

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC032565
Inspector	Sharon Treadwell
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Stoke on Trent City Council
Registered person address	City of Stoke-on-Trent, Civic Centre Glebe Street STOKE-ON-TRENT ST4 1HH
Responsible individual	Susan Hammersley
Registered manager	Robert Henry Snape
Date of last inspection	10/02/2014

Inspection date	26/08/2014
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Previous inspection	good progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	none

This inspection	
Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for children and young people	outstanding
Quality of care	outstanding
Keeping children and young people safe	good
Leadership and management	good

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	good
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Young people have exceptionally positive experiences when they visit this home for respite care. They benefit from experiential learning because they are well motivated to engage in a wide range of activities. Young people have extremely positive relationships with staff at the home, which have generally developed over a long period of time. This is an exceptionally stable staff group, who are dedicated, experienced and knowledgeable, and are fully committed to ensuring that the young people are well cared for in a safe, happy and stimulating environment. A social worker comments, 'the staff here aren't transient, they stay and he has real relationships with them that have built up over time.' There is a strong focus on working co-operatively with parents, social workers, health professionals and young people's education providers to promote young people's personal growth and the progressive development of social and practical skills.

Young people are robustly encouraged and strongly supported to express their views and to make choices about how their care is delivered and about what they do whilst on respite. This is facilitated by good staff awareness of young people's varied mechanisms of communication. Excellent staff understanding of young people's, often severe, learning and physical disabilities ensures that those disabilities never limit the young people's capacity to access new and enjoyable experiences.

Management is visible and effective. Managers have a clear understanding of the strengths of the home, are well aware of areas for development, and demonstrate a real commitment to consistently improving the quality of the service.

One requirement has been identified during the inspection. The person conducting monthly visits to the home to monitor the quality of care, on behalf of the local authority provider, is insufficiently independent. Those visits do not routinely incorporate interviews with young people's parents.

Three recommendations have been made as a result of this visit. Safeguarding training for staff is not tailored to the specific needs of young people with disabilities. External doors are kept locked to promote young people's safety but records do not demonstrate consideration of this on an individual basis. Young people's written records do not provide a good reflection of the significant progress they make in terms of personal, social and emotional development.

Full report

Information about this children's home

This home is operated by a local authority. The home offers short break care for children and young people with severe learning and/or physical disabilities and is registered to accommodate up to six young people at any one time. The service is generally only open at weekends but opens occasionally during the week in school holidays.

At the time of this inspection the service provides short breaks for 21 young people, on a rotating basis, with a further three undergoing the home's assessment/induction process.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
10/02/2014	Interim	good progress
21/08/2013	Full	good
02/02/2013	Interim	good progress
09/08/2012	Full	outstanding

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

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
33 (2001)	ensure that quality assurance visits, undertaken by the registered provider, are undertaken by an independent person and not by an employee of the local authority who is employed in connection with the carrying on of social services functions relating to children. These visits must incorporate interviews	30/09/2014

	with children's parents and relatives. (Regulation 33 (2(b)) and (8(a)))	
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that safeguarding training for all staff includes training specifically on issues affecting disabled children (NMS 4.6)
- demonstrate, through appropriate risk assessment, that physical restrictions on normal movement from the home (specifically the locking of external doors) are agreed with placing authorities and parents, and that restrictions necessary for certain young people do not routinely impose similar restrictions on other young people (NMS 10.4)
- ensure that information about young people is recorded in such a way as to help young people when they access their files now or in the future, specifically to understand and appreciate the progress they make whilst at the home. (NMS 22.6)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **outstanding**

Children and young people thoroughly enjoy their short breaks at this home. They feel safe, happy and well cared for in a warm, nurturing, stimulating and well-equipped environment.

Young people are valued as individuals and are extremely well supported to communicate their wishes and feelings about their individual care. Young people have very good access to a wide range of activities both on and off site. Robust risk assessments and excellent staff understanding of young people's, often severe, learning and physical disabilities ensures that those disabilities do not limit the young people's capacity to access new and enjoyable experiences. Young people value these opportunities saying, 'thank you for taking me to the park on Sunday. I saw ducks and squirrels and a waterfall.' The outside space at the home is extremely well equipped and young people love to play on the trampoline, ride around in a go-cart and indulge in lots of water play. Young people have recently enjoyed an outing to Trentham Gardens and a trip to a fruit farm, where they picked a huge variety of fruit. It was clear, during the inspection, that the best part of that trip was eating the 'fruits of their labours.'

