

Children's homes inspection - Full

Inspection date	13/01/2016
Unique reference number	SC035477
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	Jacqueline Bumford
Inspector	Jackie Line

Inspection date	13/01/2016
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	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

SC035477

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- A long-standing and consistent staff team provide young people with stability. Young people invest and consider this placement to be their home.
- Young people develop positive, trusting, and reciprocal relationships with staff over time. Key worker relationships are seen as particularly important by young people.
- Staff have a proven ability to work positively with birth families and carers. They help young people repair once fractured and estranged relationships, and as a result they enjoy improved relationships with people who are important to them.
- Young people who have lived at the home for a long time enjoy improved outcomes. They make good progress from their starting points with respect to their health, education, behaviours, confidence, and emotional well-being.
- Most young people are well supported and move on positively from the home to independence or return to live with family or foster carers.
- Transitions into the home are well managed with young people and their families having the opportunity to visit before moving in. This enables them to ask questions and allays their anxieties.
- Young people learn some good independence skills, not only about how to manage practically but emotionally as well. This enables young people to think about how to ask for help in the future if they experience feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- Young people who arrive at the home at risk of child sexual exploitation are kept safe from harm. Levels of risk reduce because of the actions of staff.
- Safeguarding concerns such as disclosures by young people are responded to promptly. Consequently, actions are taken to address concerns and minimise reoccurrence.
- Leaders and managers demonstrate a commitment to improving the service, and this means practice continues to evolve.
- Staff report being well supported; good training opportunities and regular supervision means they keep up to date with the skills and knowledge required to meet young people's needs.

To continue to improve the home needs to:

- Improve care planning to ensure any outstanding information pertaining to health, education and youth justice is sourced quickly. Consider more carefully the timing of admissions to allow new and existing young people time to settle and adjust before introducing anyone new.
- Liaise effectively with education professionals to ensure where young people are not in education, plans are reviewed and progressed without delay. Ensure that routines at home facilitate young people's learning, and support their return to education.
- Review and update risk assessments in a timely manner, and clearly identify strategies for managing all identified risks.
- Ensure staffing levels and working hours are adjusted to effectively address recent disruptions at night, and that appropriate levels of supervision are afforded to young people at all times.
- Maintain good employment practice by sourcing appropriate references in all cases, and verifying as far as is practicable reasons people have left relevant employment.
- Ensure systems are in place to report significant events to Ofsted.
- Use monitoring systems to identify shortfalls in provision more quickly and take appropriate action.

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 with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
8: The education standard In order to meet the education standard the registered person must ensure – (2(a) that staff (viii) help a child who is excluded from school, or who is of compulsory school age but not attending school, to access educational and training support throughout the period of exclusion or non-attendance and to return to school as soon as possible, in particular that plans are reviewed and implemented without delay, and when young people are not in school routines in the home are such that constructive educational activity is facilitated.	15/02/2016
12: The protection of children standard In order to meet the protection of children standard the registered person must ensure – (2)(a) that staff assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child, (b) that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm; In particular risk assessments are reviewed and kept up to date, clear strategies are in place to manage night time disturbances, appropriate levels of supervision are provided, computer games are age appropriate, and arrangements are in place to ensure the welfare of young people who are away from the home for extended periods is promoted.	15/02/2016
13: The leadership and management standard 13(2)(h) In order to meet 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.	15/02/2016

14: The care planning standard 14(1) In order to meet the care planning standard the registered person must ensure that children receive well-planned care, in particular that all information is received without delay pertaining to health, education, and youth justice, and attention is paid to the timing of new admissions.	15/02/2016
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- Ensure staffing levels take account of the needs of children and can respond flexibly to unexpected events (The guide to the quality standards paragraph 10.15, page 54).
- Ensure the registered person maintains good employment practice, specifically in relation to references, and verifying, as far as practicable, the reasons for leaving relevant employment with young people and vulnerable adults (The guide to the quality standards paragraph 13.1, page 61).
- Ensure systems are in place to notify Ofsted and other relevant persons if one of the situations specified in regulation 40(4) (a-e) occurs (The guide to the quality standards paragraph 14.10, page 63).

