

The Cornerstones logo consists of two horizontal bars, one above the other, with a small gap between them.

Cornerstones (Crosslands)

Inspection report for Children's Home

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Inspector	Sharon Lloyd
Type of inspection	Key

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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 provides a residential childcare assessment service for three boys, aged from six years to 17 years old. The service is registered for children who present with a variety of needs, including emotional and behavioural difficulties and learning difficulties. The main focus of the service is primarily to provide a comprehensive assessment service for children with autistic spectrum disorders.

The property is a large, well appointed bungalow, situated within its own grounds. There are extensive and well-tended gardens to the rear, with play equipment and car parking facilities. The property is rurally based, approximately four miles from the extensive range of resources in the town.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

At this unannounced key inspection, the home was assessed against all key national minimum standards. One child was resident and participated minimally in the inspection.

The home is well organised and managed so that it provides an outstanding level of care and support to children with learning disabilities, including communication disabilities. Parents and social workers agree, 'the quality of support is excellent and would be hard to improve on'. Staff follow excellent systems that ensure children's health and safety is prioritised. Staff work closely with the company school to promote children's education, communication skills and social development. Children make excellent progress in all areas of their development. They present as relaxed and happy and respond well to the clear structure and routines provided.

Improvements since the last inspection

The home was judged to be outstanding and there were no shortfalls noted in the service following the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children enjoy freshly prepared meals that are well balanced and additive-free. Carers record their likes and dislikes and convey this to the chef so that children's particular preferences are taken into account in menu planning. Meals are varied and

include foods from other cultures so children learn to appreciate a wide variety of tastes. Photographs of meals are displayed each day so children know what to expect for the evening meal. Meals are taken at the dining table and children develop good table manners through the careful attention and encouragement that carers give them. Children enjoy helping out in the kitchen, preparing simple snacks and baking cakes.

Children's health information is obtained and considered prior to admission and the home establishes and maintains good liaison with children's consultants and specialist health advisors. Children are registered with a local general practitioner, dentist and optician who have skills in administering to the needs of children with disabilities. The home's records demonstrate that children's health needs are well met. Staff ensure that long term medication is regularly reviewed and work with doctors to reduce the dosage of controlled medicines where possible. By following excellent medicine administration systems, staff ensure that children receive the medicines and treatment they need at the prescribed dosage.

With parental permission, children receive holistic therapies such as Indian head massage and reflexology, which help them to relax their muscles. They participate in physical activity that they enjoy. This includes swimming, cycling and walking.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Files are stored securely so that children's information is protected. Photographs of children are used extensively to provide children with a pictorial record of their time at the home. Staff know and follow good procedures relating to the sharing of photographs so that children's privacy is promoted and safeguarded. Carers follow excellent routines that promote children's privacy and respect their dignity. Shutters on bedroom windows are closed at night so that should children open or remove their curtains, passers by cannot see into their bedrooms.

There have been no complaints about the home. Carers do their best to show children how to make a complaint and children practice doing so, using a variety of communication methods. However, due to the severity of communication difficulties experienced by many of the children who live at the home, carers know they cannot be sure that children have understood and could follow the complaints process. Carers are ever vigilant in observing children and continually try to interpret, understand and respond to their non-verbal cues.

Social workers and parents are invited to visit the home unannounced and to read the log books relating to their child at every visit. This gives them confidence that the home is providing good quality care and addressing children's needs appropriately. An independent safeguarding officer also visits the home once a month, unannounced and carries out an inspection of all records relating to safeguarding children. He also observes practice, talks to carers and children and provides very good guidance to the home. This ensures that the home's practices continue to

safeguard children.

Staffing levels are high and are agreed with placing authorities to meet the needs of each child. Most children receive support from two dedicated carers at all times. Carers are well trained in safeguarding procedures and in the management of challenging behaviour. They know how to restrain children safely, where necessary, to protect children and staff from assault and injury. They follow clear and consistent behaviour management strategies that are developed and continually reviewed for each individual child. Carers are competent and confident in dealing with children's challenging behaviour and through this, children quickly learn the boundaries and routines of the home. They thrive on the clear structure and good routines in place. A parent commented: 'They get to know the child well and know what makes him tick. He responds well to them. They have good strategies for managing his behaviour'.

The home has good policies and procedures to protect children from bullying and carers report bullying is not a feature of the home. There is a protocol with the local police aimed at safeguarding children who are missing from home. Children carry identity badges with them that contain pertinent information and relevant names and phone numbers on to promote their safety and wellbeing should they ever be missing. No children have been missing from the home.

Children's health and safety is prioritised and regular checks on the premises, services and appliances ensure that children live in a safe environment. The home has been awarded the highest five star rating following a recent check by the environmental health services. Children and carers practise fire drills so that in the event of a fire, they would know how to keep safe.

No carer is allowed to start work at the home until robust recruitment checks have been carried out and full information is available to show they are suitable to work with children. Visitors are recorded and supervised so that as far as possible, children are kept safe from contact with potential abusers.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children receive support in accordance with their needs. They are assessed by a speech and language therapist who advises the home on the best way to help individual children develop their communication skills. Parents and social workers comment on the good progress children make. After six months at the home, one parent commented, 'It's quite remarkable and lovely to see the difference in my child. He has come on a great deal. There is a major change in the way he interacts with people'.

