

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	19/07/2016
Unique reference number	SC033120
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Luton Borough Council
Registered person address	Luton Borough Council Town Hall George Street Luton LU1 2BQ
Responsible individual	Joanne Fisher
Registered manager	Christine Ali
Inspector	Jane Partridge

Inspection date	19/07/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Sustained 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	Good

SC033120

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- The redecorated and refurnished home provides a comfortable, inviting and homely environment for children to enjoy on their short break stay. Children communicate that they enjoy their time spent at the home.
- Children receive consistent care from the familiar, long-standing staff team. Staff genuinely care about the children's welfare and work in their best interests.
- Staff have keenly embraced and implemented new practices, which help to build children's self-esteem and confidence.
- The professional team around the child recognise and praise staff skills and expertise in knowing each child individually and how best to meet their needs.
- Parents are particularly positive about the care that their children receive. They feel valued by the managers and staff because they are widely consulted in all areas of their child's care and service delivery.
- Children are safe and the experienced staff team ensures their continued safety by following their safeguarding practices and processes.
- The manager leads a child-focused service. She is aware of the home's strengths and has a clear vision for the future development of the service.
- Although a good judgement, shortfall in practice is recognised. Information about advocacy and specific contacts are not included within the children's guide. Also, although significant progress in building children's self-esteem is evident, some children do not experience this, as targets set are not specific enough.

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

Recommendations

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

- Ensure that the children's guide helps children to understand how they can access advocacy support and how to contact the Office of the Children's Commissioner. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 24, paragraph 4.22)
- Ensure that the children's home staff seek to identify and provide appropriately targeted and stepped opportunities for children to develop. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 31, paragraph 6.4)

Full report

Information about this children's home

This home provides short break care and accommodation for up to five children aged between 0 and 18 years. A local authority owns and operates this setting.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
15/02/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
05/10/2015	Full	Good
02/03/2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness
14/10/2014	Full	Adequate

Inspection Judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The home has recently undergone significant redecoration and refurbishment. It offers children a modern, comfortable home environment in which to enjoy their stay. As the home offers short breaks to children with additional needs, it also boasts specialised equipment, including play apparatus that children access and enjoy in the large, spacious garden. Since the last inspection, seven children have joined the home, accessing overnight short breaks. Staff very much appreciate the possible impact that accessing this new service may have on both the child and their parents. They take great care to introduce the family to the resource and work at the child's pace. Staff work closely with the external professional team throughout. Introductions include meeting the parents, parents and children visiting the home, observing the child in school and beginning tea visits, which culminate in the first overnight stay. Staff use pictorial social stories with children to aid this transition. One parent commented: 'I was one of those parents who were really concerned about leaving my child, thinking I can't leave my child with someone else. But he is safe, well cared for and I can relax knowing he is there.' Staff plan each short break session carefully, preparing activities in advance in order to meet the child's basic needs and to ensure that children have fun and enjoy their time. Children experience familiar and consistent care from the dedicated staff team, many of whom have worked in the home for over 10 years. Children benefit from the range of activities that staff offer. One parent commented: 'They take him out into the community. He has a different experience there, they do things I just can't do with him.' Using electronic communication, one child reported, 'I am happy' when asked about staying in the home. As the home offers short breaks, children's education remains the responsibility of parents and the local authority. However, the home supports children's learning and development. Since the last inspection, the home has introduced both individual development plans and a rewards programme. The rewards programme offers immediate acknowledgement of positive behaviours as children receive stickers for good behaviour. Individual development plans set out highly individualised targets for children to work on and achieve. Achievements are celebrated with certificates, which are displayed and a copy taken home. Children enjoy the experience of success, which builds their confidence and self-esteem. Staff contribute to children reaching their potential. Although there is a significant development in the way the home supports learning, some targets are too	

ambiguous, which may mean those children do not experience the successes that others do.

During this review period, the home has introduced key work sessions. These sessions offer staff the opportunity to gather children's views about their experience of the service, their likes and dislikes, and help to build relationships. Staff report that they have found the sessions really helpful, that they have got to know the child better, their likes and their levels of understanding. A particularly impressive session was the work that a member of staff undertook with a child in respect of bullying behaviour. The child understood far more than was initially anticipated. This impressive way of working has enabled a deeper understanding of children's cognitive abilities.

Children accessing the home come with a range of complex health needs. Health plans set out individual needs and provide staff with the necessary information to meet the unique packages of healthcare for each child. Staff meet children's dietary needs. They offer a range of foods to meet cultural norms and, where necessary, implement strategies to help maintain healthy food intake.

The short break service offers support to the wider family. Staff appreciate the demands that caring for a child with additional needs has on families. One social worker commented: 'The service is an absolute support to the families caring for a child with a disability.' A parent commented: 'I have two younger children so, for me, knowing my son is well cared for, I can give my undivided time to the two little ones, this is a lifeline for me now.'

