

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	27/07/2016
Unique reference number	SC035439
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Lancashire County Council
Registered person address	PO Box 78, County Hall, Fishergate, Preston PR1 8XJ

Responsible individual	Paul McIntyre
Registered manager	Joan Osgood
Inspector	Jackie Line

Previous inspection date	09/02/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Sustained effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

SC035439

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- Leaders and managers create a positive ethos within the home, and an environment where young people feel safe and well cared for.
- Over time, young people develop positive, reciprocal relationships with staff based on mutual respect and trust. This forms a platform from which they make progress.
- Most young people grow in confidence, learn to negotiate their wants and needs more effectively, and develop a more positive self-view.
- Young people learn independence skills in line with their age and development. They contribute to plans regarding their next steps as they prepare for their transition to adulthood.
- Some young people achieve exceptional outcomes given their starting points and complex needs.
- Managers advocate for young people when progress is not being made, and help them to overcome their challenges.
- Staff work hard to manage young people's complex needs including risky behaviour. As a result, some behaviours that cause concern are reducing.
- Managers and staff work collaboratively with partner agencies, which generally report good levels of satisfaction about the service provided to young people.
- Staff benefit from regular supervision by managers, whom they say are approachable and supportive.
- Tailored training programmes enable staff to keep up to date with the skills and knowledge required to meet young people's needs.

To continue to improve, the home needs to:

- Implement more robust arrangements to check on the welfare of young people during agreed stays away from the home. Furthermore, when they go missing, staff must always make consistent efforts to locate them.
- Strengthen external monitoring systems to provide a more robust analysis of the home's performance and impact on young people.
- Improve internal monitoring so that shortfalls are quickly identified and acted on, including the quality of record-keeping.
- Provide routines and structures at home that consistently support learning for one young person who remains disengaged from education.

- Help two young people to access dental treatment after refusing to attend appointments, and ensure that one young person receives any outstanding immunisations.
- Escalate concerns with the placing authority when it is failing in its responsibility to provide required documentation and carry out return home interviews.
- Ensure that all significant events are notified to Ofsted.

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 within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
6. The quality and purpose of care standard The registered person must— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose – in particular, provide routines, structures and bespoke educational support for those young people not currently accessing school. (Regulations 6(2)(a), 6(2)(b)(i))	30/09/2016
13: The leadership and management standard The registered person must— use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13(2)(h))	30/09/2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Ensure that the registered person evidences what they have done to achieve engagement, including any actions taken to escalate concerns with placing authorities when they are not fulfilling their responsibilities – in particular, to chase up outstanding personal education plans and return home interviews. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 11, paragraph 2.3)

- Ensure that following an incident of restraint, all the staff and children who have witnessed the restraint, or been involved in any way, should be given the opportunity to be debriefed about the incident by someone independent of it to inform the strategy needed to prevent any recurrence. ('Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 5: Children's Homes', page 27, paragraph 2.102)
- Ensure that staff organise and ensure each child's attendance at the necessary primary and secondary health services – in particular, that dental appointments and childhood immunisations are up to date for all children. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 34, paragraph 7.11)
- Ensure that staff continually and actively assess the risks to each child and the arrangements in place to protect them – in particular, that physical welfare checks are made when young people spend agreed time away from the home, and that consistent efforts are made to locate young people throughout any missing period. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 42, paragraph 9.5)
- Ensure that the registered person notifies Ofsted and other relevant persons if one of the situations specified in regulation 40(4)(a)–(e) occurs. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 63, paragraph 14.10)
- Strengthen the external monitoring processes in place to ensure a more rigorous and impartial assessment of the home's arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and that reports accurately reflect events in the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 65, paragraph 15.5)

Full report

Information about this children's home

A local authority operates this children's home. The service is registered for up to six young people, irrespective of gender, aged between 11 and 17 years. The home cares for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
09/02/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
28/10/2015	Full	Good
14/07/2015	Full	Inadequate
17/03/2015	Interim	Sustained effectiveness

