

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	26/04/2016
Unique reference number	SC006011
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Care Afloat Ltd
Registered person address	158 Birkrig, Skelmersdale, Lancashire WN8 9HP

Responsible individual	Michael Fletcher
Registered manager	Peter Mahon
Inspector	Denise Jolly

Inspection date	26/04/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Declined in effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

SC006011

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- The young person recognises that staff care about her, and do everything they can to help her to stay safe. As a result, she experiences improvements in her emotional well-being as well as her safety and life skills.
- Staff support the young person to meet with other professionals who can help her to learn about the risks she may encounter in misuse of drugs and alcohol, and in inappropriate relationships.
- A range of professionals confirm that staff understand the risks that young people face, and work cooperatively to minimise them.
- Young people who live far from home receive support and encouragement to develop and sustain important links with their culture and family. They influence the home environment so that they feel safe and comfortable in it.
- Managers take a realistic approach to addressing shortfalls and to securing continuous improvement in the quality of care provided. Clear action plans and consultations with stakeholders ensure that progress is monitored.
- Managers and staff demonstrate interest in and enthusiasm for their care role. They place young people at the front and centre of all developments and reviews of the conduct of the home. As a result, young people identify well with the home and those who care for them.
- Young people are supported to participate in full-time education. Improvements are needed to ensure that they have access to a range of suitable developmental activity until this is achieved.

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

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the '*Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards*'. The registered person must comply with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The leadership and management standard 13. (2) In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to: (c) ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; particularly with regard to attachment, gang culture and sexual exploitation.	3/06/2016
14. The care planning standard In order to meet the care planning standard, children should have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home (1)(b)	3/06/2016
Statement of purpose 16. (3) The registered person must: (a) keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate revise it, with particular reference to the details of all professionals who provide therapy, and how the home seeks to achieve therapeutic outcomes. (Regulation 16 (3a))	30/06/2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- When young people are not participating in education, the registered person must work closely with the education authority, so that in the interim the young person should be engaged in suitable, structured activities, including improving their independence skills. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 28, paragraph 5.15)
- Ensure that staff understand and consistently apply the system for

rewarding and celebrating positive behaviour and recognising where young people have managed situations well. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.39)

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to two children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. A private company owns and operates the home.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
23 February 2016	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
28 July 2015	Full	Requires improvement
26 March 2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness
16 December 2014	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
One young person lives in this home at present. Managers have limited further admissions until she builds upon the progress she is now making in her settling-in period. Staff are building positive, secure and trusting relationships with her, and with her family. They provide genuine, interested and warm care. They demonstrate good levels of confidence and competence in their ability to remain positive and constructive when she experiences difficulty in responding to their efforts. This means that she has become attached to the staff and to the routines of the home. She was busy organising a change of bedroom, where she had planned a colour scheme and furnishings, helped to decorate it, and was very pleased with being able to see the fruits of her efforts. She said, 'Whenever staff come on duty, they act like they are coming into my home. I like that they don't just treat this like work.' The young person confidently talked to staff, who listened to her and discussed her ideas and opinions. She explained to the inspector why she was in the home, and the goals she was working towards for her future happiness. She said, 'I want to stay here until I am an adult. I like it here, I like my staff and they like me. They do get on at me sometimes, but they know when to stop.' This confidence in staff care and nurture supports and develops her self-esteem, and improves her emotional welfare, helping her to manage the impact of past trauma and upset better. This is evident in the way that she has been able to withdraw from alcohol and cocaine misuse, and has not been missing from the home for nearly a month. Due to the efforts of the manager and staff, the young person is looking forward to starting back at school for the first time in a year. In the interim, a tutor programme is in place for two hours of home tuition each day. Because she has shown limited engagement with this programme, the planned increase of her education has not been realised. Nevertheless, staff have supported her to adopt improving routines, such as getting up earlier so that she is being prepared for successful attendance. Her uniform is ready for her first day, and she has completed an initial visit. Because staff are persistent and work with the tutors who visit the home, she has dipped into the educational programme offered. Although she has been reluctant to participate in assessment tests, she has contributed to lively debate about slavery and black culture. She has completed some reflections on gang-related relationships and culture. She has written poetry that reflects some of her experiences. This enables staff to engage with her about important aspects of her life and identity, and contributes to her sense of being valued by them. While every effort is being made to ensure that her education plans get on	

track, staff rely on activities, such as shopping, going for walks or decorating, that do not formally contribute to her education plan. This inhibits her being able to make good progress in the short term. The young person said that she really wanted to start school, because she did not consider home education to be suitable for her.

