.

Four recommendations for good practice were made under this outcome area but three are no longer applicable. One recommendation remains outstanding: the home was required to ensure that medicine administration records indicate when medication ceases and when and how it is disposed of. This information is not consistently recorded in medicine administration records and the recommendation has been repeated.

Five actions were raised under the outcome area 'staying safe'. All records relating to Alderley and Mottram units have been archived and were not available for inspection. Records of measures of control demonstrate that no restraints have been used on Langley unit since before the last inspection and sanctions are not used at all. Risk assessments are in place to safeguard children and young people from avoidable hazards.

Three actions have not been fully implemented. The log of complaints remains poorly kept so the home cannot demonstrate that all complaints are recorded and addressed within reasonable timescales. Similarly, the home cannot demonstrate that all allegations against staff have been appropriately dealt with and that referral to the safeguarding team has been considered or actioned. This impedes effective monitoring and puts children and young people at risk of poor quality care.

Notifiable events have not always been notified to the relevant authorities and in particular to Ofsted. This means that external monitoring of the home's response to incidents does not

routinely take place. For example, Ofsted has not always been notified when serious allegations have been made against staff. This impedes Ofsted from effectively exercising its regulatory auditing and safeguarding function.

The last inspection found that staff files were maintained in line with Schedule 2 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001, with minor omissions. For example, photographic identity was not always held. This remains the case. This means that the home cannot demonstrate that all staff employed at the home are fully vetted as suitable individuals to work with children and young people.

Four recommendations for good practice were made under the outcome area 'staying safe' and all have been met. A new draft anti-bullying policy is available to guide staff in how to deal with episodes of bullying. However, bullying is no longer a feature of the home. Monthly fire drills take place at various times of the day so that everyone is familiar with fire evacuation procedures and the home could be safely and quickly vacated in the event of a fire. Effective, positive behaviour management techniques are employed so that children and young people learn what is expected of them at the home. There are no physical restrictions on normal movements within the home except to safeguard children's welfare. For example, a gate prevents children from entering the kitchen while the cook is preparing food but enables children to see in.

Three recommendations were made under the outcome area 'enjoying and achieving', two of which related to shortfalls in the care provided in the two units that have closed down. All are met. Children and young people receive individual support in line with their needs and wishes. They all attend school and have access to computers for education and leisure pursuits.

One action was raised under 'economic wellbeing'. The home was required to ensure that the home is fit for purpose. This has, for the most part, been addressed by the closure of the two other units. The remaining unit is well appointed and provides comfortable accommodation. There are some shortfalls in the accommodation that the home is aware of and addressing.

Three actions raised relate to organisation and management. The systems for monitoring the home have been substantially improved so that any shortfalls in the operation of the home and the quality of care can be identified and addressed. The Statement of Purpose has been updated so that it accurately describes the services provided by the home and provides valuable information for parents and social workers.

Three recommendations were made in relation to the organisation of the home and one has been met. The manager of the home has received additional support and training to develop the skills to manage the home. However, he plans to move on shortly and a new manager has been identified. A recommendation to provide staff with one to one supervision once a month is almost met so that staff are better guided and supported in their work. Children's files are well kept and contain all relevant information.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The home employs two part time cooks who provide a range of nutritious and varied meals including foods from other cultures. Children's individual dietary needs are taken into account and records are kept of what they actually eat. Good food hygiene standards are maintained.

Young people who prepare their own meals do so under staff supervision and learn about food safety and hygiene in the kitchen.

Children's health needs are promoted through well documented and detailed health plans that guide staff in how to meet the individual health needs of each child. Carers communicate well with parents and keep up to date in changes in children's health status and medication requirements. Good routines ensure that careful attention is paid to health needs.

Medicines are safely stored and carefully administered. Records show that children receive the medicines they need; however they do not always show when a medicine has been returned to the parent so that it is not completely clear that each child has had all required doses during their stay without cross-checking the record with other records.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

Carers respect children and young people's privacy and provide them with opportunities to have time alone in their bedrooms should they want it. Bedroom doors are fitted with alarms so that night staff are alert to children who need assistance during the night. Parents and social workers are aware of this. Only one child or young person uses the bathroom at any one time. This child is supported by carers in accordance with individual needs for assistance with personal hygiene. There are no screens around baths and specialist showers so the home does not adequately respect children and young people's modesty. The home has identified this as an area for improvement.

Parents and some young people know how to make a complaint. Long-standing plans to introduce more user-friendly complaints forms for children with communication difficulties have not yet been fulfilled. However, carers do consider each month whether children and young people have been upset during their short stay and try to elicit this information from them and act on it.