Since the last inspection, five children have left the service. Three of those moves were due to the child turning 18 years of age and moving into adult services and two children moved on to long term residential care. The staff work closely with the transition team, sharing information and contributing to meetings to help ensure that the transition is as seamless as possible. Staff provided an extended stay for the two children moving on to long-term residential care. They worked with the external professional team to identify an appropriate resource and they supported the children in their move. A social worker manager commented: 'Their work with children transitioning is terrific; they have been excellent at moving children on.' The dedication and integrity of managers and staff ensure that children leaving their service do so with the utmost support to ease their onward journey.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good

Children accessing this service are safe and protected. Close working with families and external professionals ensures that all relevant information is available to meet children's needs effectively and safely. Risk assessments identify particular harmful or hazardous situations for children and offer staff strategies to keep children safe. One particular assessment, the gender preference for personal care, ensures that children receive dignified and respectful care.

The skilled childcare staff team are knowledgeable in matters relating to abuse and neglect and remain observant to possible areas of concern. Staff refer child protection concerns appropriately to the statutory agencies. When staff have concerns about the standards of care within the child's family home, information is shared with professionals and parents in a bid to support change. The home has an accredited worker who works directly with families to establish need and to support change.

Children who use this service are highly vulnerable. Robust risk assessments and appropriate levels of staff to child ratio mean that no children have gone missing from the home. There are procedures in place to support staff to respond to an incident of missing, should it occur.

Children who use this service can display some challenging and complex behaviours. Staff successfully use distraction and de-escalation techniques to help children manage their behaviours. Should a behaviour escalate with a need for physical intervention, staff utilise the lowest levels of intervention, such as a diversionary move, where they guide the child away from one activity or to an alternative activity. Children experience a caring environment, where they and others around them are kept safe. Staff are currently engaged in deprivation of liberty assessments for two children accessing this short break service. This will ensure the Court of Protection considers their mental capacity against appropriate safeguarding strategies.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good
The appropriately qualified manager has significant experience of working within children's social care and has managed the home for almost five years. She leads a stable and committed team and children's well-being remains central to practice. One parent commented: 'They love and care for the children in their care, you really feel that.' The staff team receive regular competent supervision. This provides opportunity to discuss children's needs, staff performance and their continued professional	

development. This is further explored through the annual appraisal system, through which a review of staff performance and professional development ensures that the home continues to deliver the services as set out in its statement of purpose.

The vast majority of staff have the required qualifications for working with children and young people. Just one member of staff is working towards completion. Staff receive training in core subjects and specific training, such as in autism and haemophilia, to meet the needs of the children in placement. Plans are in place to extend staff's understanding of wider childcare theories, such as attachment and resilience, through already planned training sessions. The manager has introduced a restorative practice model to assist staff to reflect on and consider their working styles. The aim being to work with children with additional needs in an enabling style, rather than working for them or to them.

The manager has good monitoring systems that help her to review practice to ensure compliance with regulations and to continue the service development. The home's independent visitor competently reviews and assesses the home's arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The manager welcomes this monitoring and utilises the findings to add to the continuing improvements in service delivery. She has a good overview of the strengths of the home and of the areas for improvement. This is set out clearly in the home's development plan.

Managers and staff have excellent working relationships with the wider professional team. A rarely changing staff team has enabled long-standing relationships to be maintained between the home's staff and the team around the child. One social work manager reported: 'They are excellent at co-working; they very much work as part of the multi-disciplinary team.' Schools echo this experience. One headteacher commented: 'We have frequent contact with a good flow of information between us.' The team work closely with all professionals to ensure that children receive continuity in their care, have their individual needs met and make progress in their unique areas of personal development.

The managers and staff work very closely with parents. Frequent contact ensures an information flow, where staff act on the most current information in meeting children's needs. Parents receive direct feedback from staff in respect of their child's stay. One parent commented: 'My child has limited communication so I need their feedback.' Parent's views are regularly sought in respect of service delivery. One parent commented: 'They invited us all in to discuss budget changes and possible impacts of service. They asked our opinions and how best they could meet our needs. We weren't just told how it was going to be, they asked what we needed.' Many children from a south Asian background access this service. The team includes bi-lingual staff who are able to communicate fluently with parents, ensuring that all information is accessible and shared. The quarterly newsletter sent out to parents is also available in another language. Parents feel valued by

managers and staff, that their opinions count and that a strong, trusting, working relationship prevails.

At the last inspection, three recommendations were made to help improve the quality and standards of care. Two of these related to the home updating their missing from care policy and ensuring that systems are in place for an independent return interview should a child actually go missing. These recommendations are met. The policy is updated and a charitable advocacy company has been employed to undertake return interviews. The third recommendation is also met, as systems are in place to ensure that appropriate scrutiny is given to all incidents of control, discipline and restraint.

The manager has produced an up-to-date statement of purpose. While the children's guide is an engaging pictorial document, it does not help children to understand how they can access advocacy support and how to contact the office of the Children's Commissioner.

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 children looked after 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 that 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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