Young people's relationships with staff are extremely positive. This is a particularly stable and caring staff team who have excellent awareness and understanding of young people's very individual needs and functioning capacities. Young people generally require high levels of personal care and are always treated with respect and dignity. Young people are well supported to maximise their individual potential. Young people progressively acquire skills to improve their self-esteem and confidence as well as their social skills and practical abilities. Young people are set measurable and achievable targets when they visit for respite and their achievements, however small, are recognised and rewarded through lots of praise and the awarding of certificates to take home. Young people have received certificates for making new friends, sharing, good listening skills and learning to butter crumpets. Young people take great pride in showing their certificates to their parents.

Young people's health and education remain the primary responsibility of their parents and carers. However the manager and staff work very closely with young people's families, schools and health care professionals. Young people benefit from these close working relationships because they promote consistency in their care and in their lives.

Quality of care **outstanding**

Staff have an excellent capacity to make young people and their parents partners in determining the care provided. The staff display great sensitivity to the emotions of parents about accessing respite care for their children and to the emotions the young people experience when separated from their families. The ethos of 'the team around the child' is strongly promoted by the home to ensure that the best interests of young people consistently guide the care provided. One parent recently sent this comment to the home: 'We would like to express sincere gratitude for all the help, support and genuine kindness shown to our family, especially our daughter who is lucky enough to access these outstanding facilities. Truly amazing and wonderful staff. Absolutely fantastic.'

Young people are carefully introduced to having respite stays at the home to ensure that those stays are positive experiences. Staff undertake comprehensive initial assessments, including gathering relevant information from young people's parents, schools and health professionals as well as reviewing information provided by their social workers. Staff give careful consideration to groupings of young people and say, for example, that one of the groups who visit together do not like lots of noise. Another group consists of young people who were once at school together and have now gone their separate ways. Their respite weekends allow them to retain friendships.

Most of the young people who visit for respite have very limited verbal communication skills. Staff are well trained and very skilled in helping all young people to voice their opinions and make choices. This is achieved, for example, by good use of picture cards and symbols and by serving meals from a trolley so young people can choose from the various options on offer. One young person says, 'I enjoy my meals at the home very much.'

Individual placement plans are detailed and specific to each young person ensuring that their care and support needs are clearly stated and consistently met. Parents confirm that their children enjoy visiting the home and benefit from the experience. One parent notes that his son 'interacts much better now with other young people and is less isolated.'

Medication accompanies young people into the home each time they visit for respite care and is then returned home with them. There are sound procedures and practices for recording the receipt and administration of medication. Staff receive regular training to ensure that they have a full understanding of young people's presenting medical conditions and are able to manage these safely. All young people have specialist school placements and the staff ensure that there are regular exchanges of information with schools, particularly with regard to managing presenting behaviours and enhancing young people's communication skills.

Parents and social workers are fully informed of the home's complaints procedure and often act as advocates for the young people. There have been no formal complaints since the previous inspection. The home has recently introduced a

'grumble box'. This takes the form of a large post box in the art area and young people are being robustly encouraged to record any positive or negative comments about their stays so that these can be used to influence change. This has worked well. The manager responds individually to all comments made and young people are able to see that their comments make a difference. For example a recent comment about towels being hard resulted in the purchase of new, fluffy, soft towels for the bathrooms.

The home has recently identified that the section of young people's care plans, which deals with equality and diversity needs, is too general. This section of every young person's plan is currently being rewritten to better reflect their very specific support needs in this area and how these are met in the daily living situation.

This is a purpose built home, which is decorated, furnished and equipped to a very high standard. Although the outside of the building has an institutional appearance the inside has a particularly warm, homely feel. Bedrooms are personalised attractive and welcoming, and there is a wealth of sensory and play equipment to enhance young people's enjoyment of their stay. The manager is aware of the requirement, introduced into regulation this year, to regularly consider the continuing appropriateness and safety of the location of the home.

Keeping children and young people safe good

Young people feel safe and are safe when they visit this home. Robust risk assessments ensure that there is a good balance between protecting and safeguarding young people and encouraging them to develop as much capacity for independence as they can. Risk assessments demonstrate sound awareness of young people's presenting behaviours, and their physical limitations, and ensure that both care provided and activities undertaken take full account of these and prioritise their safety.

