

Children's homes inspection - Full

Inspection date	11/08/2016
Unique reference number	SC034849
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered Provider	Cheshire West and Chester Council
Registered Provider address	58 Nicholas Street Chester CH1 2NP

Responsible individual	Sophie Wales
Registered manager	Julie Harwood
Inspector	Sharon Lloyd

Inspection date	11/08/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Improved effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Requires improvement
The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.	
how well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
the impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

SC034849

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is requires improvement because:

- Some aspects of leadership are not strong.
- The home is not currently compliant with its conditions of registration and is looking after a child beyond its remit and beyond what is outlined in the statement of purpose. Although the child is making good progress, he is not being cared for by a small team of carers and this means that his emotional needs are not being fully promoted.
- Partnership working is not strong, because despite frequent consultation between the home and social workers for a child, the home has not actively challenged the placing authority to improve its care planning and address the child's needs in good time. Other children receive short breaks for more than 75 days a year and the home does little to challenge placing social workers to ensure that children receive a care service appropriate to their legal status.
- Some shortfalls identified at the last inspection have not been fully addressed. This undermines the home's capacity to improve. For example, monitoring of the home's records is not yet good, so children's files are not fully up to date and do not evidence the good work that goes on in the home. The location assessment does not give a good and informative view about the suitability of the location.
- Consultation with children and parents is not yet strong. Their views about the quality of care are not canvassed to inform the home's six-monthly review. However, they have been consulted about how to spend monies raised at a recent open day.
- The home does little to remind children about how to make a complaint or raise a concern, should they wish to. Information is not routinely provided to each child's parents following every short break, nor are parents well informed about changes in the home, including staff changes.
- Some shortfalls in safeguarding practice mean that children's privacy is sometimes compromised and risk assessments are not fully up to date and shared with parents.
- Staff files for agency and relief workers do not contain all the information required by legislation. Consequently, the manager does not have access to their references. This does not ensure that she has good-quality information

demonstrating the suitability of these people to work in this setting.

The children's home strengths

- The home has significantly improved since the last full inspection in December 2015 and improvements noted at the interim inspection in March 2016 have been sustained. It provides a child-focused service that all service users recognise as good or excellent.
- Children are happy and relaxed in the home. They feel well cared for and safe. Children, including wheelchair users, can move freely about the home and garden.
- External monitoring on behalf of the provider is good and there is improving scrutiny and governance. This ensures that senior leaders and managers have a good overview of the service. Actions for improvement are identified and followed up.
- Children visit alongside others with whom, for the most part, they are well matched, so they enjoy their short breaks. The home is well equipped to meet children's individual needs. It provides enjoyable and relaxing experiences for children with varying levels of disability. Children benefit from a range of activities and outings, planned to take account of their wishes, interests and needs.
- Each shift is staffed to meet the needs of the specific group of children visiting, which enables children to get the most from their short break. Staff are appropriately qualified, trained and supervised. They are caring, patient and kind.

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/s 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(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
Engaging with the wider system to ensure children's needs are met 5. In meeting the quality standards in relation to challenging the local authority to improve its care planning, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff— (c) if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority's or a relevant person's performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's relevant plans.	30/09/2016
Subject to paragraph (6), the registered person must ensure that the home is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. (6) Nothing in paragraph (5) requires or authorises the registered person to contravene or not comply with— (b) any conditions in relation to the registration of the registered person under Part 2 of the Care Standards Act 2000. (Regulation 16, (5) and (6))	30/09/2016
In relation to the employment of agency and relief staff, the registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. (2) The registered person may only— (a) employ an individual to work at the children's home; or (b) if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3).	16/10/2016

(3) The requirements are that— (a) the individual is of integrity and good character; (b) the individual has the appropriate experience, qualification and skills for the work that the individual is to perform; (c) the individual is mentally and physically fit for the purposes of the work that the individual is to perform; and (d) full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1)(2))	
--	--

