

Children's homes – Interim inspection

Inspection date	23/02/2017
Unique reference number	SC034849
Type of inspection	Interim
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered manager	Julie Harwood
Inspector	Sharon Lloyd

Inspection date	23/02/2017
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 required improvement at the full inspection. At this interim inspection, Ofsted judges that it has improved effectiveness. The home has made good, all-round progress in meeting the requirements and recommendations raised at the last inspection. Most of these have been met or partially met. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the areas for development. The senior leadership team has developed more effective oversight of the home's progress in addressing shortfalls in the service, and is supporting the registered manager well. This is driving continuous improvement. For example, improvements in the frequency and quality of risk assessments, children's records and consultation with children, have resulted in a steady increase in the quality of care. Shortly after the full inspection, the home appropriately applied for a variation to the conditions of registration so that it could continue to provide a service for a child who was living at the home. The manager is assertive in advocating for the child and worked more effectively in collaboration with senior managers and those responsible for care planning. Consequently, the local authority quickly identified a suitable long-term placement. The child was discharged after a brief but well-planned, child-centred and successful transition. No other children have been discharged from the home since the last inspection. The home has received one new referral. Introductions have been carefully managed, which has helped the child to adjust to the service in their own time. A trusted professional from a partner agency has been able to provide the anxious parent with positive feedback after a planned visit to the child during an introductory stay at the home. This has reassured the parent and boosted her confidence in the service. The home obtains detailed information about children's health, welfare, development and routines before they are admitted to the service. This ensures that staff are well informed and able to plan a short break that meets the child's individual needs and interests. Children continue to enjoy their short breaks. Staff are responsive to their needs. They promote positive interaction and provide many opportunities for fun. There are a great many photographs on display that show children happily engaged in a wide variety of activities both in the home and on trips with staff. The environment	

in the home is adjusted to meet the needs of children staying. For example, equipment is set out or removed in accordance with children's preferences. Staff take account of their particular health needs, including physical disabilities and autism. This helps to ensure that children enjoy a relaxing short break.

The manager has a good understanding of her responsibilities in relation to meeting the legislative requirements and the statement of purpose. As a result, she is advocating powerfully for children, providing better challenge to professionals when children's needs are not being well met. For example, she has made a child-centred decision to reduce the service to a child who is also receiving respite services at another establishment, in line with a decision made at the child's review. She has appropriately challenged other professionals to adhere to agreements made in the child's best interests.

The multi-agency approach to partnership working is being continually strengthened. The home communicates well with parents, teachers, social workers and health professionals, including specialists in children's mental and emotional health. This helps to ensure that children get a good service, both at the home and from other professionals. The manager contributes to the development of the local authority residential services and services for children with disabilities through regular meetings with relevant professionals. Visits from the police and fire service ensure that the home has access to safeguarding professionals, and children have access to support from specialist workers in the same way as children who live in children's homes.

The statement of purpose has been updated to include greater clarity about the aims and ethos of the home. It clearly describes how the home intends to meet the needs of the children who use the service. Copies of the updated document are provided to Ofsted when amendments are made. For example, the statement of purpose was updated to show that the home was providing accommodation for a child looked after by the local authority. This section was removed from the document when the home returned to its usual function. This enables Ofsted to maintain an overview of the home's capacity to meet its purpose and function. The location assessment has been further developed, and a copy has been supplied to Ofsted. It shows how the home keeps children safe in the locality.

Case records give a clearer indication of each child's needs and progress. These are held on computer, and the home has introduced a system for routinely sharing summaries of a child's short break with parents at the end of each stay. Parents find these reports helpful in assisting them to ensure that their child's health and other needs are continually assessed and met. For example, a parent explained: 'They are brilliant at keeping information. He is going through a lot of assessments at the moment, as they are looking at how to medicate him. Their records are brilliant at describing him, so I can share them with the doctors because they describe him better than I can. They've got him off to a tee. They must observe him really well because they describe the little things he does and they understand his behaviour. I'm constantly asking for advice, and they are very helpful.'

The home has improved the way it communicates with parents, all of whom are extremely positive about the service. Staff seek their views on the delivery and quality of care, and obtain up-to-date information about children's health and welfare, by means of a courtesy call before each short break. This gives parents confidence that their child's needs are central to planning and ensures that staff are fully informed about children's current needs and health status.

The local authority is reviewing the way it delivers short breaks to children at the home. A consultation process has been led by senior managers and is informing decision-making. Some parents and staff expressed anxiety about the proposed changes and some said that they had not been consulted. The manager has encouraged those parents to share their views with the appropriate people. She is collating the views of the staff team and is contributing to the proposed development of the service, helping to ensure that any changes meet children's and families' needs effectively and positively.