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
This service excels at developing positive, reciprocal relationships with young people based on mutual respect and trust. Even those who are harder to reach start to invest over time, albeit slowly. Young people describe staff as 'great' and 'sound'. Staff listen, and value young people's opinions. They support them with their wishes and feelings and, when sometimes things do not go to plan, they help them to understand why. Staff support young people who are currently adjusting to changes in their care plan, and are unsettled because of this. For all young people, this home provides a safe environment where they can explore their feelings with trusted staff. A social worker reported that one young person has a 'sense of belonging and care', because of the relationships she has developed. Staff have a proven ability to stick with young people through difficult times. With continued support, young people make progress from their starting points in different aspects of their development. One social worker said, 'Where we were at last year compared to now, she has done phenomenally well. Great credit to the staff for how they have worked with her.' Young people develop independence in line with their age and development. They learn practical skills that will support their transition to adulthood, such as managing money, doing their laundry, shopping and cooking. Young people report that they link in with their personal advisers, and contribute to discussions and plans about their next steps. Different opportunities enable young people to have fun and experience new things. For example, some young people enjoyed a recent holiday to Centre Parcs where they participated in a range of activities such as quad-biking, laser shooting and Segway hoverboarding. One young person enjoyed a trip to watch a premiership football match. Another experienced the sights and sounds of London where a theatre trip and trying squid for the first time were particular highlights! Young people develop their own friendships away from the home. They enjoy time with their friends in the community and this mostly goes without incident. More often than not they will return on time, and they know about staying safe when out with their peers. The manager is currently reviewing the arrangements for one young person in line with his individual needs, and she is renegotiating boundaries with him. This shows that managers and staff reflect when something is not working and take steps to change it in order to promote young people's interests and well-being.	

Staff support most young people's health needs. All are registered with primary services and have an annual health assessment. Staff encourage young people to seek medical advice and specialist support when necessary. This leads to improved health outcomes for some young people. For example, one young person no longer requires medication, and another young person is benefiting from reduced substance misuse. Two young people have refused dental appointments, and one young person needs to receive outstanding childhood immunisations. Staff have not yet followed up on these matters and a recommendation is raised to address this, so that all young people's health needs are fully met.

Some young people make exceptional educational progress: for example, one young person is now in full-time employment, which she enjoys. She is also revisiting maths and English to ensure that she gains relevant qualifications. Another young person has successfully completed compulsory education after previously being permanently excluded from school. She achieved 95% attendance, is motivated to learn, is expected to achieve her predicted grades and has secured a place at college. Another young person is now accessing a Prince's Trust course after a long period out of education, training and employment. She recently participated in a residential trip, which she enjoyed.

When young people disengage from education, staff meet with relevant professionals to look at alternatives and discuss the way forward. This yields some good results. For example, one young person has secured a traineeship in an area of interest to him, and says that this is something that he will commit to when it starts in September.

One young person's engagement with education remains worryingly low and, although staff provide some educational activity, it is still not consistent during this sustained period of school refusal. Furthermore, he is allowed out during the school day to see friends. As a result, he does not receive clear expectations about education, and the routines and structures in the home do not support learning. This undermines the otherwise good educational support provided to young people, and is likely to impact on his future life chances if not resolved.

Following a requirement at the last inspection, staff work together with young people to help them look after their bedrooms. Some young people begin to take this responsibility on for themselves, reflecting an improvement in their own feelings of self-worth.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
Young people report that they feel safe and can identify a trusted adult whom they can talk to if they have any worries. Staff inform young people about advocacy services and make these available to them. One young person contacts his independent reviewing officer when he has specific issues to discuss. This shows that some young people confidently access people outside the home should they need to. Managers respond quickly whenever a concern or complaint is raised. When necessary, they implement changes to improve practice and prevent recurrence. As a result, managers and staff learn from situations that arise. For example, there are now clearer procedures for when young people need collecting late at night. This avoids confusion and delays, and better promotes young people's welfare. Staff respond quickly when specific safeguarding concerns arise. They work well with partner agencies, such as the children's looked after nurse, police and probation service to address risk. For example, staff have worked successfully with young people to help them disengage from unhealthy and unsafe relationships. Although vulnerabilities remain in respect of child sexual exploitation, risks have reduced considerably. Young people receive support and guidance to manage their behaviour more appropriately. When faced with particularly challenging situations, staff manage these well, minimising risks to themselves and others. Staff implement a system of praise and reward, as well as consequences. Incentive schemes help young people learn to negotiate, and mean that staff recognise the effort they make to modify their behaviour. Occasionally, situations escalate and physical intervention is required. Restraint practice is safe, and some aspects of recording have improved. Incident reports now provide a detailed account of what happened and debriefs with young people are recorded. However, shortfalls remain. Debriefs with young people are not always carried out by someone independent of the incident, and those with staff are not being recorded at all. As a result, a recommendation made at the last inspection is repeated to further improve recording practice in respect of restraint. Most young people do not go missing. If they do, staff make efforts to locate them. During one incident, records suggest that no efforts were made to search the local area or contact the young person during the second day of his absence, to support police efforts already under way. This does not show consistently robust safeguarding practice.	