Children attend the company school and travel there each day with their carers and other children in the school bus. This enables them to participate in an everyday activity alongside other children and to learn how to behave in public with guidance

and support from their own carers. Children have individual education programmes and are taught in small groups. A carer supports them throughout the school day. A parent commented, 'going to school is a major milestone as this was something my child had great difficulty with before he went to the home. I have high hopes of him integrating'.

The home supports children's learning well. Carers continue the learning environment through activities at home. For example, where children are learning counting skills, carers practice this in the games and day to day activities they share with children.

Carers follow weekly activity plans so that children have a broad range of experiences and a good mix of lively and more sedate activities that they enjoy. Children develop their skills and interests and are continually learning from the opportunities provided. This is because the home plans children's time carefully with a focus on small steps that do not overwhelm them, but enable them to build confidence and trust.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Placement planning is excellent and is based on the local authorities' plans for children and the health care assessments they have had. Parents provide extensive information prior to the placement and the home uses this to plan children's day to day routines and activities. Good quality information is held on file and informs planning and guidance for staff. Carers are well aware of the individual needs of the children they are assigned to and follow carefully considered plans and routines that encourage and enable children to make good progress.

Communication with parents and social workers is excellent. Parents report that they are kept informed of their child's progress and they receive frequent updates and photographs that demonstrate their child is making good progress. They read the log books when they visit so they are aware of what is happening in their child's life. Carers transport children for contact with their families and supervise contact where this is needed. Families report that their children respond very well to the care staff and are confident that children are well looked after and happy. A parent said, 'Home contact is brilliant. It's working very well and we can visit there whenever we like'.

New admissions are very carefully planned and managed. Children and parents visit the home in advance and carers visit children in their own homes. This enables children to get to know their carers a little before they are admitted. Carers appreciate how frightening it can be for a child with limited understanding to move from his permanent home to a children's home that may be far away. They provide photographs and information to parents to share with children prior to placement and take great care to ensure the transition is as smooth as possible. They display great sensitivity to children's feelings. Similarly, the home helps children who move to new placements to be well prepared for the move. Where this means a move to a

permanent home within the company, then core members of their care team move with the child. This way, the transition causes the least disruption to the child. Children who have moved on within the last year have settled very quickly and happily into their new homes within the company.

Communication is a challenge for many of the children who live at the home. Staff are trained in the various methods used to help children express themselves and make their views known. They give children manageable choices so that they are not overwhelmed. Children's meetings are held quarterly and with the aid of carers, children are encouraged to share their views with each other and to make choices about things that concern the whole group, such as holidays and play equipment. Carers help children to develop a form of communication that suits their needs and from this to express their views and wishes, thereby reducing their frustrations and anxieties.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Children live in a well appointed, comfortable, clean and homely environment. Each child has their own large bedroom with en-suite facilities. Bedrooms are tastefully decorated and personalised to meet the individual child's needs and interests. The three lounges, dining room and large kitchen provide ample space for each child to engage in activities of their own choice without interfering with other children's needs. Equally, rooms are sufficiently large to allow children to spend time together, should they wish.

Extensive gardens provide plenty of space for children to play and outdoor equipment includes a basket ball net, trampoline and swing. The gardens are well tended and provide a peaceful, relaxing space that children enjoy.

The remit of the home does not include preparing children for independent living. However, children learn self care skills and develop independence through the close support and excellent guidance that staff provide. They learn to use money through shopping for their own snacks and toiletries and spending their pocket money. They experience the joy of giving because staff assist them to buy and exchange gifts with family members on special occasions. Every week, each child undertakes an activity aimed at promoting their independence and future economic wellbeing. A wide range of suitable activities include baking cakes to share with friends at school and going shopping for new clothes.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The detailed and comprehensive Statement of Purpose provides excellent information about the home for parents, social workers and other stakeholders. Each child has a personalised copy of the children's guide and staff spend time going through this

with children regularly until children are familiar with its contents.

The home is effectively organised, managed and monitored. The manager has extensive experience in the social care of children and young people and is suitably qualified to manage and lead the staff team, which he does extremely well.

Children's files are very well kept and there is evidence that children contribute to their records through personalised booklets, using a method of communication that is individually tailored to meet the needs of each child.

Children benefit from having a consistent team of dedicated carers whom they know well and learn to trust. The home is committed to providing a highly competent staff team and 80% of carers are suitably qualified. All are well trained and experienced. This gives them the confidence and competence to meet children's needs. Very good management support and supervision ensures staff provide high quality, individualised care to children.

Parents are impressed by the competence and dedication of the staff team. One said, 'It's not just a job to them, they genuinely care about my son. They know him very well. He has a bond with them and he listens to what they say and does as they suggest. He's now a happy chap: the people are the key'.

The company has effective, well qualified senior staff who work with the manager to develop new strategies and tools for working with children. The manager and proprietor monitor the operation of the service and the children's progress regularly. Through effective review and quality assurance, the home continues to improve its service to children. For example, plans are in place to develop a sensory room as an additional facility for children to enjoy and to improve the way children's health and medical information is collated and stored. This will provide children with clear and informative health records to take with them when they leave.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Children receive equal opportunities to thrive and to develop their own potential and interests. The home promotes inclusion through supporting children, when they are ready, to attend local groups where they are made welcome and can mix with peers from a range of ability levels. Carers value and accept each child for their differences and encourage them to value themselves and respect others. The home promotes an awareness of diversity and provides children with frequent opportunities to learn about other cultures, races and religious groups.