

Children's home inspection – Full

Inspection date	22/11/2016
Unique reference number	SC035954
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Metropolitan Borough of Wirral
Registered person address	Education Department, Metropolitan Borough of Wirral, Hamilton Building, Conway Street, Birkenhead, Merseyside CH41 4FD
Registered manager	Debra Edwards
Responsible individual	Nikki Kenny
Inspector	Elaine Allison

Inspection date	22/11/2016
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	Outstanding
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding

SC035954

Summary of findings

The children's home's provision is outstanding because:

- Children make exceptional progress because of their short stays. Effective planning for short-break stays ensures the compatibility of the group. This ensures that young people are provided with further opportunities to make new friends and build positive relationships.
- A competent staff team fully understands the needs of children and delivers high-quality, sensitive care. Staff are meticulous in ensuring that children and their families are included in all decision-making processes.
- Children receive consistent care from the familiar, long-standing staff team. Staff genuinely care about the children's welfare and work in their best interests.
- Children are protected from harm by the diligent care and supervision provided by staff.
- The number of staff on duty is always enough to meet the needs of children and to support them in their diverse activities, visits and important appointments.
- Parents are particularly positive about the care that their children receive. They feel valued by the managers and staff because they are widely consulted in all areas of their child's care and service delivery.
- The management and staff teams use research practice and all available resources to help them to succeed in shaping the service, in which children always come first.
- The interim manager understands the importance of self-evaluation in taking account of the experiences of children and families.

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

Recommendation

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

- Ensure that staff are familiar with the home's policies on record keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording, particularly with reference to recording the dates and designation of the recorder. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

Full report

Information about this children's home

This service provides short-term breaks for eight young people with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, physical disabilities and learning disabilities. In addition, one child is able to live at the home. The home is owned and managed by the local authority.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
21/03/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
13/10/2015	Full	Outstanding
24/03/2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness
18/11/2014	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Outstanding
The quality of individualised care provided to children during their short stays is exceptional. The staff work hard to make sure that children experience care that is sensitive to their individual needs. Staff are alert to children's emotional, physical and social needs and pace their admissions and length of stays according to individual needs. Observations gave a clear indication that there is a warm and caring relationship between the staff and children. For example, staff show affection to children as they arrive from school. This initial welcome quickly puts children at ease. Children described staff as: 'crazy, but good crazy', 'lovely' and 'the best'. Staff treat families and carers in a fair and inclusive manner. This means ensuring that there is effective two-way communication with families and carers. This positive partnership generates substantial benefits in the way children are looked after, including their routines and communication needs, during their short breaks. The home has recently facilitated a meeting for parents to discuss their views, to ensure that the service provides the best service they can for children. Parents commented, 'They really want our input, it's not just lip service', 'It is definitely a case of making sure we are involved in all decisions about our children', and 'They make sure they are doing what we do with our children at home. This is so fantastic because they share ideas with us and listen to us on what works.' This level of consultation with parents means that the service adopts a 'shared care' approach when young people come to stay. Staff ensure that the individual care planning documents are compiled in consultation with parents to ensure that children with complex needs receive the same level of support, whether they are at home or receiving a short break. Excellent inter-agency working ensures that the short-break arrangement is an integral part of the care planning for each child. Staff from the home join meetings with other professionals, such as family support and education colleagues to plan an integrated approach to services offered to children and their families. A social work manager commented: 'The input of staff at multi-agency meetings has a significant impact on the planning and outcomes for children. All staff from the service present as both knowledgeable and passionate in their roles.' Detailed information shared between the home and schools, in the form of written summaries, contribute to the staff team's understanding of a young person's needs. This shared knowledge informs practice and determines how shifts are planned.	

Staff help children to utilise all the leisure opportunities available in the home and the garden areas. Newly installed play equipment provides even more variety of choice. For example, the garden areas have recently been refurbished to utilise the ample outdoor space, a new outdoor play shed has been purchased and new scooters, which better meet the children's needs, are available.

Young people show warmth and affection for the staff. Their demeanour indicates that they feel safe and are able to approach the staff with any concerns or anxieties. There is a relaxed atmosphere within the home, with plenty of singing and laughter. Young people have fun during their short-break experience. The service celebrates children's achievements. For example, each child receives an 'achievement certificate' when they reach specific and individual goals in their lives, such as by showing good road safety and brushing their teeth. This not only further enhances their self-esteem but also demonstrates important milestones in each child's life, which are shared with parents and fellow professionals.

The staff ensure that the accommodation and facilities provides a bright, safe, pleasant and stimulating environment that is accessible to all children. Staff continue to personalise each of the bedrooms, which are customised with furnishings, toys and posters that children have chosen, prior to the child commencing their short break. These personal touches are successful in creating a home-from-home environment, where children feel safe and comfortable.

Keen listening and observational skills are used exceptionally well by staff. This helps staff to understand the wishes and feelings of children. Barriers to communication are overcome by the persistence and patience of skilled staff who are trained in different methods of communication. This, given the children's diverse ways of securing meaningful engagement, means that their feelings and views are at the heart of everyday practice. Children are encouraged to state their wishes and preferences in young peoples' meetings and in individual key working sessions. These are then used as resources by staff members, who incorporate these ideas into the planning of activities, celebration events and menus.