Subject to appropriate and rigorous risk assessments, and personalised interests and skills, staff encourage the young person to participate in activities and social occasions that could help her to develop as a full and rounded individual. At present she is reluctant to venture out without staff, saying that she finds it odd to be out without them, as she likes their company. However, staff are researching ethnically diverse places, such as city centre restaurants, markets and youth clubs, that support her identity and offer her an opportunity to make positive and safe friendships. She has recently been successful in gaining voluntary work in a charity shop, which will give her opportunities to practise and develop positive social and community skills that will help her in her future.

The young person has improved her access to healthcare. She has begun to engage, albeit inconsistently, with a range of professionals to address her basic healthcare and her emotional well-being and safety. Staff support her by giving her clear and consistent messages about the importance of staying fit and healthy, and are encouraging her to go to the gym. Through their support, she has engaged in sexual health screening, and has also considered risks and responsibilities with a substance misuse worker. This gives her access to age-appropriate guidance and reliable information that equips her to make informed choices. A therapist has begun to visit the home, with the goal of building a relationship with her that will support and nurture her resilience and self-knowledge. The therapist works with staff to help them to understand the aims and techniques of the approach, but a lack of written information and formal training in this area means that they rely on word of mouth to stay up to date. This will impact on their ability to support the young person fully once she begins to engage with the therapist. At present, because they are sensitive and responsive to her immediate need for emotional warmth, this is not affecting the progress that she is making.

The home provides spacious, accessible and diverse accommodation. The comfortable lounge and dining areas are places for socialisation and relaxation that reflect the personality of the young person. As the young person has been living alone, she has been able to invite a relative to stay with her overnight, to help to bridge the emotional gap that living a long way from her home has created. She was able to arrange the visit with female staff whom she wished to have supporting her, and this contributed to a happy time for all. This is part of a successful strategy, to help her to reduce any impulse she has to go missing from the home.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
Young people feel very safe and secure in the home. They rely on the guidance of staff to help them to sustain positive relationships with each other and with staff. Staff always help young people to explore why social exchanges go wrong, and sensitively encourage young people to examine their own behaviour as well as that of others. Because key workers achieve a safe environment for this difficult work to take place, young people respond positively to their efforts to make progress at a pace that suits them. A strength of the home is the consistent messages provided by staff. This is possible because staff have developed an open culture where all staff contribute their thoughts about each plan of care for young people, and agreement is reached by child-centred and reflective practice. Staff use praise liberally to motivate and value the current young person, but do not avoid the more difficult messages that they share, to enhance self-awareness and improve her behaviour and safety. This robust and realistic approach makes a marked difference to the way she views the home. She knows that staff want to protect her from exploitation and inappropriate relationships and activities, and also that she will be challenged fairly if she presents unacceptable views and behaviours. She wanted to emphasise to the inspector how she felt and said, 'My staff are really good. I can talk to them about things. When I am upset, they are who I want. That's why I wanted to come back, as the last time I was with them, they looked after me and I felt safe and happy.' Her social worker praised the home for how well they are protecting her, given the risks she had been exposed to, and said that staff provided clear information about any progress or difficulties. The home has a clear system for identifying and managing risk. This includes setting out the particular risks and signs of drug and alcohol misuse, and how to identify and minimise the risks of sexual exploitation, as well as the urgency of alerts to all professionals of any episodes of the young person being missing from the home. The police missing from home coordinator described staff as knowledgeable about the particular risks associated with the young person, and good at liaising with them and other police forces to share intelligence and actions to enhance her safety and protection. With staff support, the young person was able to engage with police risk assessment processes, to help them to create a specific plan to meet her protection needs. Regular strategy meetings devise updated plans that will be enhanced by this assessment once it is circulated. This has contributed to the young person being able to continue to live in the community rather than in secure accommodation. Most staff have participated in training to develop their understanding of sexual exploitation, although some refreshers are required to bring them fully up to date. However, this has not reduced their ability to take immediate action when required.	