For one young person, missing episodes have reduced in frequency and length, which indicates the progress she has made in keeping safe. In fact, there has been no missing episode for three months, which is a significant achievement.

Although staff request return interviews, they do not take place. This matter is not chased up sufficiently with the placing authority to bring about change. A lack of return interviews means that young people do not have an opportunity to talk to someone independent of the home about why they went missing. Furthermore, potentially vital information is not sought about what happened during the period of absence. Consequently, it is not possible to assess and review risk.

In line with their individual plans and stages of development, some young people spend regular or extended periods of time away from the home, either with friends or family members. This is agreed with the placing authority. Although staff telephone young people to check on their welfare, they do not meet up with them during this time away. This does not fully promote their welfare, and in one case meant that staff were not following strategies outlined in the young person's risk assessment.

Sound recruitment and selection processes ensure a safe and competent workforce. This means that unsuitable people are prevented from working with young people.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement
Leadership and management practice is not consistent enough to be good. The registered manager is experienced and suitably qualified in holding a Registered Managers Award. She registered with Ofsted in January 2011. The ethos of the home is one of care and support, with a clear focus on building positive and meaningful relationships with young people. This is the critical ingredient in keeping young people safe and improving their behaviour, experiences and outcomes. The registered manager is a child-focused individual who is available, approachable and held in high regard by young people and staff alike. Young people describe her as 'great', and they regularly go to her for advice and guidance. Staff also report being confident about raising issues in the knowledge that they will be addressed. Staff receive regular supervision, which they say is useful and helps them to reflect on their practice. Timely appraisals take place, facilitating an annual review of	

performance. Relevant and continuous training courses enable staff to keep up to date with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet young people's needs. Individuals wishing to progress into management roles undertake relevant courses in managing and recruiting staff. The vast majority of staff have completed the qualification required for their respective roles, or are undertaking this. Improved monitoring of staff training means that any gaps are addressed.

Staff understand how training informs their practice. For example, a member of staff described how recent attachment training had helped him to look at the reasons underlying a young person's behaviour, and how early life experiences had impacted on his development.

Young people live in a home that is largely well maintained. Routine health and safety checks ensure that it is a safe physical environment. All young people have adequate natural ventilation in their bedrooms, but some window frames have been increasingly damaged over time. Although these are not unsafe, the registered manager has enquired about getting them replaced to ensure that ongoing improvements are made to the home when necessary.

Managers carry out regular monitoring activities and identify some areas for development. A lack of attention to detail means that other areas requiring improvement are overlooked. For example, managers have not identified the outstanding health needs highlighted in this inspection, nor recognised that case records do not provide a good overview of young people's day-to-day experiences. Furthermore, they have not addressed all the requirements and recommendations raised at the last inspection. A lack of robust oversight means that managers cannot prioritise areas for development effectively, and this limits the capacity of the home to improve.

External monitoring reports vary in quality. Some lack detail and so do not fully reflect on events within the home. Most lack clear evaluative statements about whether or not staff safeguard young people and promote their welfare. The registered person recognises that arrangements are not yet good enough, and she is taking steps to improve practice in this area with further training and a review of the personnel carrying out the visits. A recommendation is raised to support further improvement in this area.

Managers regularly review the statement of purpose and achieve most of the aims and objectives set out in that document. However, there are shortfalls in the delivery of care in not providing a bespoke package of education for one young person currently refusing school, and in not implementing routines and boundaries to support his learning during this period. A requirement is raised to ensure that this is addressed.

The registered manager advocates for young people. For example, she has involved the independent reviewing officer and service manager to raise concerns about the care planning process for one young person that is not satisfactory. She also challenged an education provider who unfairly withdrew a work placement from another young person, leading to it being reinstated. A social worker said, 'She is like a terrier, and will create and advocate on young people's behalf, and challenge children's social care.' This good practice in championing young people's needs is not consistently applied. As a result, she has not escalated concerns about return home interviews not being completed, and the continued failure of the placing authority to provide personal education plans.

This inspection highlighted that not all serious incidents are notified to Ofsted. Such incidents were reviewed on inspection, and all have been responded to appropriately in full collaboration with safeguarding agencies. Consequently, young people's welfare has not been compromised. A recommendation is raised to ensure that all relevant people are informed of significant events in the home, so that the regulator can effectively carry out its monitoring function.

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 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'.

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