Systems for ascertaining parents' views, and those of children and professionals, are not yet fully developed. A recommendation for the manager to consider the service-user in her six-monthly review of the quality of care has not been met. To address this, the manager has recently begun to make ad-hoc phone calls to parents. She aims to build a better relationship with them, promote a sense of trust and ascertain their views about the quality of the service. This is a new system, not yet embedded.

Improved consultation with children is giving some children the opportunity to influence the development and operation of the home. For example, many children are assisted to select how they wish to spend their time at the home, and some have been involved in decision-making about new equipment. They have chosen to have a new trampoline as part of the planned development of the garden. Staff have explained the complaints process to every child and have put information about how to complain on the noticeboard. Deeper consultation is hampered because the home is not routinely using signing or other communication methods with children who are non-verbal.

Some small progress has been made in using symbols, pictures and signing to communicate with children. For example, symbols showing emotions have been placed on a noticeboard in the lounge. Staff encourage children to use these to show how they are feeling. The pace of developing staff skills and appropriate communication aids in this important aspect of the service now needs to quicken so that more children are able to enjoy meaningful conversations with staff and each other. The manager acknowledges that strengthening the staff team's ability to communicate with children is a key priority for the home. She has a raft of plans that she intends to implement and is enthusiastic about progressing this work.

A requirement to improve the quality of staff recruitment files has been partially met. The home has carried out a full audit of staff files and found shortfalls in files

of long-serving staff who have moved between local authority jobs. Weaknesses relate to a lack of written evidence of decision-making about their suitability for their current role. In collaboration with the human resources department, the manager is addressing these shortfalls so that more robust evidence of staff members' suitability for their role is collated. This is work in progress and will be followed up at the next inspection.

Children's individual risk assessments have been brought up to date and are subject to scrutiny and regular review. They are focused on risks to individual children and provide clear guidance for staff in how to keep each child safe. This helps the manager and staff to identify and meet children's safety needs. The manager acknowledges that more needs to be done to ensure that rigorous and robust risk assessments are in place for each child. This is work in progress.

Curtains have been fitted to the viewing panes in children's bedroom doors, which better protects children's dignity and privacy. Staff report that some children are very pleased with this improvement and that the use of the curtain is dependent upon each child's individual needs. For example, staff report that the curtain is not used for children who need close supervision at night. There is no evidence of how this is risk assessed for each child in the children's relevant documentation.

There have been no serious incidents or safeguarding concerns since the last inspection and, therefore, no notifications to Ofsted. The arrangements for the day-to-day management of the home in the absence of the registered manager are not yet strong. Managers from other homes are relied upon to provide on-call management but this does not ensure good day-to-day management, leadership and decision-making during the manager's annual leave.

There have been a few instances where children have been denied access to part of the home as a means of behaviour management. This has been implemented to meet the needs of one child but has had a negative impact on other children, denying them access to the small lounge for several hours. Staffing levels on these occasions have not been sufficient to ensure that the needs of all the children can be met.

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 who may have learning disabilities, physical disabilities and/or sensory impairment.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/08/2016	Full	Requires improvement
17/03/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
02/12/2015	Full	Requires improvement
24/03/2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness

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 recommendations:

- 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 ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 22, paragraph 4.6)
- Seek the views and involvement of parents/carers and social workers frequently, and use them to inform the development of the service. In particular, include their views in the six-monthly review of the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 22, paragraph 4.8)
- Continually and actively assess the risks to each child and the arrangements in place to protect them. Where there are safeguarding concerns for a child, ensure that their placement 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 the registered person maintains good employment practice. Ensure that recruitment of staff safeguards children and minimises potential risks to them. In particular, continue to review staff files and ensure that they contain information that demonstrates the suitability of that person to work with children in the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)
- Ensure that children can access all shared areas of the home unless there are specific reasons why this would not meet a child's needs. Limits on privacy and access may only be put in place to safeguard each child in the home (regulation 21 (c)(i)). Any decision to limit a child's access to any area of the home and any modifications to the environment of the home must only be made where this is intended to safeguard a child's welfare and must be informed by a rigorous assessment of that individual child's needs. To ensure that children are not denied access to parts of the home because of the needs of other children, plan staffing levels so that they meet the needs of the children and can respond flexibly to unexpected events or opportunities. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.10; page 54, paragraph 10.15)
- Ensure that clear arrangements are in place to maintain effective management when the manager is absent, off duty or on leave. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.20)

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 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 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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