The strength of tolerant and supportive relationships in the home is evidenced by the trust that the young person demonstrates when she talks to staff about her impulses and motivators, such as gang membership, family dynamics or drug use. Staff respond with factual and well-reasoned information, calmly given, and often repeated, in order to help her to think about how she can manage positive change. It has also helped her to talk about some of her past relationships and experiences so that staff can help her to begin to understand the impact of these on her life. She said, 'I have stopped taking and selling drugs, I have stopped drinking, and I can see that my last boyfriend wasn't any good. I have to think about not running back to (my home area), and showing I can be safe. But that's hard sometimes when I miss my friends.' This insight is echoed by protection professionals who say that this home offers her the right support, but that she has yet to respond consistently to their efforts in order to ensure her safety and well-being.

Staff are trained in a proactive approach to supporting behaviour. The young person has contributed her views about how staff can best support her when she is in crisis. Through meaningful dialogue and reflection or by simply giving space, staff help her to regain composure when discussions have become heated or unproductive. Because of this, many situations are successfully de-escalated, and she can retain her dignity and relationships when she is upset. Staff use incentives and reward to promote positive choices, such as attending medical appointments or meeting with substance misuse workers. However, a lack of clear guidance about this approach has caused some inconsistency in staff use of sanctions and rewards. The matter has been highlighted, and staff are in discussions to resolve it. In the short term, managers are expecting staff to keep clear records about how rewards have been used. This will ensure greater consistency for the young person. Such actions build reliable, open and trusting relationships that support her to grow and to develop new awareness about their benefits.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement
The qualified and experienced manager leads good practice in placing the young person's needs and wishes as high priority. Recent staff changes ensure that she is cared for by staff in whom she has confidence and trust. This underpins the progress she has made in overcoming previously unsafe and unwanted patterns of behaviour. She said, 'Staff are interested in me, they keep their promises, and they "get me". They are helping me to enjoy living here.' Staff offer strong and persistent messages about how she can make and sustain progress, and are resilient when she suffers setbacks to this progress.	

Leaders and managers have reviewed the development plan for the home, to ensure that all previous shortfalls are effectively addressed, and that the quality of care provided continually develops and improves. Previous requirements related to the safety and care of young people have been addressed, and the home's improvement plan sets out actions that will ensure that young people are effectively supported to improve. Staff confirm that they are involved in reviewing the systems and procedures that set out how they deliver good care, and are contributing to a revised staff handbook that will underpin consistent practice by clarifying house rules, rewards and incentives. The structure sets out how the main aims of the home are underpinned by staff skills and knowledge that will develop through an improved induction and staff training programme, as well as partnership work with other professionals who support young people.

To support these longer-term goals, the manager has set out a programme of staff development days, and uses supervision to encourage staff to reflect on their practice and development needs. Staff say that this has improved morale because they feel involved in the positive changes in the home. The independent visitor provides detailed description and analysis of how well young people are supported and kept safe. His report is used to add to other monitoring of the home, to ensure that development is sustained. Development is slower in some areas than others. For example, an improved training programme, that includes how staff understand the impact of poor emotional experiences and attachment, and how to work with young people at risk from gangs, self-harm or exploitation, is planned, but has not yet been finalised. This is because a staff development officer has only recently been appointed.

The home's statement of purpose should be updated to ensure that it records the experience and qualifications of all therapists who work in the home, and sets out how staff will support their work, to ensure that young people make continual progress in their plans.

No young people have left, or come to live in, the home since the last inspection, and so it is not possible to identify improvement within the admission and discharge processes as required at the last inspection. For this reason, the previous requirement will be repeated. The young person who lives there has a relevant and detailed care plan that staff regularly discuss with her and with other professionals. This identifies her core needs and how the home can meet them. Progress is measured from her starting point. This enables her to be encouraged by the positive changes she has made, and further motivate her to success. Her voice comes through clearly in those plans, even when she does not agree with them. Staff are realistic about the importance of collaborating with her, but also about setting clear boundaries and expectations that help her to stay safe and well. Other professionals, such as a social worker and the police, say that the home provides clear communication about her changing needs, and they recognise that staff support is integral to her welfare and emotional stability. This is a strength of the home.

Managers have prioritised repair and refurbishment of the home, to ensure that it offers welcoming and comfortable accommodation that young people can relax in. The young person has been fully involved in this aspect of progress, and clearly enjoys being able to influence her surroundings to remind her of her family home. This is important for her sense of identity and well-being, and has encouraged her to set down roots that are the start of emotional stability. Staff recognise that this is an essential foundation for her to make progress.

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against '*Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection*'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of looked after children is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place, however, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, 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 who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This 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 Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the '*Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards*'.

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