Recommendations

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

- Continually and actively assess the risks to each child and the arrangement in place to protect them. Where there are safeguarding concerns for a child, ensure that their short break plan, agreed between the home, the parent and the placing authority, includes details of the steps the home will take to manage any assessed risks on a day-to-day basis. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 42, paragraph 9.5)
- Ensure that systems allow for all serious events to be notified, within 24 hours, to the appropriate people. The system should cover what action is needed to be undertaken to ensure appropriate notification to Ofsted in the absence of the registered manager (The Guide, page 63, paragraph 14.10, 14.13)
- Ensure that children's case records are kept up to date and that information is shared, as appropriate with parents (The Guide, page 62, paragraph 14.3 and 14.5)
- Seek the views and involvement of parents/carers and social workers frequently and use them to inform the development of the service (The Guide, page 22, paragraph 4.8)
- Encourage children to share any concerns about their care or other matters. Remind children of the complaints process as necessary (The Guide, page 22, paragraph 4.13)
- Ensure that each child is provided with support to communicate their views, wishes and feelings and participate as fully as possible in all aspects of their care planning and daily care. Where appropriate, use communication aids and equipment to encourage children to express themselves (The Guide, page 22, paragraphs 4.6)
- Ensure that each child is provided with support to communicate their views, wishes and feelings and participate as fully as possible in all aspects of their care planning and daily care. Where appropriate, use communication aids and equipment to encourage children to express themselves (The Guide, page 22, paragraphs 4.6)

- Use the guidance provided in the Department for Education's framework in 2014 for reviewing the appropriateness and suitability of the location of the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 64, paragraph 15.1)

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home is run by a local authority and is registered to provide short-break care for up to six children with complex needs, including learning disabilities, physical disabilities and sensory impairment.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
17/03/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
02/12/2015	Full	Requires improvement
24/03/2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness
30/09/2014	Full	Adequate

Inspection Judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Requires improvement
The home provides mostly good, personalised care for 40 children with disabilities, who receive short breaks. One child who is currently living at the home has made exceptional progress since moving in. He is benefiting enormously from the calm and consistent approach of staff and effective behaviour management strategies that take account of his anxieties. However, he is cared for by up to 15 different staff. This does not promote his emotional well-being in the longer term. The home encourages children to make choices about their day-to-day care, and staff are sensitive to children's needs and wishes, including those children who are pre-verbal. Alternative communication methods are used with some children, but staff do not always promote the development and improvement of communication skills, not wishing to put children under pressure. Some children are not actively encouraged to express themselves, even though, with the aid of particular communication tools, they do so at school. Consequently, communication with some children is more limited than it needs to be and this restricts children's ability to make their views known. Although the home is increasingly holding monthly consultation meetings with children, only a few children are involved in those meetings. More needs to be done to enable as many children as possible to give their views about the quality of care delivered in the home and, in particular, to enable those who can to contribute to their own care plans. Children attend the centre from a wide geographical area, across the whole of the local authority. Some children travel for up to an hour for their short breaks. The local authority provides transport for many children. This assists families with competing commitments and enables children who live far away to benefit from the service. Careful attention is given to matching children so that, as far as possible, they have short breaks alongside others whom they know and get on well with. This helps them to enjoy their short breaks. Children are well cared for and happy when they stay at the home. They benefit from a positive rapport with staff, who are warm, attentive and patient. One child said: 'It's nice. It's really, really calm and good for me to be here on my own and looked after like this. I know a lot of people who come here and I can tell they have fun here. We all like it.'	

Staff plan activities to suit children's individual needs and interests. For example, they arrange outings to the seaside, shops, activity farms and parks, which children enjoy. One child explained: 'I help with jobs here. I do lunch and wipe the tables. I do my best. And I get lie-ins here, so that's nice.' An open day earlier in the summer provided children, their families and neighbours with an opportunity to mix and enjoy the facilities together. It was a successful fundraising event and the home is currently consulting with children and families about how to spend money raised.

Children enjoy visits to the home where they have access to a variety of indoor and outdoor play equipment, including a specialist swing, climbing frame, sensory garden, bike track and electronic devices such as tablets and television. Specialist beds and hoists are provided to meet the needs of children with complex disabilities. One child explained: 'I like it because the beds have rails to stop me falling out. I've never fallen out of bed here. I get hoisted into bed and in the bathroom and I get good support in the bathroom.'

Children can move freely about the home, with easy access to the sensory room and large garden. A wheelchair user explained: 'All the doors are open, except to the bedrooms, so I can move around OK. I can get out of my chair if I want. I can climb onto the sofas and into bed myself as staff lower the bed for me. They help me whenever I need help.' Some children enjoy arts and craftwork or baking, while others like dancing and listening to music. All benefit from the relaxed and unhurried atmosphere.