Full report

Information about this children's home

This children's home is operated by a local authority and provides care for up to six young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home takes emergency placements.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
17/02/2015	Interim	improved effectiveness
02/07/2014	Full	Adequate
19/03/2014	Interim	Good Progress
07/10/2013	Full	Adequate

Inspection Judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	good
Most young people develop trusted relationships with staff. Key workers play a particularly important role in this process, and young people identify with them positively. For example, one young person said, 'My keyworker is the best, she is caring and funny, and listens to me'. A young person recently admitted to the home could already identify with her keyworker as someone she likes and can talk to. Consequently, young people are learning about reciprocity and beginning to invest in relationships. Young people benefit from consistency and stability. They recognise they are well cared for and that staff have their best interests at heart. One young person comments: 'The staff sort things out with you, like a family would'. Social workers are consistently happy with the standard and quality of care provided. They report: 'Staff really do care about [young people's] welfare and safety.' 'They endeavour to nurture young people and promote environments and activities to enable them to have positive experiences despite their previous life experiences'. As a result, young people settle and feel comfortable. One young person told the inspector he thinks the home is 'fandabbydozy', another says 'I feel better since living here', and one reports that he considers this to be his home.	

Most young people make good progress relative to their starting points. For example, young people develop confidence, become more independent, and over time learn to make better choices about some aspects of their behaviour. One young person says: 'Staff have helped me get back on track'. Another comments: 'The staff have given me confidence, at first I wouldn't go out and was scared of my own shadow. Now I am able to go to the shop and into town which I wouldn't have done before'.

Consultation and communication levels are good. Young people are involved in the development of the home, for example, they have made decisions about the new layout following a refurbishment. They say the creation of an additional lounge works better for them, and prefer the dining room now that it is situated in the conservatory. They have also contributed to the design of a welcome leaflet for new residents by giving reassuring messages such as: 'I settled quickly, I think this is because the team were so helpful', and 'the staff will always do their best for you'. Young people are also involved in aspects of their care planning. They visit the home before coming to live here, and this provides them with the opportunity to ask questions and allay their fears. One young person made a positive choice to remain living in the home when foster care was being considered. His views were shared, and listened to. Delegated authority is managed well, and as a result responsibility for decision making is clearly outlined. This improves the day to day experiences of young people.

In the main staff support young people to rebuild strained relationships with people who are important to them. Where families present challenges they are patient, persistent, and honest in their communications. Social workers confirm that contact arrangements are well facilitated, and in some cases staff transport young people long distances to see family members. Examples of progress include a young person reconnecting with a birth parent; young people going from time limited and supervised contact to now enjoying overnight stays with parents, and young people returning to live with their extended family.

Staff encourage young people to develop new skills in line with their age and development. This includes them helping around the home, travelling independently, and in some cases looking for work and finding employment. As well as learning practical tasks, staff help young people to think about the emotional challenges that come with living on their own, and warn them about the dangers of inappropriate friendships. Young people who have moved on to independence between inspections are largely coping well. Staff maintain contact with them, and young people are secure in the knowledge that ongoing support is readily available.

Young people are provided with a range of social and recreational experiences. Examples include trips to theme parks, the Trafford centre, Christmas markets, football stadium tours, and Cadbury's world. Young people enjoy going to the cinema, receiving beauty treatments, playing, football, pool, and trying out

different activities like boxing. They are encouraged to maintain positive friendships within the community, enjoy spending time with their friends, and have sleep overs from time to time. This means that most young people have different opportunities to socialise, and develop confidence.

Most young people's health needs are well met. They are registered with medical practitioners, and are supported to attend routine appointments. Health information pertaining to a young person who has recently moved in remains outstanding, and staff are in the process of progressing this.

Education outcomes are mixed. Some young people make good educational progress. For example, young people have successfully completed college courses, developed clear ambitions for their future, enjoyed periods of improved attendance, received accolades such as pupil of the year, and participated in summer schools to help them prepare for working life. For other young people engagement in education is a struggle, attendance fluctuates, and behaviours lead to periods of exclusion. For those new to the home planning shortfalls mean that arrangements are not clear, and some personal education plans are not completed or reviewed within agreed timescales. Consequently, young people experience delays in education provision, and staff are not working quickly and clearly enough with education partners to help young people overcome barriers. Furthermore, when young people are not in school, daily routines at home do not facilitate constructive activity, and this does not support their reintegration and learning.

