

Children's homes - interim inspection

Inspection date	17/03/2016
Unique reference number	SC034849
Type of inspection	Interim
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Cheshire west and Chester council
Registered person address	58 Nicholas Street Chester CH1 2NP

Responsible individual	Sophie Wales
Registered manager	Julie Harwood
Inspector	Sharon Lloyd

Inspection date	17/03/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Requires improvement
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection This home was judged Requires improvement at the full inspection. At this interim inspection Ofsted judge that it has improved effectiveness. The home has made good progress in addressing the many shortfalls in practice identified at the last inspection. All requirements have been fully met and the home has developed an action plan to address the recommendations for good practice. It has a clear plan for improvement, which staff know and welcome. The home has engaged appropriately in transition planning which supported a young adult to make a smooth and successful transition to adult services. No children have been admitted but one child has begun visiting the home, in preparation for his first overnight stay. The home has taken prompt action to ensure all the facilities and equipment the child needs are in place before he stays at the home. Additionally, a key worker has been appointed and is gathering information about the child's needs. The home is effectively working in partnership with family and the child's school, social worker and health professionals. This ensures that the staff team is well prepared to look after the child and properly meet his needs. Independent visitor reports drive improvement. The visitor consults with children, families and staff before forming a view on the quality of the service. Reports show good reflection on the quality of care provided, the operation of the service, children's experiences and safety. There has been some delay in addressing actions raised in these reports, due to staff shortages but in recent months, the home has rapidly improved so that shortfalls identified by the visitor have now been addressed. The manager knows the strengths and weaknesses of the home well. She evaluates the quality of care given through improved monitoring systems which now include consultation with children and their families. This enables the manager to have a better overview of children's experiences and progress and to monitor the effectiveness of interventions. Consequently she has a clearer understanding of each child's progress, which she reviews with staff in one-to-one supervision and in staff team meetings. The manager is in the process of developing her monitoring tools further, learning from management colleagues in other settings.	

The home struggled to meet the rota during December and January because of a high rate of staff sickness. With the aid of a regular relief staff member, the permanent staff team covered gaps in the rota, postponing their holidays and working extra hours to keep the service running effectively. Their commitment and dedication to the children is noteworthy and meant that there was only one day when the home could not provide short breaks for children. In addition, the staff team has supported other homes through crisis periods in recent months. Consequently, staff are tired. Despite this, they remain engaged in their work and enthusiastic about planned changes aimed at improving the service.

Recruitment for more staff is on-going but responses to recruitment campaigns have so far been poor. Managers provide hands-on support during busy times so that children continue to be adequately supervised and supported when staff are preparing the evening meal or attending to medication.

Most of the staff team are now back in post. There has been a marked improvement to the arrangements for staff supervision and in recent months, with the implementation of improved systems, almost all staff have received one-to-one supervision. This enables the manager to have better oversight of their work and to provide guidance, advice and support, as needed.

The manager is driving forward planned changes to rotas and staff are excited about and looking forward to working in teams around children. The changes are planned to take effect from 01 April 2016 and should result in more consistent care for children from smaller teams of staff whom children get to know well. In addition, training days have been scheduled for the full staff team to learn about new ways of working with a greater emphasis on developing nurturing parenting skills.

The provision of suitable facilities has improved. Broken toys have been replaced and the sensory room is once again operational. Children with reduced sight have better access to the large screen television. The computer has been fixed and Wi-Fi has been set up with appropriate safeguards so that children can use the internet. This means children have a wider range of activities to choose from within the home. Staff report children have enjoyed making pizzas and helping with the laundry. There are many photographs around the home showing children having fun, engaged in various enjoyable activities that promote their independence.

The home has taken steps to improve communication with children and listen to their views. There is good evidence of how children's views are informing the development of the service. For example, the home has purchased additional iPads at children's request and are consulting children about which room they wish to sleep in and how they want to spend their time. The home has also acquired new computer software that enables children to use the computer more easily and enjoyably.

Partnership working promotes good outcomes for children and their families. For example, the home liaises effectively with health professionals and schools to ensure staff have a good understanding of children's individual needs and know the best way to respond to them. The home responds to family crises, providing additional short breaks which support families to stay together through difficult times.

The home's statement of purpose reflects how the home intends to meet the Quality Standards and an up to date copy has been supplied to Ofsted. This enables the regulator to maintain a good overview of the home. The children's guide has been reviewed with the use of a recognised alternative communication system. This makes it easier for the majority of children who use the service to understand. The home has not yet fully developed the location assessment but has gathered further information to inform a better assessment of the suitability of the location.

Safeguarding practice has improved so that children's safety is better prioritised in the home. For example, viewing panes in bedroom doors are used more selectively and only where necessary to ensure children's safety. This provides children with greater privacy, which they welcome. Doors are no longer routinely used to restrict children's access to areas of the home unless this is agreed in their risk assessment and is necessary to protect them. This enables children to have greater access to their bedrooms and the amenities in the home.

Fire safety procedures are very much improved. With the exception of a child who has not stayed at the home since the last inspection, all children have engaged in at least one fire drill and their participation is effectively monitored. Individual fire safety protocols give clear instructions about how to help the child evacuate the premises safely and with the least likelihood of causing distress. Systems are in place for all newly admitted children to participate in a drill as part of their induction to the home. Children have responded remarkably well to the fire drills, including early morning drills, when children are still in bed. The home's records do not indicate that all staff have renewed their fire safety training in recent years so the home cannot demonstrate that all staff know how to respond effectively in the event of a fire.

Children's confidential information is safely stored. The manager has redesigned children's files so that they provide a good and easily accessed account of children's placement plans, risk assessments, experiences and progress. To date, only two files have been updated and the manager acknowledges that some shortfalls in recording continue. The manager recognises the pace of improvement needs to quicken up and that most children's records do not yet provide a clear and up to date account of their progress. Most children's individual risk assessments have not been updated in line with the home's policy and remain out of date. Some do not identify how the home will combat known risks to children's safety.

Information about this children's home

- The home is run by the local authority to provide short break care and accommodation for up to six children with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and / or sensory impairment.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
02/12/2015	CH - Full	Requires improvement
24/03/2015	CH - Interim	improved effectiveness
30/09/2014	CH - Full	Adequate
25/03/2014	CH - Interim	Good Progress

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):

- 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 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 (The Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the Quality Standards, page 42, paragraph 9.5)
- ensure that children's case records are kept up to date and signed and dated by the author of each entry and that staff understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Ensure also that case records include the relevant plans and information outlined in Schedule 3 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2015 (The Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the Quality Standards, page 62, paragraph 14.3 and 13.4)
- ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills to recognise and be alert to any signs that might indicate a child is at risk of harm. In particular, ensure that skills in protecting children from the risk of fire are gained, refreshed and recorded in the home's workforce plan. (The Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the Quality Standards, page 43, paragraph 9.12)
- 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. (The Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the Quality Standards, page 64, paragraph 15.1)

What the inspection judgements mean

At the interim inspection we make a judgement on whether the home has improved in effectiveness, sustained effectiveness, or declined in effectiveness since the previous full inspection. This is in line with the *Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection*.

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 focused on the effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection.

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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