Parents appreciate how the home supports children to develop their independence and social skills. For example, one explained: 'They have helped with a lot of things. For example, he was biting his sleeve a lot. We worked together on it and it worked – he stopped. They've also got him eating more foods.'

New admissions to the home are sensitively managed. Children are made welcome for tea visits with and without their parents. They only stay overnight when they are ready to do so, and the home has received detailed information about them from parents. This enables staff to respond effectively to them. It helps children to build up trust in the staff team and get to know the routines of the home before their first short break. A child explained: 'When I first came here, the whole experience, being away from home, was scary. It really upset me. But it didn't take long to get used to it. I was OK by the second night. I do trust the staff here.'

Only one young person has moved on to adult services since the last inspection. Although the home is able to provide good assistance and advice to families for children moving on, in this case it was not required. However, staff do make a fuss of each young person as they leave the service, marking their final visit with a celebration and gifts. This helps young people to feel cared for and contributes to them having a positive experience of transition.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
Person-centred risk assessments are drawn up to assist staff in managing risks for individual children. The frequency with which these documents are reviewed is unsatisfactory, and some are significantly out of date. The home has made some progress in addressing this, which was identified as a concern at the last inspection, but the pace of implementing reviews remains slow and approximately 50% of children have not had their risk assessments reviewed in more than six months. For example, in one case, although staff routinely take action to mitigate against the risk of a child falling out of bed, this is not recorded in the child's risk assessment. While the child has, to date, been fully protected, there is a risk that agency or relief staff may not know how to protect the child because the risks and actions necessary to mitigate against them are not clearly set out. This does not ensure the best possible protection for some children. Viewing panes in bedroom doors assist night staff in monitoring children through the night without disturbing them. For some but not all children, the need for such monitoring has been risk-assessed. Some panes have curtains which give children an illusion of privacy but as they are see-through, staff and children in the corridor can see into the bedroom, while the child in the bedroom cannot see out. This means that some children's privacy is compromised without their knowledge. Complaints from children are rare and no children have complained about the home since the last full inspection. The home does not do enough to encourage children to have their say or to raise concerns. For example, there are no systems to routinely solicit children's views about their stay after each short break. There are no easily recognised and readily available tools for children with communication disabilities to make their views known. The home uses regular agency staff and relief members of staff who are employed by the local authority. It does not have staff files for this group of staff. Their personnel records, which are held by the local authority, are not always kept in accordance with regulations. For example, the registered person does not have access to references for agency staff. This does not ensure that the registered person is fully informed about the skills and competence of all staff who work at the home. Children feel safe and well cared for in the home. Since the last inspection, the home has reviewed the way it uses gates and doors within the home.	

Consequently, children's liberty is restricted only when necessary for their immediate protection. Records relating to such incidents are well documented and demonstrate that restraint is used appropriately. There have been no physical interventions since the last inspection and staff manage children's behaviour effectively by responding calmly and positively to children's anxieties.

Children who self-harm are protected through diversion and a nurturing, calm environment. As a result, children reduce their self-injurious behaviour over time. There have been no incidents of children going missing. The garden and external exits to the car park are kept locked with the full agreement of children's parents and social workers. Children say that this keeps them safe and some recognise that they would not be safe in the community without staff. Children access the community regularly, and are well supported by staff. Staffing levels are increased to meet the safety needs of individual children. For example, when a child's anxiety levels are known to rise in the adapted minibs or in the community, additional support is given by higher staffing ratios so that the child can safely enjoy outings and positive experiences.

Most of the staff team have completed fire safety training since the last inspection. They know how to respond in the event of an emergency so they can evacuate the home safely and calmly, protecting all the children present. Staff report any injuries they note on a child's body. This helps managers to maintain an overview of safe care practices and individual children's safety. All written information is shared with relevant key personnel, including social workers. This ensures that those with responsibility for children's placements are kept fully informed of issues affecting their well-being.