Recent weeks have seen a rise in levels of disruption in the home, particularly at night. Four male residents, two of them new, engage in silly and loud behaviours until the early hours of the morning. Some residents are staying out of the difficulties, and in one case this is testimony to the progress they have made. Nevertheless it is unsettling, and if not addressed quickly has the potential to undermine the experiences and progress of young people.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement
Young people report they feel safe, and can identify an appropriate adult they can talk to should they have any concerns. Young people know how to complain and 'have your say' forms are available for them to complete. They are confident that any issues they raise will be looked into properly, and records examined demonstrate that this is the case. Staff spoken with during the inspection demonstrated a clear understanding about child protection procedures and reporting concerns. Managers and staff understand	

their roles and responsibilities in this aspect of their work, and are familiar with the whistleblowing policy. There have been no reported concerns or allegations relating to staff between inspections. A disclosure made during the inspection by a young person about another child was responded to appropriately, and is currently being investigated. A prompt response to safeguarding concerns helps to protect young people from harm.

Young people living in this home all have histories of putting themselves at risk through their actions and unsafe lifestyles. For example, young people arrive at the home with self-harming behaviours, are at risk of child sexual exploitation, and engage in anti-social behaviour. Staff are able to engage positively with young people and specialist workers to minimise risk, and this has resulted in some good progress being made. For example, self-harm episodes are well managed and incidents are not repeated, risks relating to child sexual exploitation reduce considerably, and one young person is able to articulate that he does not get into as much trouble as he once did. Furthermore, the involvement of a drugs and alcohol support service means young people are being educated about the risks of such behaviour to help them make more informed choices.

Some young people recently admitted to the home are involved in criminality. Staff are not liaising with the youth offending service appropriately, and consequently all orders imposed by the court are not known or understood. As a result, staff are not sufficiently proactive in supporting young people's engagement with services to help address this aspect of concerning behaviour.

The quality of risk assessments is variable. Some are good, for example each young person has their own individual plan outlining risks associated with going missing and strategies to deal with these. One young person has a specific risk assessment to address the fact that he is known to carry knives when out in the community. Other risk assessments are not reviewed and updated regularly enough to take account of new information or changes in behaviour. For example, there is no information to account for recent night time disturbances and no guidance issued to staff about how to manage this. Furthermore, the risk assessment for one young person has not been updated to reflect the increased likelihood of violence when under the influence of alcohol. As a result, prompt action is not being taken, incidents have reoccurred, and this does not fully promote the safety and welfare of young people.

Missing episodes are rare, and have remained consistently low over several months. When incidents do occur, staff take appropriate action to ensure their safe return. Similarly when young people leave the home without permission they are quick to report them as a cause for concern where necessary. One social worker said: 'Since coming here staff have a much better handle on his whereabouts, and missing episodes have reduced compared to pre-placement experiences'.

When young people spend extended periods of authorised time away from the

home, staff do not always maintain and record agreed levels of contact. This does not consistently maintain young people's welfare at all times.

All staff are trained and equipped to de-escalate potentially volatile situations. As a result, incidents of restraint are rare with the last one being in July 2014. A rewards system is in place which promotes and praises positive behaviour. Consequences are imposed to help young people recognise that their behaviour impacts on themselves and others. This helps them to modify aspects of their behaviour that are not okay and has led to some improved outcomes. For example, one social worker says: 'X's consequential thinking is better and she is more able to think things through'. As a result, she is more able to keep herself safe when out in the community with friends.

A lack of clear boundaries and poor supervision at times does not promote appropriate behaviour or sufficiently protect young people. For example, the inspector witnessed young people playing computer games that are not age appropriate, and it was clear from debris left in the computer room that some young people had been smoking in there. This is unacceptable, and raises questions about levels of supervision and support provided at other times. Consequently, young people's safety, welfare and behaviour are not managed consistently, and this is an area identified for improvement.

