

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC039673
Inspector	Jackie Line
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	Brendan Francis Lee
Registered manager	Gwyneth Marie Monk
Date of last inspection	11/02/2014

Inspection date	11/12/2014
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Previous inspection	good progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	none

This inspection	
Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for children and young people	good
Quality of care	outstanding
Keeping children and young people safe	good
Leadership and management	outstanding

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	good
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Young people live in a safe and caring environment. They are clearly happy, and one young person described her experience of living in the home as, 'absolutely, amazingly, outstanding!'

The home accommodates young people at different stages of their journey. The staff team are experienced, dedicated, and work well together to support young people. Staff are very responsive to the individual and often complex needs of young people. Care planning is creative and highly personalised. As a result, young people make good progress in many aspects of their development.

Young people say they get on well with all staff, and they clearly benefit from stable and consistent care. Young people participate in a range of new experiences and opportunities. Participation in community initiatives, together with ongoing consultation is exceptional. This helps young people develop positive relationships, build confidence, and improve their self-esteem.

Young people say they are safe, and are learning to make informed choices about their behaviour. Some young people engage with specialist services to help them with this process. Young people benefit from clear boundaries, good routines, support and nurturing provided by staff. Together, this has led to a reduction in risk

taking behaviours. As a result, young people's life chances and outcomes improve.

Leaders and managers are constantly striving to improve the service. Consequently, they devise and implement new initiatives to help maximise young people's potential. This is particularly evident in preparing young people for independence.

One requirement and two recommendations have been made following this inspection. This is to ensure young people's welfare is fully promoted when they spend time away from the home, all records relating to this are clear, and casual staff have an annual appraisal to review their performance.

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 of either sex aged from 11 to 17 years. The home takes emergency placements. Placements are also available for young people bailed or remanded by a court.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/02/2014	Interim	good progress
05/12/2013	Full	outstanding
24/01/2013	Interim	good progress
08/10/2012	Full	outstanding

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

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 Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
11 (2001)	ensure the registered person promotes and makes proper provision for the safeguarding and welfare of children accommodated there, in particular ensuring staff take appropriate action if the whereabouts of young people cannot be confirmed, and young people are not adhering to agreements in place when spending time away from the home (Regulation 11(1)(a))	30/01/2015

Recommendations

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

- ensure all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually, with particular reference to staff employed on a casual basis (NMS 19.6)
- ensure there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of records and take action when needed, in particular the quality of daily records on the electronic database when a significant event has occurred. (NMS 22.1)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **good**

Prior to placement young people have experienced chaotic or transient lifestyles, and this home provides a secure base from which they can grow and develop. Young people report consistently that 'life has got better' for them, since coming to live at the home. Young people have made good progress relative to their starting points, and in some areas young people have excelled.

The educational outcomes for most young people are excellent. Young people previously experienced significant gaps in their education. This has been addressed, and because of the routines and structure in place, most young people are now attending school or college regularly. Increased attendance has a positive impact on their learning. As a result, young people who sat examinations in the summer achieved outstanding results. Young people have gone on to college, or have successfully applied for a place on an apprenticeship scheme. This means they are investing in themselves, broadening their learning opportunities, and developing aspirations for their future.

Young people are in good health and benefit from effective and consistent health care. All young people have an individual health plan; they are registered with medical practitioners and attend health appointments. Young people have successfully completed a first aid training course, and this means they have acquired an important life skill. Young people are educated in a variety of health and well-being matters, including sexual health. As a result, young people are able to make informed decisions about, and take responsibility for their own health.

Young people are making good progress in their emotional and behavioural development. This is relative to their starting points, and length of time living at the home. Improvements are noted in young people's self-care skills, and this reflects growth in their confidence and self-esteem. One young person said: 'I clean more, I have changed the way I act, I am more confident in myself, and I have had the chance to meet new people and build relationships'. As a result, young people are developing a positive self-view.

In many areas there has been a clear reduction in risk taking behaviour. However, some young people continue to engage in risky behaviours including cannabis use, and developing some unsuitable relationships. Furthermore, not all young people adhere to agreements in place designed to promote their safety and welfare when spending time away from the home. That said, young people are involved with services, and engage in work to help them address these issues. This is a positive development, and will enable young people to continue to make progress and further improve outcomes.

