

SC039673

Registered provider: Lancashire County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

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, who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Inspection dates: 11 to 12 December 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 10 February 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is outstanding because:

- Young people receive outstanding care that meets their individual needs and enhances their day-to-day lives. Young people, their parents and external professionals are highly satisfied with the service.
- Young people enjoy warm and nurturing relationships with staff. Young people trust staff and feel safe and well looked after.
- Staff take time to understand young people and learn about what is important to them.
- Staff promote the importance of education and are highly proactive in ensuring that young people have the necessary support to overcome barriers to education.
- Staff work hard to positively engage young people's families where appropriate. They closely support and facilitate contact between young people and their families.
- The needs of young people moving into or out of the home are carefully considered so that the young people benefit from well-planned care.
- Young people have confidence in staff and feel safe in their care.
- Risks to young people's safety and well-being are clearly identified and carefully managed, in partnership with external agencies where appropriate.
- Young people are helped to learn about maintaining their own safety through innovative and creative practice.
- Young people are positively supported to develop safe and appropriate behaviours.
- Staff are well supported and report a positive and open culture.
- A comprehensive training programme helps to ensure that staff have the necessary skills and knowledge to provide safe and effective care.
- A commitment towards continuous development means that young people benefit from a constantly improving service.

The children's home's areas for development:

- Improvements in the recording of measures used to support young people to develop safe and appropriate behaviours would enable the registered manager to monitor the area more effectively, and help to ensure that a consistent approach is maintained.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
10/02/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
09/11/2016	Full	Outstanding
26/01/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
27/05/2015	Full	Outstanding

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

Recommendations

- The capacity and competence of staff to build constructive, warm relationships with children that actively promote positive behaviour, provides the foundations for managing any negative behaviour. In respect of behaviour support planning, staff should have clear guidance about how to respond to each child's individual behaviour. ('Guide to the children's home regulations including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.14)
- Specifically relating to the use of consequences. The registered person should ensure that all incidents of control, discipline and restraint are subject to systems of regular scrutiny to ensure that their use is fair, and that the above principles as set out in 9.35 are respected. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 49, paragraph 9.36)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Young people make outstanding progress due to the highly individualised, responsive care they receive. For example, young people grow in confidence and achieve in education, often when this not been previously possible for them. Young people's emotional well-being has improved, which has helped them to build more positive relationships and make safer choices.

Feedback from young people is highly complimentary. They speak very positively about their experiences at the home. Their comments include: 'It doesn't feel like a children's home. It just feels like home.' and, 'They have helped me make the best of myself.' Parents also speak highly of the service: 'Staff are fantastic at understanding [name removed]'s needs and support her effectively as a result.' and, 'I would like to thank each and every one of them for the positive impact that they have had on my child and, in turn, our family relationship. They are an absolute credit to the system.'

The positive view communicated by young people and their parents is reflected in the feedback received from community professionals. A social worker commented, 'They have young people at the heart of their agenda. The manager and staff team are highly committed to all of the young people I review and go above and beyond to ensure their needs are met and that they are advocated for.'

The registered manager considers new placements very carefully and ensures that any new young people being introduced to the home will not have a negative impact on those already living there. There is careful consideration as to whether a young person's needs can be safely met before they are admitted to the home. As a result, young

people's placements rarely break down, which means young people benefit from stability and consistency.

The turnover of staff is low, which means that young people receive their care from staff who know them well and understand their needs. A key strength of the service is the ability of managers and staff to build warm and trusting relationships with the young people in their care. Young people describe staff in ways such as 'awesome', 'the best' and 'amazing.' One young person said, 'I get on with them all, for sure. They are sound. Caring, but not in your face all the time.' Another young person recently made a photograph album of staff and called it 'My Fam [family]'.

The positive relationships shared by staff and young people strongly promote young people's emotional well-being. A social worker said, 'Young people feel it. They know that staff care, and they respond to that. The relationships they build with young people are a real strength.'

Staff are sensitive to the things that matter to young people. For example, one young person's care plan includes clear guidance about the significance of a soft toy, and clear instructions to staff not to wash or move it. Recently, a young person was supported by a staff member to have a small ceremony and release a balloon on a date significant to a loved one who had passed away.

Young people's views and opinions are valued and encouraged. Regular consultation, for example, through young people's meetings, helps to ensure that young people are enabled to have a say about the day-to-day running of the home. Staff work hard to support young people in expressing their wishes in regards to their own care and support. Innovative key-working methods, developed by staff from the home, make direct work with young people more meaningful and fun. As a result, they engage and benefit from the direct work.

Each young person has been supported to develop an easy-read care plan, called 'looking after me'. This gives young people the opportunity to state how they want to be cared for and supported. Young people are encouraged to access external advocacy services to further support them in expressing their views. The registered manager recently invited external advocates to attend a young people's meeting, to talk about how they could support them. Knowing that they are listened to helps young people to feel valued and gives them some control about the decisions that affect them.