Shortfalls in the selection and recruitment of staff do not fully protect young people from unsuitable people having access to them. For example, references for one member of staff are not sufficient, and efforts are not consistently made to verify reasons for leaving relevant employment.

Health and safety checks are carried out regularly, and consequently the home provides a safe environment for young people to live in. Young people and staff are supported to understand what to do in the event of a fire, and know how to evacuate the building safely in such an emergency.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement
The home is run by a suitably qualified and experienced Registered Manager. She has been in post since 2001 and holds level 5 and 6 awards in leadership and management. Young people benefit from a stable staff team and this provides consistency and continuity for them. Staff remain motivated and are proving resilient in the face of	

recent challenges from young people. Staff are positive about their work describing it as 'great, engaging, enjoyable, and challenging [in a good way]'.

Two new staff appointed between inspections have integrated well. They report a strong induction process and feel well supported in their new role. Staff say managers are approachable and accessible, and that regular supervision is constructive enabling them to reflect on their practice. One member of staff says 'My supervision is extremely helpful and I am supported by my manager in all areas'. Staff receive an annual appraisal of their performance, identifying areas for development for the coming year.

Good systems are in place to monitor staff training, meaning relevant courses are prioritised and all core training is up to date. Staff report they are given time to complete on-line training and attend courses, and all staff apart from those in their probationary period have gained an appropriate professional qualification. Specialist training is provided to address the needs of individual young people. For example, the psychology team for looked after children, SCAYT+ provided training on self-harm. Formal training is supplemented by regular briefings from the Local Children's Safeguarding Board. As a result, staff update their practice, knowledge and skills to meet the needs of young people in their care.

Staffing levels are not always sufficient to consistently meet the individual needs of young people. For example, on occasions staff have been unable to collect young people from contact when arrangements change, or they need to come home because they are experiencing difficulties. Furthermore, staffing has not increased to account for the impact of young people newly admitted to the home, and to manage recent night time disturbances. Consequently, patterns of behaviour are beginning to emerge that are undermining good routines, and compromising young people's welfare. This was addressed during the inspection, and an action plan is now in place which includes the implementation of waking night staff.

Temporary staffing shortages resulting from sickness and annual leave means the Registered Manager has been covering shifts recently. She has also been without her two assistant managers. Consequently, she has not had sufficient time to dedicate to monitoring the home's performance, and take remedial action where necessary. Consequently, shortfalls highlighted at this inspection have not been identified sooner. New arrangements for external monitoring are set to be implemented in January 2016. This means that visits will now be carried out by a suitably qualified and experienced independent person strengthening external quality assurance systems.

A development plan is in place, and some improvements have been made between inspections. For example, young people's guides have been enhanced, the way young people contribute to staff appraisals has been revised, delegated authority is now streamlined, and the home has been refurbished. All of these improvements impact positively on the experiences of young people.

Some aspects of care planning are good. The registered manager and staff have successfully managed a series of short term admissions to the home on both a planned and emergency basis. Most young people had positive experiences, and their needs were well met. Where it became clear a young person's needs could not be met safely, alternative arrangements were made quickly. Recently, two young people were admitted within three days of each other. This was planned, and the decision to place young people in such quick succession does not allow sufficient time for new and existing residents to adjust and settle. As a result, levels of disruption have increased and an impact meeting has now been called. Furthermore, some key information is missing relating to health appointments, education plans, and youth justice. This does not demonstrate good enough preparation to enable staff to respond to young people's needs effectively from the start.

Not all significant incidents are reported to Ofsted in line with regulation. This undermines the ability of the regulator to carry out its monitoring function because it is not kept appropriately informed. Consequently, the welfare of young people is not fully promoted.

The statement of purpose is reviewed and revised as necessary to ensure it accurately reflects the aims, practices, and staffing structures within the home. Managers and staff are broadly compliant though improvements are required in relation to staffing and meeting the education needs of children to ensure the home's statement of purpose is applied in full.

Four requirements and three recommendations have been raised at this inspection to address shortfalls and secure the necessary improvement moving forward.

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 looked after children 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 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 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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