

SC032496

Registered provider: Trafford Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This is a local authority home providing care and accommodation for up to six young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. One of these places is usually reserved for children who need an emergency placement.

Inspection dates: 26 to 27 June 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	Good
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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 effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 26 October 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: Good

Enforcement action since last inspection

none

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- The home is very well led by a competent and aspirational registered manager.
- The dedicated, stable staff team receives very good support, supervision and

training. This helps staff to provide exceptionally good care to children.

- Partnership working is excellent. It promotes children's development and progress by ensuring that they receive the support they need.
- Children feel safe in the home and are safe. Positive behaviour management strategies help children to learn self-control and reduce the need for restraint and sanctions.
- The home supports children to reduce their risk-taking behaviour, such as going missing and misusing substances. Staff work effectively with the police and youth offending service to reduce children's involvement with the criminal justice system.
- Children say they are well cared for. They have a sense of belonging, which stems from the good relationships they develop with staff.
- Children's education, health and emotional well-being are very well promoted. Consequently, children make good progress across their development.

The children's home's areas for development:

- The impact of children placed in the home in an emergency is sometimes negative and the arrangements should be reviewed. Some children, who are easily influenced by peers, have been drawn into crime and risk-taking behaviour. Some children have had unplanned endings to their placements when they have been admitted to the home in an emergency, but this has put the safety of them or other children at high risk. The quality of the impact of risk assessments in these cases has not been good.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
26/10/2016	Full	Good
23/06/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
07/12/2015	Full	Good
18/08/2015	Full	Inadequate

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

Recommendations

- Review the arrangements for looking after children admitted to the home in an emergency. In particular, ensure that emergency admissions are only taken when the home has the capability to care for those children while continuing to offer high-quality care to children already living in the home. This relates to the need to reduce the negative impact that children placed at short notice often have on children already in placement. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.6)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive individually tailored care that takes account of their particular needs, wishes and interests. They feel well cared for by staff who are patient, kind and caring. Children benefit from the many and varied positive experiences on offer, such that they develop self-esteem, confidence and new skills.

Professionals and families report that children are very well looked after by a settled team of staff who are nurturing and consistent. For example, one professional said: 'I know this home well. Staff do all they can to support children and keep them safe.' Another professional said: 'I've seen children do really well there. This child is as settled as she could possibly be, given her previous turbulent lifestyle.'

Children benefit from the home's clear focus on building strong, positive and supportive relationships with them. They recognise that they are safe, and that staff help them to make good progress in their lives. One child explained: 'We can speak to any staff about anything. We have one-to-ones and we write it up and both sign it. We have young people's meetings as well. They ask us what we want all the time and they try to put things in place for us. We've got routines and I'm settled here. I don't have to worry every day about where I'm going home to. I know where I belong: here.'

A professional explained the difference the home has made to a child who had very low self-esteem when admitted to the home: 'He was nervous, timid and shy. The great support they give him has made a huge difference. They've helped him build confidence so he is now comfortable interacting and can look at people. He can do things in society without panicking.'

Children's health needs are very well supported. The home works in close partnership with the looked after children nurse and other health professionals, thereby ensuring that children get the health services, medicines and treatment they need. They receive healthy meals prepared by staff who maintain good food hygiene standards.

The home prioritises children's education and has high aspirations for every child. Consequently, children who have missed extensive education in the past are well supported to re-engage with education. Most do so successfully. A headteacher explained: 'They have been really proactive. They contacted us as soon as he was admitted there and asked for his exam timetable. They were on it from the word "go". They are hugely supportive and have done remarkably well to get him in for the exams. They have kept in really good contact with us and have worked marvels to get him in at all.'

Children enjoy a relaxed, calm atmosphere and they engage well in the many and varied activities on offer. These range from computer and board games to trips to the zoo, the local gym, the seaside and horse-riding lessons. Children are encouraged to try new things and to develop their interests and hobbies. This helps build self-esteem, confidence and social skills.

A child gave the following account of the home: 'It's a good home. They look after you well. They care about us and listen to us. We have meetings and have our say. And they are fair. There are two games you can play. You can tow the line and do what you're supposed to and then you get rewards, money, trips out and treats. Or you can go your own way and not get those things. I'm doing well. My life has changed since being here.'

The home sets targets for individual children and helps them to develop new skills and achieve positive outcomes through agreed incentives, rewards and praise. Children develop their self-care skills, learn to cook, do their own washing and prepare for future independent living.

Children who have a planned move to the home visit beforehand, meet the staff and children and receive a welcome pack on their admission, which helps them to settle in quickly. Those who are admitted in an emergency are also made welcome and staff explain how the home operates, what support they can expect and what the home expects from them. This helps children to understand what is happening and have a sense of order in a crisis situation.

