

1254837

Registered provider: Together for Children Sunderland Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is owned and managed under trust arrangements and is registered to care for up to six children who may have emotional and/or social difficulties. The manager is suitably qualified and experienced for the position held.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this setting on 14 January 2020, to carry out an interim inspection. The report is published on our website.

Inspection dates: 8 to 9 June 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 14 January 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: improved effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/01/2020	Interim	Improved effectiveness
07/05/2019	Full	Good
04/12/2018	Full	Requires improvement to be good
31/10/2018	Interim	Declined in effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy living at this home and make good progress from their starting points. Staff speak warmly about children and see them as individuals with their own personalities and characteristics, rather than for the behaviours they may display. As a result, children have trusting, secure relationships with staff who are committed to ensuring that they provide the best possible care. One professional said, 'Children really are at the centre of everything they do.' Overall, the approach staff take means that children are cared for by staff who understand them and their needs.

Staff prepare children well when considering new admissions to the home. Staff visit the children, where possible, before they move into the home. Staff spend time with children to understand their likes, dislikes and routines. Children who live in the home are prepared well for new children joining. The potential admission of a child whose first language was not English was discussed at a children's meeting. Staff were creative in showing the children a map and flag of the country, as well as sharing 10 interesting facts about the country. This resulted in a child-led discussion about the possible experiences that this child may have had, during which the children demonstrated empathy and compassion towards the child. The children's guide was also translated into the first language of the child. As a result, children are prepared for living in a group home, and their cultures and individual needs are respected.

Education attendance for children is variable. For those children who experience barriers to attending school, alternative education placements are arranged, as well as the use of tutors. Staff advocate on behalf of children, ensuring that their wishes are listened to when education provisions are being identified for them. Staff attend all education meetings and challenge the plans for children when they feel these do not meet the children's education needs. This provides the opportunity for children to make progress in their education.

Children are in good health and their health needs are met. Children access universal services and routine appointments are made. Staff use the positive relationships that they have with the children to promote good health and to provide support. As a result, one child has recently stopped smoking and there continues to be a reduction in the use of alcohol and drugs, with no incidents in the last two months. This means that children develop a strong sense of how to look after their own health and, as a result, they remain healthy.

Children have a say in their care and planning and know that their views are valued. Seeking the views of children is prioritised in the home. Staff use a wide range of forums to do this. These views are then considered at staff meetings, where they are discussed as an agenda item.

Children are provided with a copy of the complaints procedure on admission to the home. They know they can speak to a member of staff to voice their concerns if an issue arises and feel confident about doing so. However, children are not aware of where the complaints forms are located in the home, and that they can make a complaint without the assistance of staff. This means that children are unaware of the process they can follow in order to raise a complaint confidentially.

The home is decorated and maintained to a high standard. Outside, there is a large wooden summer house, which contains a pool table and gym equipment for the children to enjoy. Children are involved in the redecoration of their bedrooms and the home. However, there is minimal evidence of the children's presence in the home. This does not promote the children's identity and sense of belonging.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Children say they feel safe living in the home. Staff understand children's experiences of trauma and use this knowledge to respond to children's needs effectively. As a result, incidents requiring physical intervention and the use of sanctions are minimal. This approach helps children to develop their relationships with staff.

Children's risk assessments and individual crisis management plans are well written and easy to understand and are kept up to date so that areas of risk are clearly identified.

Children are helped to understand how to keep safe. Key-work sessions are undertaken with children following every significant incident. This supports children to discuss and reflect on their behaviour. Staff are creative in their delivery of these sessions, for example using YouTube videos on gang and knife crime.

Staff provide children with a very clear message that children's safety and well-being are important. When children go missing from the home, which is a regular event for one child, staff follow the home's procedure. Staff actively take steps to locate the child, in line with the child's missing-from-home plan. This includes persistently trying to contact them by telephone and contacting their families and associates, as well as driving to all known locations in an effort to find them. Once children are found, return home interviews are offered to them on all occasions.