Staff have regular access to safeguarding training to ensure that they are fully aware of their reporting and recording responsibilities. Domestic staff are not routinely included in this training and, although they do not have unsupervised involvement with young people, young people may well choose to share potential safeguarding concerns with them. There are some very good examples of staff working co-operatively with associated professionals to support young people who are subject to child protection plans. However staff are not routinely recording timely checks, when these young people visit for respite, that there are no evident physical injuries. This has the potential to leave staff vulnerable to allegations that any such injuries have occurred whilst at the home. Staff are competent in recognising the signs and symptoms of abuse and are fully aware of reporting and recording any safeguarding concerns. However, the safeguarding training currently provided to staff does not include training specifically on issues affecting disabled children and this has the potential to limit the very specific knowledge and skills they need.

Young people have very robust individual behaviour management plans in place to guide staff in promoting their safety. Young people's severe learning and physical disabilities necessitate high levels of staff supervision. The environment is physically safe for young people, staff and visitors. There are regular checks on fire safety, electrical and gas equipment and the home has an up-to-date fire safety risk assessment and clear evacuation procedures. Regular fire drills ensure that young people are fully familiar with the evacuation procedure. All specialist equipment is properly serviced and maintained and staff undertake manual handling training to ensure that they are confident and competent in providing the necessary physical support to the young people they care for. External doors are secured and there is a keypad entry and exit system. Whilst young people's care plans clearly demonstrate that their safety would be compromised if they left the building alone, the home has not completed a risk assessment to specifically demonstrate the need to routinely restrict all young people's access to outside areas.

Staff recruitment is robust and promotes the safety of young people properly. There is an exceptionally stable staff team at the home with the majority of staff having been in post in excess of five years. This provides real consistency of care for young people. No young people have gone missing from the home. Sanctions are rarely utilised and restraints are rare. There has been only one restraint since the previous inspection and this was prompted by concern for the safety of a young person and staff member. Staff are observed to manage young people's presenting behaviours very calmly and appropriately so that situations of potential conflict are always quickly diffused.

Leadership and management

good

The manager of the home was appointed in September 2013. He successfully underwent a suitable person interview for registration with Ofsted in December 2013. He is appropriately qualified and has a wealth of experience in working with young people with disabilities. A social worker recently reported to the home, 'today at a review a parent commented that since the new manager arrived the quality of the service has risen. She commented that the service was more 'energised' with the provision of more activities. She also says all parents have been asked for ideas about how the service can be improved and this is greatly appreciated.' The home has recently introduced coffee mornings for parents in an attempt to increase their involvement in how the home develops.

One recommendation was made at the previous inspection for staff to complete an impact risk assessment, when new young people were being introduced to the home, to demonstrate compatibility with young people already accommodated. This is now undertaken routinely.

The expertise, commitment, dedication and real success of staff in progressively

enhancing young people's functioning capacity and social skill levels is not well reflected in young people's individual records. Many young people have been receiving respite care at this home for a long time. Initial assessments do not always reflect young people's starting points well, in terms of social and practical skill levels, and so their very positive progress is not always clearly evidenced. Records of young people's stays feature a wealth of factual information but often little reflection on the significant impact of the work staff have undertaken with young people. Young people's social workers and parents speak extremely positively about the real impact that respite care has had on these young people's lives. The new manager has begun to make changes to recording systems, for example introducing target sheets to focus work with young people on specific areas for development, so that, should young people choose to access their files, the files will better reflect young people's ongoing progress.

Staff are knowledgeable, experienced and well trained to provide a high standard of care to young people receiving respite. Good communication and visible and robust management oversight ensures that young people receive a service which fully meets their individual needs. Social workers and families say that the service is extremely flexible and responsive. There are many examples of changes being made to young people's arranged respite stay arrangements, and of additional stays being provided, where changes in family circumstances have required this. One social worker says that 'the staff here always go the extra mile.'

The manager maintains rigorous internal monitoring systems and produces reports to demonstrate this, which are shared with HMCI, Ofsted. This monitoring evidences a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home and identifies areas of proposed development. The home has a development plan in place identifying clear and achievable goals. There are clear indications of how practice is developing to meet these goals. For example, there is more structure on shifts now because there is an identified member of staff who acts as shift co-ordinator and there is more advanced planning of activities so that young people can make informed choices about what they want to do during their stay.

Regular monitoring visits are undertaken on behalf of the local authority to quality assure the service provided. Currently these visits are conducted by a senior member of local authority staff who is employed in connection with the carrying on of social services functions relating to children. Changes to the regulations, in April 2014, mean that this is no longer appropriate. The visits do not routinely incorporate interviews with young people's parents and this is especially important because young people are accessing respite care, are not generally looked after children, and parents remain the primary carers.

What inspection judgements mean

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Good	A service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements.
Adequate	A service that only meets minimum requirements.
Inadequate	A service that does not meet minimum requirements.

Information 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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the framework of inspection for children's homes.