Allegations against staff are appropriately shared with the designated officer for safeguarding in the local authority; however, notifications to the regulator are not always completed as swiftly as possible. Delays in notifying Ofsted of serious events inhibit the swift assessment of action taken to safeguard children.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement
The home is led by a suitably experienced and qualified registered manager. She has over 14 years' experience of managing children's homes and has been in post since February 2014, when she transferred to this service from another short break children's home. While the quality of management is good in many areas, some aspects of leadership are not strong. Some shortfalls identified at the last inspection have not been fully addressed, which undermines the home's capacity to improve.	

The home is not always run in accordance with its statement of purpose. A small number of children have short breaks in excess of 75 days a year and one child is currently living at the home. These children are not accommodated in accordance with the home's conditions of registration. They are receiving a service from the home which goes beyond short break arrangements. While these children benefit from the care that the home is providing, they are not fully protected because their legal status does not meet their identified needs.

Looking after a child for longer than 17 days means that the home is in breach of its registration conditions. The home has not notified Ofsted of its actions and has not applied for a variation to its conditions. This prevents Ofsted from having good oversight of the management of the home.

Partnership working is not yet strong. Managers have been in frequent consultation with the parents and social workers responsible for those children who are receiving a service not covered by legislation relating to short breaks. However, they have provided insufficient challenge to ensure that good and timely care planning takes place. This means that the home has been complicit in delays for at least one child in accessing services or support that meet the child's needs.

Shortfalls in the oversight and monitoring of records mean that some children's records are not up to date and not all information relating to a child is kept on their personal file. For example, where risk assessments and care management plans have been updated, this has not always been in discussion with parents; and records demonstrate that new plans have been implemented without being shared with parents and/or social workers. Records of injuries to a child are not always held on the child's file because there is significant delay in managers monitoring and signing off these records. This means that management scrutiny of safeguarding matters is not always strong and timely.

Daily recording of children's experiences is improving, but does not always include a reflection on the impact of the experience on the child. Children's records do not show clear and measureable targets, and so do not demonstrate how well staff support individual children in key aspects of their care and development. Written information about children cannot be relied upon to be fully up to date and known to parents and it does not reflect much of the good work that staff do. This impedes the manager from effectively assessing and demonstrating how well the home is promoting children's happiness and development.

Staff meet regularly as a team and have individual supervision with their line manager most months. This is usually carried out in accordance with the home's supervision policy. Supervisors have received additional training recently to help them improve the quality and impact of supervision. Staff receive ongoing training that helps to equip them with the skills they need, including the specialist skills required to care for individual children. In recognition that more needs to be done to improve communication with children, further training in using alternative

communication methods has been scheduled for later this year. Communication with parents has improved since the introduction of pre-visit telephone consultations that routinely take place 48 hours before each child's visit. Through such regular conversations with parents, the home ensures that it has up-to-date health and medication information, which helps to ensure that staff respond appropriately to children's health needs. It also provides parents with the opportunity to report any changes or provide information that would be helpful to staff.

Despite this, one parent, who lives some distance from the home and therefore rarely visits, commented: 'The service is great. Our child loves going but we don't know much about what's going on. It would be good if they had a newsletter showing changes, including changes in staffing. Sometimes we get an email after the visit which is really good and tells us what she's done. We'd like them more often.'

Since the last inspection, the manager has produced a six-monthly report on the operation of the home and the children's progress. While it is a concise and informative report, it lacks crucial information because children's views have not been ascertained to inform the monitoring and development of the home. Improvements to the location assessment are not sufficient to ensure that the document provides a good overview of the suitability of the location.

Improved monitoring by independent persons is evident in the monthly reports of visits to the home. Reports show a good focus on driving up the quality of care. Actions raised are routinely followed up and reports show good scrutiny and governance by senior leaders and managers.

The quality of handovers between shifts has improved. Staff discuss children in greater depth so that staff coming on shift are well informed and children's short stays are better planned. This ensures that each child's needs are carefully considered and that efforts are made to ensure that the child enjoys their time at the home through the provision of appropriate care and activities.

Parents and social workers are more than satisfied with the way that the home looks after children and they report that children are settled and happy there. One parent summed up the views of many, saying: 'It's an excellent place' and a professional who is involved with several children who have short breaks at the home said: 'I have no concerns about the way they look after children; they are more than accommodating to family and professionals.'

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*.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted*, which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, workbased learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It inspects services for looked after children and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2016