Contact arrangements are complex, and staff work flexibly to support and facilitate these arrangements. This commitment is something that social workers and families acknowledge. As a result, young people's relationships with their families improve, and this means they are enjoying more constructive relationships with people who are important to them.

Young people participate in a range of activities. They report they particularly enjoyed a programme of events over the summer months, including a holiday, and trips out to animal and theme parks. Young people took part in archery, water orbing and kayaking. Young people said: 'We had an amazing time.' One young person commented that their favourite moment was, 'going on the big rides, and overcoming my fear of heights.' In addition, some young people attend regular activities, for example guitar lessons and ice-skating. All of these opportunities enable young people to develop new skills, have fun, and build their confidence.

In line with young people's individual needs, clear plans are in place to support their transition to independence. Young people participate in well thought out training programmes. This means that young people learn a range of life skills, and are prepared both practically and emotionally for their next steps. Young people said: 'Staff support us in loads of ways; they help us to set and achieve goals, and this helps us get what we want for the future'

Quality of care

outstanding

Young people are cared for by a highly dedicated staff team, who genuinely place the well-being of individual young people at the heart of what they do. Consequently, young people enjoy an excellent quality of care that young people and professionals describe as, 'nurturing, brilliant, caring, supportive, and very child focused'.

Staff and young people are relaxed with each other, and readily enjoy each other's company. Young people report that 'all staff are awesome,' and recognise that staff 'look out' for them. Indeed one young person reported to their social worker; 'no-one's ever cared for me like this'. An outstanding level of care enables young people to build positive and trusting relationships. Young people clearly enjoy living in this home and describe it as 'fun, lively and amazing'.

Staff are managing some highly complex care arrangements. They respect and understand that each young person's circumstance is unique, and staff work creatively and compassionately to meet their individual needs. One member of staff said: 'All of the young people are individuals, there are no magic wands and we work with what we have, to help young people the best we can'. This means staff respect and understand young people who present challenges. Staff are knowledgeable, and able to address issues on an ongoing basis.

Staff are clearly aware of young people's assessed needs. Placement plans are in

place, and young people's needs and progress are clearly documented. A young person comments: 'I am kept in the loop; I am very happy with my progress report. I am proud of my achievements, and agree with everything that has been written'. Young people participate in their review meetings and contribute to their plans. This means that young people are in a position to make informed decisions and choices about their day to day lives, and future plans.

Staff develop highly effective partnerships with professionals and families. All partners are full of praise for their efforts. A parent said: 'The way the staff care for my daughter is brilliant'. A social worker said: 'Staff go above and beyond what they need to do, and I do not have a bad word to say about them'. A drugs worker said: 'It is the best and nicest home I visit, and I visit lots of homes'. This collaborative approach ensures staff are working together to ensure young people's needs are met.

Consultation and participation are areas of real strength. Regular consultation meetings provide young people with opportunities to have their say. Young people are actively encouraged to make a positive contribution to the wider community, and to the lives of others. Young people have helped out serving meals at a local homeless project for young people. Moreover, together with staff, young people have organised a highly successful Christmas Fayre in order to raise funds. As a result, they have contributed to something worthwhile, learned new skills along the way, and gained a real sense of achievement. Young people have also developed awareness and understanding about social problems. A young person went on to give a presentation at school about homelessness. She subsequently received high praise for this accomplishment, and a fellow student said they had changed their views as a result of listening to what she had to say.

Education is a high priority for staff, and they work tremendously hard to support young people to realise their potential. Where there are challenges staff are persistent, remain focused, and work proactively to overcome these. A head teacher said: 'They don't do barriers, they deal with issues head on. This means there is no delay in sorting things out'. Staff work creatively to support young people to manage exam stress. For example, they arranged pamper evenings to help young people relax. This level of individual care undoubtedly contributes to young people's progress and success.

The home environment is maintained to a high standard, and is warm and welcoming for young people and visitors. Young people have their own rooms that are personalised, and one young person commented, 'I love my room'. Photographs and mementos on display reflect young people's positive experiences, and celebrate their achievements.