Safer recruitment processes are followed when staff are appointed, which provides assurance that they are suitably vetted and qualified to provide care.

Before children are admitted to the home, a senior member of staff completes an impact risk assessment. While the identified risks and the strategies in place to reduce the risks are clear, there is little analysis of risk or consideration of how each child's behaviours may affect the other children. This lack of analysis means that children have been matched without consideration of how the incidents they experience on a daily basis, living in a group home, will have an impact on them.

Each evening, staff lock all internal doors downstairs, which denies children access to these areas of the home. This practice creates an institutionalised environment for children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The manager is suitably qualified and experienced. He is passionate, inspirational and leads by example. Evidence of this practice includes the preparation involved when considering the admission to the home of a child whose first language is not English.

The manager has an excellent understanding of his and the staff team's strengths and weaknesses, and has an ambitious vision for further developing the service. He is supported by a stable, highly motivated and committed team of staff who share his vision for the home. As a result, children benefit from consistent staffing arrangements and practices, which provide them with stability and security.

The manager is influential in changing the experiences of children. His confident and innovative style of management has resulted in extensive progress and improvement being made since the last inspection. One young person, who remains in contact with the staff following their move on to independence, provided positive feedback about the manager. They said, 'Prior to [the manager] being in post it was three out of 10, but since [the manager] has been in post, it is nine out of 10.' Staff continue to keep in contact with this young person who, despite having moved on, said about the staff, 'They are still my family.'

The manager has high expectations of himself and his staff. He ensures that children are provided with the best possible care. This, along with the manager's highly effective auditing processes, ensures that children's care experiences continue to improve.

Children's records are up to date and of a high standard. There is an emphasis on using child-focused and non-blaming language. The manager welcomes external scrutiny from the independent visitor. He shares the recommendations in staff meetings, to make further improvements and to raise the standard of care children receive. This demonstrates a culture of openness and willingness to listen and change.

The manager ensures that new staff joining the home receive an induction and a structured training programme, that is relevant to the individual needs of the children. The manager and his team complete mandatory training. This is up to date, except for the physical intervention refresher. This has been unavoidably delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions, and has been rescheduled.

Staff feel supported by the management team and are confident about seeking advice and guidance. Staff feel there have been significant improvements made since the current manager has been in post, including more continuity and information-sharing. One member of staff said, '[The manager] is always bringing

things back from management meetings and sharing them with us, and is always looking at how we can improve.'

Staff receive reflective supervision regularly. There is a clear focus on staff development and improving performance. However, there is little focus on the individual needs of the children in the home.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i))	9 July 2021
The registered person must ensure that— the privacy of children is appropriately protected; children can access all appropriate areas of the children's home's premises; and any limitation placed on a child's privacy or access to any area of the home's premises— is intended to safeguard each child accommodated in the home; is necessary and proportionate; is kept under review and, if necessary, revised; and allows children as much freedom as is possible when balanced against the need to protect them and keep them safe. (Regulation 21 (a)(b)(c)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv))	9 July 2021

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children are aware of the complaints procedure and are able to access the forms and make a complaint without the need to ask staff, in order to protect their privacy. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 22, paragraph 4.13)
- The registered person should ensure that there are systems in place so that all staff, including the manager, receive supervision of their practice from an appropriately qualified and experienced professional, which allows them not only to reflect on their practice and development, but also to focus on the needs of the children assigned to their care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2)
- The registered manager should ensure that the home is a homely, domestic environment that meets the needs of their children. Children's homes must comply with relevant health and safety legislations (alarms, food hygiene and so on); however, in doing so, homes should seek as far as possible to maintain a domestic rather than 'institutional' impression. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 13.9)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1254837

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Together for Children Sunderland Limited

Registered provider address: Stanfield Business Centre, Addison Street,
Sunderland SR2 8SZ

Responsible individual: Martin Birch

Registered manager: Barry Hall

Inspector

Paula Shepherd, Social Care Inspector

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