The one-to-one support ratio means that children are closely supervised at all times. Children appreciate the nurturing care that they receive and this is reflected in their behaviours. Children adapt to the home and become accustomed to spending time with familiar staff and other children. They grow in confidence and look forward to the ways in which they spend time with staff, both inside and outside the home.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
The interim manager ensures that staff are familiar with safeguarding procedures and protocols, and in particular safeguarding matters relating to young people who have a disability. All staff have received safeguarding training and showed a good awareness of the potential heightened risks posed to young people who have a disability. Young people are helped well to stay safe when accessing this short-break service. Staff maintain a safe environment by being vigilant at all times. There are no concerns regarding young people going missing from care. The risk of going missing is minimised by the level of staff and their one-to-one supervision of children. Each young person has a personal emergency evacuation plan that is individual to their needs. Managers and staff ensure that each separate short-stay episode is informed by a reassessment of risk, in the light of up-to-date information provided by the family or carers of the young person. Activities are risk-assessed in relation to the needs of each young person involved. Staff are proactive and creative in choosing varied and interesting activities with children, such as trampolining and cooking lessons. They are also skilled in anticipating any related dangers or risks associated with particular activities. Weekly fire tests, servicing and regular fire evacuations contribute to a safe environment. Specialist moving and handling equipment is serviced as required. Medication, including periodic and emergency medication, is well managed and suitably administered. Written protocols and consents are in place, and staff receive regular refresher training. Staff and parents are clear about expectations to ensure that children and young people receive their medication safely. Staff help children to manage lifelong conditions with dignity and respect, by providing a continuation of the care that they receive at home. Transitions to and from the home are successful because they are well managed. The good links between families and carers mean that staff have a full understanding of the children's current needs and behaviours. This shared understanding results in child-centred care where the needs of children come first. During children's time at the home, staff ensure that they are not at risk of being exploited. The close supervision of children means that they stay safe. The use of computer tablets is supervised and managed in such a way that children are protected from risks of online harm. For example, a child was observed accessing an inappropriate game on his own personal tablet, staff were immediately alert to this and liaised with his parents to ensure that this was not accessible during his	

stay at the home.

The behaviour management techniques staff use are very effective. Staff know the young people extremely well and use helpful diversionary techniques if they are becoming agitated or anxious. Staff use strategies that are individual to the young people and engage them in positive activities of their choice. A real strength of the care provided is the way in which staff express clear and consistent boundaries for children. Staff members take time to explain that the need for such boundaries is to prevent harm to staff or children. As a result, behaviour is managed well, with very few incidents and the use of physical intervention is rare. When it is used, it is as a last resort and only when it is considered that a child or others may be in danger. Most interventions are low level and are used to defuse a situation before it reaches crisis point. All incidents are recorded in detail, are subject to management review and consideration and risk assessments are updated accordingly. Children and staff are given the opportunity to express how the incident affected them, both at the time and after the event.

The robust and detailed recruitment process means that only adults who are safe to work with children are appointed to work in the home. The environment is physically safe and matters of health and safety are routinely checked by staff and visiting health and safety officers. A recent health and safety assessment deemed the home as 'outstanding' in its approach to ensuring that children are safe during their short breaks.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding
At the time of the inspection, the registered manager was on long-term sick leave. The inspector was aware of this and the responsible individual had put in place suitable arrangements for the management of the home. Care practice is shaped by the interim manager's understanding of research-based practice. She uses this to improve communication in the care setting. She has recently studied a current research paper on residential short-breaks services and used this knowledge to lead change in the way in which care is delivered. The manager also scrutinises practice to assess how each individual activity and intervention makes a difference to children's lives. Her aim is not only to provide a continuation of the care, but also to offer an experience that is meaningful to children. To this end, she has developed a recording system, which captures children's progress towards targets agreed with parents, carers and schools. These targets help to focus staff on the purpose of the care provided during a short-break	

stay. It is also captured in a visual mode in the form of a colourful ongoing path to ensure that children can clearly see their own progress. The interim manager has a clear understanding of the progress that children are making, and the service's contribution to their development. This is reflected well in her and the staff's quality of care review reports.

Exceptionally skilled, qualified and motivated staff members provide high-quality care for children. The staff team is long-standing and provides excellent continuity of care. All staff members possess the appropriate qualification to practise. The management team is proactive in its pursuit of high standards. The interim manager ensures that the home achieves its aims and objectives as set out in its statement of purpose, in terms of the quality of care provided. The parent of a young person, who has enjoyed short stays, best expresses the quality of working relationships. Reflecting on the success of the short breaks her child receives, she stated, 'The staff are fantastic, it's a home-from-home. I have peace of mind knowing that they are looking after my child.'

The managers bring a wealth of resource material to the team, keeping up to date with current issues relating to children. An outstanding feature of this research is that it relates to both parenting and children's home and residential practice. This is in line with the interim manager's emphasis on decreasing reliance on institutional practice, and promoting effective parenting. Staff also take responsibility for looking at research and bringing ideas to staff meetings. One staff member was able to discuss issues relating to 'personal space' that they had been looking at and described how this knowledge had been successfully utilised in working with a child. This further increases the staff team's knowledge.

The children's guide has been updated. The new guide is an excellent example of how the staff go that extra mile to ensure that all young people can access the document. It is in pictorial form, with a keyboard attached to give an audio version of the guide.

Records within the home are of a very high standard, capturing the children's needs and time spent at the service. However, some records are not dated and some records, such as medication audit sheets are still in the name of the registered manager, who at present is off sick. The interim manager immediately amended the documentation and has shown a commitment to ensure that all recordings are duly dated.

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 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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