

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	18/10/2016
Unique reference number	SC035380
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Stockton on Tees Borough Council
Registered person address	Stockton on Tees Borough Council, 6 Alma Street, Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland TS18 2AP
Responsible individual	Shaun McLurg
Registered manager	Dawn Coyle
Inspector	Susan Atkinson-Millmoor

Inspection date	18/10/2016
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	Outstanding
The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the home contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help, protection and care.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding

SC035380

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is outstanding because:

- The manager and staff team dedicate their time to building secure, trusting relationships with children, young people and their families.
- The staff team has an in-depth knowledge of the needs and methods of communication of each child or young person.
- The home is managed by a strong, aspirational leader who is supported by an equally strong management team.
- Staff advocate strongly on behalf of children, young people and their families.
- The service is flexible and responsive to the needs of each individual or their family.
- Positive working relationships are developed and nurtured with the professionals involved in the lives of children and young people who are using the service.
- Recognised theory underpins the work with families.
- Facilities provided in the home are modern and effective in ensuring that children and young people enjoy their stays.
- Recognised progress is made by each child or young person and celebrated.

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:

- Many children placed in homes may undergo a difficult transition and what should be simple aspects of their care take on a substantial significance in this context. Staff should provide a nurturing environment that is welcoming and supportive, and which provides appropriate boundaries in relation to their behaviour. In particular, ensure that the standards of decoration are maintained throughout the building. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.7)
- 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)
- The home's records on each child represent a significant contribution to their life history. Children and their parents should be supported to understand the nature of records kept by the home and how to access them. Records such as risk assessments should be shared with parents and any comments noted. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.5)

Full report

Information about this children's home

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

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/03/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
30/09/2015	Full	Outstanding
05/03/2015	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
07/01/2015	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Outstanding
The home is a large, Victorian house in a residential area, with substantial grounds, allowing the service to offer a range of activities to children and young people throughout their stays. The use of technology in the home as a means of communication, entertainment and recording of memories is high. A dedicated room with an interactive television screen and computer facilities allows young people to develop skills on a level with young people in the community. Staff are aware of the potential dangers of internet use and ensure that there is comprehensive monitoring. However, their aim is to enable young people to use technology in a safe way rather than to prevent use and, therefore, training is offered regularly. This learning is shared with families, which means that safety extends to home and school life. In addition, this offers the children and young people an opportunity to develop skills needed in adult life. The staff team develops trusting relationships with children and young people, demonstrated through good humour and warmth. All are made to feel part of the group regardless of their communication abilities. The use of storyboards and signing ensures inclusivity during a stay. The whole team strives to ensure that each stay is as positive as possible. Food choices are catered for, and celebration events recognised, with birthday cakes and parties happening regularly. Activities are planned each day, and the high staffing ratios enable the staff to give positive experiences to individual children and young people and to promote group activities. The grounds of the home benefit from well-maintained play equipment and space for playing music and holding discos. In addition, there is a well-equipped sensory room that is popular with many of the children and young people, although it is in need of some refurbishment due to its regular use. All children and young people go to local schools. School activities are supported by the staff in the home, and an education champion has been appointed to ensure that positive links are maintained. This enables the staff to promote education and to be consistent in the handling of any behaviour displayed during the stay. Such consistency is important for many of the children and young people who access the service, as it helps them to manage the disruption of living life in several settings. In addition, strategies that work well are shared with families and with the day provision, where many of the children and young people also access services. This increases the sense of safety that children and young people feel when accessing these services. Records from any incidents at the day-care provision are shared with the home,	

which adds to the consistency and ensures that staff are aware of what behaviour the child or young person has displayed throughout the holiday periods. However, the same format is used for recording incidents at both provisions, and it is therefore difficult at times to know where events have taken place. The regulator would expect to see some incidents, such as physical interventions, appearing in additional records. Information should clearly show which provision it relates to so that appropriate judgements can be made.

The manager and the staff team have developed excellent records for assessing risks, for charting the needs identified in the care plans and for monitoring progress. Such records are reviewed regularly, and achievements, no matter how small, are recognised by a reward system. All children and young people demonstrate progress throughout their stays to some degree.