The home finds out as much information as possible about each child before they are admitted and carries out an impact risk assessment, to consider how it can meet the child's needs and how that child will impact on others living at the home. Although the quality of these reports is variable, professionals appreciate the home's input. An independent reviewing officer explained: 'It's really helpful. Sometimes, they say they cannot meet a child's needs and when I chair the review, and I can see that their assessment is right and accurate. It means we have to find somewhere else for those children, sometimes specialist placements, and they have gone on to do really well there.' This demonstrates that, by carrying out careful impact risk assessments, the home helps the local authority to find the most suitable placement for children who have complex emotional and/or behavioural needs. However, where the home has admitted children against the manager's better judgement, this has caused the home to become unsettled. This has had a negative impact on children and has led, in some cases, to children having another placement move.

The negative impact of emergency placements on children already living in the home is illustrated by a social worker's comments: 'A major issue is him being drawn into

misbehaviour because of the negative influence of others. He is easily influenced by peers and his drug misuse is dependent on who he is following. He is not emotionally strong enough to say "No" and will do whatever it takes to be accepted. It all calms down when those young people are not around.'

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

Staff follow effective risk management plans which guide them in how to reduce and manage known risks to children's safety. These plans are routinely reviewed every month or after serious incidents. There is good evidence of further action being taken to safeguard children at increasing risk, as well as to allow more freedom to take age-appropriate risks to those who are learning to take more responsibility for their own safety. This shows that the home's approach to safeguarding is tailored to meet each child's individual needs.

Children become increasingly safe from the point of their admission to the home. They report that they feel safe in the home and say that the reduction in their angry outbursts, assaults on others and missing behaviour are evidence of this. For example, one child said: 'My life has changed since being here. I used to be missing a lot and up to no good and the police used to bring me home five nights out of seven before I came here. And I was always hitting people, for no reason. They've helped me with that. I don't do it anymore and I don't go missing.'

Children know the local police officer well and have developed a friendly, trusting relationship with her. She explained: 'I visit frequently and I meet new children when they arrive. Staff share any safety concerns and the home's risk assessments with me, and I attend safeguarding strategy meetings, where there are safety concerns.' She described positive partnership working that helps keep children out of the criminal justice system, saying: 'We work together to deal with low level stuff, like racial abuse via restorative justice. Staff have held specific workshops and one child is now helping to deliver one on racial abuse to other children. This is helping his understanding.'

When it is recognised that a child who has committed an offence needs the support of the youth offending service (YOS), the home works in collaboration with the police so that, where possible, the child is interviewed under caution and a referral is made without going through the court. Where necessary, YOS workers visit children in the home. This helps children to engage more readily, build their relationships with YOS workers and enables meaningful work to take place. Thus, by working proactively and collaboratively with the police and the YOS, the home ensures that children receive the support they need without being criminalised.

The home has strengthened its response to supporting children who go missing and this, in turn, has led to fewer missing incidents. The home works very closely with the police. The local police officer explained: 'We work really closely together and put the right interventions in place. There's been a massive reduction in children and young people going missing. They have good individual protocols for reporting and the staff go looking for children before they ring us, unless the child is at high risk. They've got a good relationship with the local Asda and McDonald's and they will contact the home if they see the children there. Staff then go and collect them.'

Children say staff keep them safe by keeping in touch with them when they are away from the home unsupervised, and by finding them and bringing them home if they go out without permission. One explained: 'Staff are like our parents. They make sure we're safe. They ring you every hour if you are out and they leave a voicemail and check what time you're coming back.' Children who have been missing a lot from previous placements reduce this behaviour and are, therefore, much safer.

The home is further developing its links with partner agencies to ensure that children have the opportunity to have meaningful discussions with an independent person following their return to the home. The manager has taken action to strengthen the arrangements for independent return interviews, because those responsible for this task do not routinely share information disclosed by children with the manager. However, the home is proactive in seeking this information, recognising it is important for staff, as carers, to know of any potential safeguarding concerns.

The home responds well to allegations or disclosures of abuse or to concerns raised through whistle-blowing. Investigations are well managed, working under the guidance of the local designated officer for safeguarding and relevant placing authorities. This protects children and staff well.

Staff defuse challenging situations through effective and appropriate behaviour management strategies. The home uses the 'Nurtured Heart' approach to caring for children. This supports staff to manage children's challenging behaviour through positive interventions and clear boundaries, backed up by nurturing care. A child explained: 'They put strategies in place for when I get angry and I follow them. I do counselling as well. It all helps.' Consequently, restraint is used minimally and only as a last resort, to protect children and staff from harm. There have been two restraints since the last inspection, and both have been managed well and were effective in protecting children.

The home has a clear anti-bullying policy and challenges bullying incidents when they arise. For example, staff took immediate steps to protect one child at risk of serious assault from other children by providing close supervision and support, and arranging for the child at risk to stay overnight with family prior to an immediate discharge from the home. They addressed the incident with other children through key worker sessions and sanctions.

The child at risk in this instance had been admitted to the home in an emergency and was allowed to remain. Her identified needs suggested that she would not be a good match for the other children in the home. However, the impact risk assessment completed on her admission did not demonstrate that the home had carefully considered how her placement would impact on others already living in the home.