There is no log of complaints so the home cannot demonstrate that it takes all complaints seriously and addresses them within a reasonable timescale. Records of some complaints and allegations are held in a file for that purpose but these records are not consistently well kept and in some cases it is not clear what action has been taken to investigate the complaint. Outcomes are not routinely recorded. This means the home cannot demonstrate that it acts to address complaints and improve practice.

Allegations against staff members are investigated but the records kept do not always demonstrate good safeguarding procedures and some records have missing information. A number of carers have not had refresher training in safeguarding children and are not sufficiently knowledgeable about safeguarding practices. The home has identified this as an area for development.

Notifications of serious incidents are not routinely forwarded to the relevant authorities. For example, Ofsted has not been informed of some serious allegations against staff. This means that external monitoring of the home's response to incidents does not routinely take place. This impedes Ofsted from effectively exercising its regulatory auditing and safeguarding function.

The anti-bullying policy has been updated and shared with carers. Bullying is not a feature of the home and no children are considered to be at risk of bullying in the home. No children or young people have been missing from home. External doors to the home are kept locked and can only be opened with a fob. The accommodated young person has a fob and can enter and leave the premises at will. However, children and young people on short stays cannot leave the premises unless a member of staff unlocks the front door. This action is taken to safeguard the vulnerable children who use the service. However, the home cannot evidence that it is discussed with parents and carers and agreed in placement plans as a necessary precaution.

Records relating to the behaviour management of children and young people on the two units that closed down in December 2009 have been archived and were not available for inspection. There have been no restraints used in the remaining unit since before the last inspection. Sanctions are never used and restraint is rare. Effective behaviour management strategies are used by the staff team to support children and young people to learn socially acceptable behaviour patterns as far as possible.

Good health and safety routines are followed and routine checks on appliances and services ensure that the premises are maintained in a reasonable condition. Fire drills are practiced once a month so that everyone at the home knows how to evacuate the premises quickly in the event of a fire. There are no staff bath or shower rooms for the use of staff who sleep in overnight. As staff do not use children's bathrooms, they are at risk of body odour through no fault of their own.

Although new recruitment procedures have been introduced to ensure robust checks are carried out on prospective staff members, employment records of those already in post do not demonstrate vigorous vetting procedures. This means that some staff members in post may have been employed without full and intensive checks and this does not adequately safeguard children and young people from coming into contact with potential abusers.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The home provides children and young people with a good level of support to meet their individual needs. Carers work closely with schools so that they use the same communication strategies with individual children who don't use speech. All carers are trained in the use of the Picture Exchange Communication System and use this effectively to communicate with those children who use it.

Children and young people have the opportunity to meet with key workers on a regular basis and to express their views about the care they are receiving. Carers are familiar with the non-verbal behaviours and cues of children with communication difficulties and recognise the importance of paying careful attention to these so that they can respond as well as possible to children's needs, wishes and feelings.

Communication with schools is good and a young person who is accommodated at the home has received extra tuition in preparation for GCSE examinations. The young person reports that carers provide a good level of support to all children. Computers are available to children and young people for use in homework and leisure. Some use email to communicate with friends and social workers.

The home has a variety of toys and play materials to meet the needs of a range of children. Children enjoy listening to and playing music, arts and craft and using the sensory toys and soft play room. Outdoor play equipment is available for the more mobile children. Outings include trips to the park and to a youth club for children with special needs. The home has a new 16-seater adapted vehicle but few carers are licensed to drive it and this limits the number of outings children have. The home also has a car so that individual children and young people can go out without the stigma of arriving in a minibus. Parents report that children enjoy their short stays. The young person who is accommodated reports that staff encourage outings and activities with friends and these can be arranged as long as they are well planned in advance.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Placement planning is good and the home is flexible in meeting the individual needs of children and families. For example, it provides day care to children where this is more suitable than overnight stays. Placement plans provide carers with good guidance in how to meet the individual needs of each child. However, they do not demonstrate that parents and social workers have been made aware of the home's policy on keeping external doors locked. Those children and young people who can, participate in placement reviews and contribute to decisions made about their lives.

The home works with young people, their parents and social workers from both children's services and adults' services to make appropriate plans for young people coming up to transition. Young people are fully involved in this planning.

Since the closure of a large section of the home in December 2009, there have been problems with the home's telephone system that has resulted in difficulty for families in contacting the home and their children out of office hours. The home is aware of this but has not been successful in attempts to fix it. Accommodated young people have ready access to a phone and are encouraged to use it to maintain contact with family and friends.

