

SC035380

Registered provider: Stockton on Tees Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The children's home provides short-break care and accommodation for up to six children or young people who have physical and/or learning disabilities. It is operated by the local authority.

Inspection dates: 1 to 2 August 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 17 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: improved effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is outstanding because:

- The manager is a charismatic and effective leader.
- The team makes positive relationships with children, young people and their families quickly.
- Progress of children and young people is recognised and celebrated, regardless of how small.
- Children and young people are consulted and make their views known. These are then acted on quickly when appropriate.
- Care plans and risk assessments provide a clear journey through the service.
- Staff advocate well on behalf of children, young people and their families.
- Communication with other services involved in the lives of the children and young people is effective.

The children's home's areas for development:

- The staff team would benefit from up-to-date safeguarding training, specifically addressing the needs of children who have a disability.
- The records of the children and young people's stay at the service should be consistent in their format and approach so that information gives a holistic picture of the event being detailed.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
17/03/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness
18/10/2016	Full	Outstanding
14/03/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
30/09/2015	Full	Outstanding

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet 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 within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The registered person must ensure that all employees— undertake appropriate continuing professional development. (Regulation 33(4)(a)) In particular, update training in relation to safeguarding children who have disabilities.	06/10/2017

Recommendations

- Staff need the knowledge and skills to recognise and be alert for any signs that might indicate a child is in any way at risk of harm. Specifically, safeguarding should be added to the team meeting agenda. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 43, paragraph 9.12)
- Staff should be familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective, and clear recording. Staff should record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The children and young people have excellent experiences while staying at the home for their short breaks. In addition, their progress through to independence is monitored and facilitated, from their first experience through to moving into adult services. Throughout this time, the children and young people have their achievements celebrated on an ongoing basis.

The home is a large Victorian house in a residential area and set in substantial grounds. This allows the service to offer a range of activities to the children and young people throughout their stays. The grounds have been improved to allow chickens to be accommodated in their own run and a greenhouse to help with the growing and distribution of vegetables and fruit. Those children and young people who are able help with the care of the chickens and gardening during their stay and help to distribute the produce to neighbours. Community engagement is a strength of the home, and regular events are held that include families, other professionals and neighbours. Evaluations are maintained of all events and a neighbour commented: 'The staff work so hard and are very friendly. They are a credit to the community.'

The updating of the sensory room has provided additional experiences for those children and young people who use the facility. The continued use of technology in the home as a means of communication, entertainment and recording of memories is high. This enables the children and young people to learn to use technology safely and have experiences comparable to those of other children of a similar age.

The staff develop trusting relationships with the children and young people quickly and ensure that contact is maintained with families in between breaks, so that these relationships are developed. All the children and young people are made to feel part of the group, share their thoughts and feelings and join in the activities, regardless of their communication abilities. The use of storyboards, applications on tablets and signing ensures inclusivity during their stay. This enables the children and young people to feel welcomed and make friendships that benefit their emotional well-being.

All the children and young people go to local schools. School activities are supported by the staff in the home, and communication is effective between the two provisions. This begins at the referral stage. Staff from the home link with the relevant school during the term to gain insight into the behaviour displayed and the communication abilities of individuals. Behaviour management strategies used in both the school and at home are observed and discussed with the relevant teaching staff and family members. This enables the staff to be consistent in the handling of any behaviour displayed during the stay and to be more effective in their communication with the children and young people. This increases the sense of safety that the children and young people feel when accessing the service.

Individual care plans and risk assessments are developed that evidence the journey and progress that children and young people make throughout the time they use the service. The formats are child focused and visual, enabling children and young people to be involved in decisions relevant to their care. Such records are reviewed regularly, and achievements, no matter how small, are recognised by a reward system. A young person said: 'We get stars for achievements and a reward and we go on the reward tree when we have 10 stars.' This enhances feelings of positive self-esteem.

The team works well in partnership with families and carers and other professionals. A parent stated: 'My child is very happy here. The staff are amazing and friendly.' A social worker involved with a number of children and young people accessing the service said:

'It is a great facility. They keep me updated and work well with families.'

The manager and the staff are clear that they want to provide memorable experiences for the children and young people and see it as part of their role to challenge barriers that hinder such experiences. The activities on offer during stays range from watching age-appropriate videos, going away to a spa or theatre experience and travelling abroad to making regular use of facilities in the local area, such as swimming pools and libraries. This ensures that the children and young people not only have new experiences but are continually learning that they are capable of improving their emotional and physical well-being.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

The children and young people are safe at the home and express that they feel safe. A young person stated: 'I love it here. Yes, I feel safe. I get to spend time with my friends and do lots of activities.'

