

1254841

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 registered for up to six young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. There are four young people resident. The home has recently transferred from the direct management of Sunderland City Council to its arms-length trading company, Together for Children.

Inspection dates: 5 to 6 September 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: Not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: Not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is outstanding because:

- Young people are involved, at an appropriate level, in every aspect of the running of the home.
- Young people have made gradual and incremental progress from their starting points.
- A significant strength of the home is the detailed planning of transition to and from the home.
- Strong relationship building between young people and staff through the home's link worker system is key to its success.
- Staff demonstrate a strong analytical understanding of the day-to-day risks faced by the young people, and the consistency of their approach is promoted by an effective quality assurance system.
- The home's physical environment is limited by the purpose-built nature of the building, but its interior is homely and suitably personalised with recent significant investment in its outside areas.
- There has been a significant and continuing reduction in the number of incidents that require notification, such as episodes of going missing.
- The changeover in responsibility for the home from local authority to a trading company is already adding value to the way it is managed and maintained.
- Leadership within the home is excellent. The long-standing, stable senior management team embodies the positive ethos of the home, but it is open to introducing new ideas.

The children's home's areas for development:

- Members of staff do not take a consistent approach to completing the recording template when they meet with young people on a one-to-one basis, and these records are not clearly linked to the young person's placement plan.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
First inspection		

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

Recommendations

- The importance of understanding who we are and where we come from is recognised in good social work practice, for example undertaking life story and other direct work. Staff in children's homes should play a full role in work of this kind. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 42, paragraph 3.14)

In particular, taking a consistent approach to recording one-to-one sessions and linking them to the placement plan.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The young people are fully involved in day-to-day decision-making in the home wherever this is appropriate. For example, they organise their own activities programme, their holidays, and have chosen the decor of the building. The home's innovative jobs programme, 'earn while you learn', is instrumental in building young people's self-care skills when they are undertaking chores around the house. The young people take evident pride in their environment and when spoken to by the inspector, said that they see this as their home.

The young people present well and are a pleasure to meet. They are making gradual progress from their starting points and this is apparent not only from their presentation but also from written records, such as strengths and difficulties questionnaires, school reports and health assessments. At the time of the inspection, the home was engaged in young people's return to school after their summer holidays and this was thoughtfully managed, with some examples of excellent practice, for instance through attractive personalised wall posters in young people's bedrooms reminding them of their school routine.

Recent moves to semi-independent living have been well planned and delivered for several of the young people. This means that for the most part, transition has been smooth and young people left with positive memories of their time at the home. The process of transition is supported well by the production of high-quality photo albums and DVDs. Many of the young people who have moved on continue to call in and seek support and encouragement from staff members who have been significant adults in their lives.

A robust link worker system enables the young people to build strong relationships with specific members of staff. The manager takes a thoughtful approach to matching young people's assessed needs with a link worker who is best able to meet them. This results

in young people having positive role models in their lives who fully understand their needs, and are enabled to meet them through detailed placement planning. However, one-to-one sessions to support placement plans are not yet well recorded. Different members of staff use the recording template in varying ways and this does not support an understanding of the contribution of each individual interaction to the overall plan for the young person.

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

The young people are well cared for by a staff team that demonstrates a detailed understanding of their assessed needs. A culture of effective risk assessment and management means that staff are aware of any specified risks to individual young people and how they are to be dealt with. For example, young people's specialised health needs are well understood and detailed plans are in place to meet them.

The young people are a recently formed group, and the home is now a relatively settled environment. Parents spoken to by the inspector report that during a relatively recent less settled period, they were concerned about the potential for incidences of bullying and a risk of their child being involved in criminal activity. A marked reduction in serious incidents following a natural turnover in residents means that this risk is significantly reduced, but this is yet to be sustained and maintained over time. For this reason, the way that young people are protected within the home is not yet as consistently and evidently excellent as other aspects of their care.

The natural turnover of young people and a change to the behaviours that the group present have led to a significant reduction in notifiable incidents, most particularly incidences of children going missing. None of the current residents persistently goes missing, nor are they assessed as being at risk of sexual exploitation.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The home is very well managed. The manager and his senior team embody the home's ethos of listening to and caring for young people. The transition in responsibility from a council-run establishment to an arms-length limited company has been smooth and so far beneficial to the stable and long-established management team of the home, for instance in the way that budgets are now formed annually around resident children's specific needs.

Thorough quality assurance processes mean that record-keeping, other than of one-to-one sessions, is generally of a consistently high quality. Examples identified by the inspector reviewing case records of an incomplete risk assessment had already been recognised through the quality assurance process and was in the process of being rectified. For example, some risks had been assessed as very high when they were irregular so the assessment was misleading. Others had been graded as low, when they were observably having a profound day-to-day effect on the young person's life. Strong quality assurance ensures that the risks are being assessed reliably in a way that promotes a coherent and consistent response from staff to keeping young people safe.

The home is purpose-built and well maintained, and it is welcoming and homely. The young people's bedrooms are decorated to a high standard and suitably personalised, for instance with bedspreads and wall posters of their choice. Recent investment in the exterior areas of the home has added considerably to the facilities available to undertake therapeutic interventions. These are delivered according to a well-established model that staff are trained to deliver. For instance, the addition of The Spur as an outbuilding, which was fully designed and decorated and in part built by the young people, provides them and staff with a quiet and restful space in which to undertake one-to-one sessions, and for the home's community to meet.

Staff are supported to deliver their role through a process of regular supervision and appraisal, and this identifies any training needed to further sharpen their existing effectiveness. One social worker of a young person placed at the home said that whenever she contacted the home for information, every member of staff was always fully aware of up-to-the minute details on the child and this helps her to keep in touch with progress.

A high turnover of staff of 50% in one year, for unavoidable reasons, has been welcomed as a positive opportunity by the management team. A full induction programme is offered to newly appointed members of staff, underpinned by the home's customary well-planned approach, such as the delivery of a core training offer and mentoring from the senior team. Careful management of the transition in staff means that the home's established ethos has remained firmly in place, with the injection of new talents and ideas to contribute to the home's overall excellent standard of care.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: 1254841

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Together For Children Sunderland Limited

Registered provider address: City Of Sunderland, PO Box 102, Sunderland SR2 7DN

Responsible individual: Debra Patterson

Registered manager: Michael More

Inspector

Ian Young: Her Majesty's Inspector of Social Care

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