Young people develop self-esteem and confidence through participation in local activities and groups. For example, one young person is an active member of the Children in Care Council and contributes to policy development and planning. He has acted as a consultant on the development of a new children's home where able bodied children will be accommodated alongside wheelchair users.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Carers support children and young people to develop self care skills and to be as independent as possible. Young people approaching adulthood learn to budget, shop for and prepare their own meals, in accordance with their level of ability and understanding. They learn to manage money and use bank accounts. They are encouraged to make their own appointments and to mix with peers socially. There is a lack of clarity about the funding available for clothing for young people who are accommodated so the home cannot demonstrate that young people receive sufficient funding for clothes.

The home provides comfortable, well-appointed accommodation with easy access for wheelchair users. Each bedroom is individually styled and decorated so that children and young people

have some choice of room and wherever possible stay in a room they like. Carers are currently updating bedrooms to make them more comfortable and attractive for children and young people. Some specialist beds are available and carers use hoists to help non-mobile children and young people get into bed easily.

Bathrooms are large and institutional in style. The home is aware of this and plans are in place to make them more aesthetically pleasing.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The new Statement of Purpose has been reviewed and updated so that it accurately reflects the services provided at the home and is available to parents and social workers. The home is led by a registered manager who is a qualified social worker. He is assisted by two senior residential workers, both of whom are qualified to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Level 4. The manager was registered with Ofsted in September 2009 but plans to move on shortly. The local authority has arranged for a suitably experienced and qualified manager to take his place as manager of the home.

Children and young people are supported by a well qualified and experienced staff team who know them well. More than 80% of the team are qualified to NVQ at level 3 and the remaining staff are engaged in this training. All carers have completed induction and foundation training but some need refresher training in a number of areas. Two members of staff have joined the team from the units that have closed down and are supported by the senior staff and colleagues to learn the practices of the home.

Carers participate in team meetings and receive one to one supervision to support them to deliver a good service to children and young people. Supervision is usually given once a month but there have been some gaps where staff have not received the support they need to ensure they consistently deliver good quality care to children and young people. Despite this, the home has successfully continued to provide a good service to children and young people during a time of change and uncertainty within the local authority. The newly established team has identified improvements it wishes to make to the service so that children and young people will have more comfortable and pleasant short stays. This work has already begun.

The home is effectively monitored on behalf of the provider and the operation of the home is routinely monitored by the manager and in most cases action is taken to address shortfalls identified.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The home promotes the wellbeing of all the children and young people who use the service and carers are sensitive to their individual needs and abilities. This means they tailor the routines, activities and leisure pursuits offered to suit each individual during their short stay. However, staffing levels sometimes restrict the young person who is accommodated from participating in events outside the home unless this is planned in advance. Staff are not trained in equality and diversity and this means there are gaps in the knowledge and understanding of some staff members. For example, a complaint was made against a member of staff who had inadvertently used inappropriate, racist terminology when dealing with a visitor.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
27	ensure that staff records demonstrate that suitability checks have been carried in accordance with Schedule 2 (Regulation 26)	30 April 2010
17	ensure that written records are kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect and any action taken in response (Regulation 16)	9 April 2010
16	ensure that a written record is made of any complaint, the action taken in response and the outcome of the investigation (Regulation 24)	9 April 2010
20	ensure that where any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 5 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 take place, the Registered Person notifies the persons listed in column 2 without delay. (Regulation 30)	9 April 2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure that medicine administration records indicate when medication ceases and when and how it is disposed of (NMS 13)
- improve the arrangements for phone contact between parents and children out of hours (NMS 4.2)
- ensure the policy relating to clothing allowances is implemented in practice and known to young people and staff (NMS 11.2)
- provide separate bathing or shower facilities for staff (NMS 25.7)
- ensure that all staff receive one-to-one supervision from a senior member of staff each month in line with the guidance in the national minimum standards (NMS 28.2)
- ensure that physical restrictions on normal movements within the home are used only in relation to a child where the restriction has been agreed within their placement plan (and care plan if appropriate) and are used only where necessary to safeguard and promote the child's welfare (NMS 23.5)
- ensure that personal assistance with bathing is provided in a way that maximises dignity and to this end install screens around baths and showers (NMS 25.5)
- provide staff with training and development opportunities that equip them with the skills to meet the needs of the children and the purpose of the home (NMS 31.1)