The staff have working knowledge of child protection and safeguarding processes. They know how to report a concern and keep a log of any incidents. However, their knowledge would benefit from updated specific safeguarding training in relation to children and young people who have a disability. This, along with having safeguarding as a regular agenda item in team meetings, would ensure that the culture of safeguarding is developed further. In addition, records continue to be inconsistent at times with relevant information being held in different documents rather than in one place, and this needs to be addressed. This is essential in terms of ensuring safety. This applies particularly when monitoring and reflecting to identify patterns of behaviour or to follow up any actions taken when concerns have been raised and shared.

The manager and the staff team complete thorough personalised risk assessments for each child and young person. Events and behaviours, once assessed, lead to a plan that enables the children and young people to take measured risks day to day. Such records are routinely shared with families and social workers who sign these and add their own comments. This enables them to be a part of the process, ensuring that they have full understanding of the experiences afforded to their children and young people and are able to be involved in the decision-making about activities.

Recruitment practices are robust and follow all the required elements of safer recruitment. This ensures that all staff, including ancillary workers, who come into contact with the children and young people, are deemed safe to do so. This focus on the safety of the children and young people extends to those community organisations that volunteer to help with a range of issues in the grounds. While this work is, in the main, timed to coincide with when there are no children or young people present, a comprehensive system of checks and signing in and out is in place. This recognises the need to ensure the safety of vulnerable children and young people at all times.

Physical intervention is rarely used and all staff are trained in de-escalation techniques. When the need for such interventions does occur, they are recorded in a timely way by

the staff and monitored by the management team to ensure their appropriate use.

Sanctions are used occasionally as a response to behaviour that is seen as unacceptable. These are recorded, and their use is evaluated regularly. Positive rewards are favoured over sanctions, along with a behaviour code system of red and yellow cards to disrupt potential situations. The star reward system is monitored, and when 10 stars are achieved a further reward is given. The children and young people also have their photos put up on the achievement tree in the communal area. This enables the children and young people to have a visual representation of the progress they are making. This helps them to manage their own behaviour where possible and to learn to make positive choices. This positive reward system extends to staff and is managed by the same method of stars. Children, young people and colleagues choose to give stars to staff when they feel they are deserved, and the system works well in promoting a sense of equality within the service.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The manager is a charismatic, professional leader who holds a relevant qualification and is suitably experienced. She has been registered for over 10 years and offers stability to the staff and the families who use the service. A parent said: 'The home is managed by a manager who is not only professional but respected by parents.' She is supported by a senior management team, enabling a cohesive, consistent approach.

The manager has high expectations of the team and has developed a robust monitoring system to ensure that she remains informed of the day-to-day practice. Her up-to-date knowledge of the needs of the children, young people and their families is exceptional, given the number of families using the service. In particular, she demonstrates flexibility in her approach to issues affecting parents and their need for the service at varying times.

The manager has recently developed a new induction process that will be used across the local authority. It is in two parts, the first covering the initial four weeks that can be used in any of the homes within the authority. The second covers the remainder of the six-month probationary period and evidences learning in a more coherent way, rather than just stating that staff have completed all the necessary aspects of induction. This will offer greater clarity for managers when making decisions about completion of probationary periods and identifying learning needs going forward.

Staff are supported through daily morning meetings with a member of the management team in attendance. This ensures that consistency of practice is developed with individual children and young people, regardless of the number of nights' stay they receive. Regular monitoring and evaluation of practice form part of these meetings, ensuring that the senior team is aware of any issues or subsequent actions that need to take place. The staff are also supported through monthly team meetings and supervisions, which offer opportunities to discuss the needs of children and young people and provide for reflective practice. This enables staff to explore their thoughts and feelings in relation to the impact that these have on their work. Annual appraisals

form part of this consistent evaluation of practice. Such evaluation leads to change that enhances the service experience of children, young people and their families. A parent said: 'This is a vital service that I could not do without.'

Training and development are seen as an integral part of the management task. In addition to the rolling training programme, issues of interest are discussed at team meetings, either by presentations from team members or external speakers. This underpins the constant drive for innovation of the management team.

The manager is open to challenge and responds effectively when issues are raised. She continues to drive forward improvement within practice and in the overall physical appearance of the home. When requirements and recommendations are raised, they are responded to quickly and effectively.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and 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 whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, 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'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC035380

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Municipal Buildings, Church Road, Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland TS18 1LD

Responsible individual: Rhona Bollands

Registered manager: Dawn Coyle

Inspector:

Susan Atkinson-Millmoor, social care inspector

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