Keeping children and young people safe good

Young people are safeguarded and protected by trained staff. Young people say they feel safe, and they can talk to staff or their social workers if they are worried about anything. Young people report they know how to complain should they wish to do so, and they are aware of children's rights services. This helps to promote and protect young people's welfare.

Young people are encouraged and supported to take appropriate risks in line with their age, needs and development. Individual agreements are in place, in order to safely manage particular circumstances, for example young people having overnight stays with friends or family. These set out clear expectations regarding behaviour, and actions to take should things not go to plan. Young people contribute and sign up to these agreements, as do a range of adults involved. Although this demonstrates good safeguarding practice, some young people and partners do not always adhere to the agreements in place. This compromises their effectiveness. In addition, staff have not always taken immediate follow-up action when this has come to light, and this does not wholly ensure young people's safety and well-being.

Due to their history and background, some young people can occasionally place themselves at risk through their behaviour and actions. Staff do work hard to address vulnerabilities and minimise risk. Young people are protected through robust risk assessments. Furthermore, when there are incidents of risky behaviour, staff ensure multi-agency meetings take place to review strategies. This ensures that situations are managed, and this helps to keep young people safe. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in young people engaging in serious risk taking behaviours. This includes missing from home, drug misuse, involvement in child sexual exploitation, self-harm and criminality. Therefore, young people make demonstrable progress with regards to keeping safe.

When young people do go missing, or are not where they are supposed to be, systems are in place to deal with this. Recording can be brief, and it is not always easy to determine what action has been taken to locate young people or ensure their safe return. Because missing episodes are clearly reducing, management strategies are effective. That said recording of such matters is an area identified for improvement, to ensure there is a clear account of actions and decisions taken by staff.

Young people recognise that good behaviour is rewarded, and praise and rewards lessen the need for disciplinary measures. When consequences are implemented they are proportionate, and young people say they are 'treated fairly'. Young people's behaviour is managed through staff developing respectful and warm relationships with young people. Incidents of restraint are rare, and it is clear that this is only ever used as a last resort.

Robust recruitment practice ensures that only suitable people are employed to work with young people. Criminal Records Bureau and reference checks are undertaken, and these are repeated at suitable intervals during their employment and this helps

to protect young people.

Young people live in a physically safe environment. They are protected by a range of health and safety procedures, risk assessments and routine fire checks that ensure the premises are safe. Fire drills are undertaken regularly. This means that young people and staff know how to evacuate the home safely in the event of such an emergency.

Leadership and management

outstanding

The Registered Manager has been in post at this home since 2010, and she holds and appropriate management qualification. The Registered Manager demonstrates highly effective leadership which is recognised by staff, young people and professionals alike. One professional described the manager's oversight as 'excellent' and says, 'she is very in tune with what is going on'.

There is a clear ethos within the home, and both managers and staff have high expectations. They are all aspirational for young people. Practice has been enhanced between inspections through the implementation of a series of initiatives. These include young people's involvement in community projects, and an innovative programme of work to prepare young people for independent living. This demonstrates that the manager is always looking to progress the service in ways that are highly beneficial to young people.

Staff confirm they are well supported and receive supervision regularly. Appraisals for permanent staff all take place within timescales. Staff employed on a casual basis do not receive an appraisal, and this is highlighted as an area for improvement. There is a comprehensive training programme in place, and the management team is committed to staff development. This means all staff access a range of courses to keep up to date with their learning, and consequently they are equipped with the necessary skills to meet the needs of young people in their care.

Staff morale is high. There is very low staff turnover and young people benefit from a stable and consistent staff team. As a result, young people develop meaningful relationships. Because of this and the supportive and nurturing culture in place, young people make good progress.

Internal and external monitoring takes place regularly, and is suitably robust. This monitoring system takes account of the views of young people, parents and social workers. Effective quality monitoring enables excellent standards to be maintained. Furthermore, the Registered Manager has a clear understanding of the strengths of the service, and areas highlighted for development. As a result, development plans and target setting for the service are realistic, and designed to secure continued improvement.

No requirements or recommendations were set at the last inspection, and no complaints have been made about the home between inspections.

What inspection judgements mean

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Good	A service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements.
Adequate	A service that only meets minimum requirements.
Inadequate	A service that does not meet minimum requirements.

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The 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 relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the framework of inspection for children's homes.