Several children who have been admitted to the home on emergency placements have had a significant negative impact on those children already in placement. For example, children have been drawn into going missing, criminality and drug misuse. One child was drawn into inappropriate sexual activity. On occasion, children have been admitted at short notice on a Friday evening and plans for weekend activities have had to be altered to accommodate the staffing arrangements for the newly admitted child. This can disrupt

the smooth running of the home and create animosity towards the newly admitted child.

The quality of the impact risk assessments is variable. Some are detailed and evaluative and demonstrate very clearly why a child is not suitable for admission to the home, based on their complex needs and potential to disrupt the placements of, or negatively influence, those already living in the home. Others are less good and have resulted in children being admitted to the home for 72 hours or more, before being discharged in an emergency because serious incidents have threatened their safety.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The home is extremely well led and managed by a competent, suitably qualified and highly committed registered manager who was registered with Ofsted in March 2017. She is visible and readily accessible to both staff and children. Her enthusiasm and high aspirations for children permeate the home so that all staff have high ambitions for and expectations of children.

The manager and senior staff know and understand the home's strengths and weaknesses. They have already implemented many changes to improve the home and have further plans in place to enhance children's positive experiences of living in the home. For example, the garden and interior of the home are under development and already provide a relaxing and child-centred environment. The atmosphere in the home is calm and friendly. The children's guide and other children's documents have been reviewed so that they are child-friendly and informative. More work is planned to encourage children to contribute further to the development of the home.

There is a sharp focus on monitoring children's progress through setting clear targets for each child and keeping their progress under continuous review. The home has devised new systems and documentation to aid this process. The manager, seniors and care staff all demonstrate a very good understanding of children's needs and progress. This ensures consistency of care and prompt action to address any concerns. A member of staff explained: 'We are all singing from the same hymn sheet.' Consequently, children's changing needs are identified and addressed at the earliest possible opportunity. This gives children confidence in the staff team.

Partner professionals are invited to meet with children at the home. This helps children to engage more readily with the services they need, such as substance misuse and sexual health support services, the police and mental health support workers. For example, young people approaching leaving care benefited enormously from recent discussions with a housing expert. This gave them a much better understanding of the processes involved in moving on to independent living and having their own tenancy.

Children are cared for by a stable, suitably qualified staff team. The staff know each other's strengths and weaknesses and, as a consequence, work extremely well together. The management team provides staff with very good supervision, support and training. This ensures that staff provide high-quality care, keep up to date with good practice and are continually striving to improve their level of competence. Managers promote and monitor regular training in a range of topics including those specific to each child's needs. For example, staff have benefited from training in supporting children with self-

injurious behaviour and in promoting education. Consequently, they have a good understanding of how best to support the children they look after.

Partner agencies are exceedingly complimentary about the quality of care provided and the evident commitment of the manager and staff team. They speak of how staff 'go the extra mile' and provide a 'really nurturing environment'. Communication with partner agencies is a key strength and helps to ensure that children get the best possible support from all those involved in their care and development. Professionals from a number of agencies unanimously report that the home is very good at sharing information, working in partnership and promoting the best outcomes for children. For example, one said: 'They work in tight partnership with us and are really supportive. They attend all meetings and contribute to plans. They work well with us and try to get the best education for children.'

The manager robustly challenges and positively influences those who are not meeting their obligations to children in full. She does so from a position of strength, making sure she has a very good understanding of children's rights and entitlements. This ensures that children get the services they need and make continuous good progress. For example, by challenging education providers and working in partnership with them, the home has enabled a child, who had missed significant amounts of education before moving to the home, to re-engage with education on a full-time basis. His education provider said: 'This is such a success story. They provided an incredible amount of support and we reviewed it day by day. His attendance is outstanding and he has come on leaps and bounds.'

The home ensures that children's individual needs are identified and well met. It promotes equalities, tolerance and inclusion very well through raising children's awareness and an understanding of difference. For example, children engage in fund-raising activities in aid of charities, which helps them to understand and focus on the needs of the elderly, the terminally ill and those who are bereaved. Staff helped children reflect on the recent Manchester bombing and its impact on families through group work discussions. Restorative justice and key worker sessions are used successfully to help children who are being drawn towards hate crimes and racism to change their anti-social attitudes.

The home actively encourages children to contribute to the development of the home, through ideas and practical assistance. For example, children have been involved in redesigning the garden and the upstairs bedrooms, bathrooms and landing. Some have provided practical help and have learned new skills in decorating and gardening. They have enjoyed watching the tadpoles, that they asked for, develop into frogs, in the pond they helped to build. Children are also involved in choosing rewards for achieving their individual targets, which helps to ensure that incentives are individually tailored and effective in helping children to change unacceptable behaviour. Through regular children's meetings and one-to-one sessions, children feel part of the home and say they are listened to. This promotes a strong sense of belonging and children say: 'We are like a family' and 'I feel I belong here'.

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 difference 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 who 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: SC032496

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Trafford Council, Ground Floor, Town Hall, Talbot Road, Stretford, Manchester M32 0TH

Responsible individual: Sally Rimmer

Registered manager: Alicia Cooper

Inspector

Sharon Lloyd, social care inspector

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