The team works well in partnership with families and carers and other professionals. A parent stated, 'It's fabulous here. I certainly could not manage without it. They have been my saviour.' The communication between the home, other services and families is excellent, regular and up to date. A parent said, 'They keep me up to date. I have a book that he brings home with him and we share information.' A social worker involved with several children and young people using the service stated, 'I visit regularly and have always been impressed with the practice I have seen.'

The manager and the staff are clear that they want to provide memorable experiences for children and young people and see it as part of their role to advocate and to challenge discrimination. This has resulted in holidays abroad, trips to London and the theatre and excursions to a spa cabin. Visits are recorded through photographs and videos. Copies are given to the children and young people for their own memories, and are shared with everyone using the service.

The service continues to work well with the local community, contributing to food banks and sharing the crops from the orchard with the neighbourhood.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The children and young people are safe at the home and are safer as a whole because of the individual work that the staff undertake with them and their families. The staff have good knowledge of child protection and safeguarding. They are able	

to identify possible signs and changes in emotional well-being that are indicative of harm and they have in-depth knowledge of the processes that need to be followed to make referrals. However, records do not always give an accurate reflection of the story of an individual stay. This is essential in terms of ensuring safety, in particular when looking back to identify particular episodes of a stay and of what happened, when concerns have been shared.

The manager and the staff team complete thorough personalised risk assessments. Events, once assessed, lead to a plan that enables children and young people to take measured risks day to day. This ensures that, regardless of the complex needs of some of the children and young people, they are fully involved in activities and experience positive opportunities that lead to personal growth. Such records, however, are not routinely shared with families. This would enhance their understanding of the experiences afforded to their children and young people.

Recruitment practice is robust. The recent recruitment of a caretaker examined aspects of his personality and value base, as part of the process, in addition to the required checks. This ensures that all members of the team hold similar aspirations and acceptance of the children and young people accessing the service.

The manager continues to reach out to local businesses and services to assist with improving facilities. Through this help, a path has recently been laid at the back of the garden, to allow children and young people who use wheelchairs to be able to fully access the grounds safely. In addition, the manager is mindful of the timings of the work undertaken in the grounds and ensures that this takes place while children and young people are at school or home. This recognises the need to ensure the safety of vulnerable children and young people at all times.

Physical intervention is used rarely but, when such incidents do 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 challenging behaviour. 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. This enables children and young people to manage their own behaviour when possible and to learn to make positive choices.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding
The manager is a charismatic, well-respected professional who holds a relevant	

qualification and is suitably experienced. She is ably assisted by a knowledgeable management team. Together, they empower and support their staff team. A member of staff said, 'There is a supportive management team who enable the staff constantly to learn and improve.'

The manager has high expectations of the team and ensures that members are supported through regular team meetings, daily morning meetings and robust supervision and appraisals. Such strategies ensure that there are opportunities to reflect on practice as well as a plan for the next group that is coming to stay. Observation of practice forms part of her regular routine, and supervision notes reflect constructive challenge to the staff when appropriate. This is followed by action plans and guidance, enabling the staff to learn and move forward in their practice. Accepted theory in relation to positively engaging families is at the centre of practice and is promoted at the outset, even before a family accesses the service. This ensures continuous improvement and development within the team.

The manager has developed robust monitoring processes, which give her oversight of the progress of individual children and young people. This enables her to offer a flexible system that takes account of the needs and abilities of children and young people as well as their likes and dislikes in relation to who they share their stay with. This results in relatively settled groups in which behaviours experienced at home are often not replicated during the short-break stay and the atmosphere is one where fun and happiness are the overwhelming emotions experienced. A social worker said, 'I cannot fault the service. The only problem is we need more of it!'

The manager has extensive professional networks. This enables the service to have a positive reputation in the community, and fundraising activities are responded to well. In addition, the manager ensures that the service gives back to the community and involves children and young people in events when appropriate.

The manager recognises that the service has reached a plateau in terms of its decoration and maintenance and she has a refurbishment plan underway. She is open to challenge and responds effectively when issues are raised.

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 that 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 whom 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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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