Staff strongly support young people to achieve in education and, as a result, young people make significant, and in some cases outstanding, progress in this area. For example, one young person has recently received an award from her college for 100% attendance and is progressing extremely well. This is from the starting point of not engaging in education when she was admitted to the home. Another young person is progressing so well that it has been agreed that he will take a number of GCSEs, which was not previously thought to be possible. This is as a direct result of the home advocating strongly for specialised provision to meet his needs. There is evidence that staff communicate effectively with education professionals to ensure that young people

receive the appropriate support. One professional commented that an extremely effective relationship with the home ensured the safety, well-being and educational achievement of the young person attending their establishment.

A further strength of the managers and staff is their ability to develop positive partnerships with parents of the young people they support. A strong theme from discussions and feedback received from parents was their view that they feel supported and included. One parent said, 'Staff are always willing to listen and support my views and opinions. This makes me feel like I am an active parent.' Contact is closely supported to enable young people to maintain relationships with people who are important to them. For example, a parent and sibling of one young person have been invited to spend Christmas Day at the home.

Young people are encouraged to engage in fulfilling activities and enjoy a range of recreational activities. This includes football, cheerleading, trips to the cinema and bowling. Young people recently enjoyed a holiday in Scotland, during which they took part in a number of fun activities. One young person made a scrap book about the holiday and called it 'Best Memories Ever'.

Staff support young people to participate in their local community. For example, one young person regularly takes part in voluntary work with homeless people in the local area. She has been involved in this project for some time and has been able to use this experience to assist her in providing evidence for her health and social care college course. These experiences help to develop young people's confidence, life chances and sense of belonging.

Young people moving into and out of the home benefit from well-planned transitions. A social worker described the recent admission of a young person she supported. She said, 'The young person quickly settled extremely well. I feel that this was due to the effective and prompt transition planning.'

There is evidence of an individualised approach to assist young people in developing independence skills. For example, staff described how they adapted an independence programme to meet the needs of a young person who did not find written information helpful. A social worker said, 'I have experienced and observed an innovative approach to transition planning for young people around the development of independence skills and preparation for their next steps.' One young person, who recently left the home in a planned move to independence, left a letter to staff which read, 'I just want to thank you for helping me, putting me on the right path, always having faith in me and never giving up on me.'

How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding

Young people feel safe and express confidence in the staff. They confirm that they are able to talk to staff about any worries they may have. Staff are sensitive to the needs of young people and understand that it is not always easy for them to share their worries. As a result, they have introduced an innovative method whereby young people are

encouraged to choose a key word they can use to alert staff to the fact that they are feeling upset or worried. This means young people can let staff know they need some support without having to go into great detail before they are ready to.

Staff have a clear understanding of young people's needs and are aware of any individual risks to their safety or well-being. Clear risk assessments identify specific concerns and provide guidance for staff about how to keep young people safe. A community professional described the home as 'extremely proactive' in managing risk and commented that the home worked positively with external professionals to maintain young people's safety. They commented, 'They have previously made a referral to the engage CSE team, reported concerns to myself and have responded to issues by updating risk assessments and increasing the level of monitoring.'

All new staff receive safeguarding training at the start of their employment. This training is regularly updated to ensure that they maintain their knowledge and are aware of any changes in good practice. Staff are clear about their role and responsibility in keeping young people safe from harm and show good understanding of reporting procedures. As a result, any safeguarding concerns are promptly responded to. Staff are aware of the organisation's whistleblowing policy and express confidence in managers to deal with any concerns appropriately.

Staff at the home have developed an innovative tool kit to help support young people who may self-harm. This includes some assessment tools to help staff gain an understanding of individual young people's triggers for self-harm, and an understanding of how they wish to be supported. In addition, young people are encouraged to develop a personalised box of items that they feel may assist in times of anxiety or when they are feeling low. Young people have engaged well in this process, and, as a result, incidents of self-harm have reduced. The tool kit has been complimented by professionals from an external mental health service and is currently being rolled out to other homes in the organisation.

Young people are helped to learn about keeping themselves safe. Staff are skilled in engaging young people in such learning and use creative methods to help them do so. For example, some young people were encouraged to create posters with staff about safe internet use recently. All young people in the home have been involved in the creation of a 'Conflict Charter'. This has helped them to learn about respecting each other and to manage disagreements in a positive way. Again, young people have been engaged in this process and also respond positively to meaningful one-to-one work on the subjects of conflict and bullying.

Due to the support provided at the home and the positive relationships young people have with staff, young people make outstanding progress in reducing, or in some cases ceasing, high-risk behaviours such as being missing or engaging in anti-social behaviour. Incidents of young people being missing from the home do not occur frequently. However, when they do staff take appropriate action to safeguarding the missing young person, including alerting the relevant agencies and conducting searches.

Staff have a good understanding of young people and the things that may trigger emotional responses. Staff are skilled in supporting young people to manage their feelings and behaviour in a safe way. Records of incidents demonstrate that staff are able to de-escalate potentially volatile situations before they reach crisis point. As a result, incidents of restraint or physical intervention are a rare occurrence in the home. However, some of the preferred strategies for individual young people could be clearer in their individual support plans. The parent of one young person commented, 'Since he has lived there he is not as angry. That is one of the biggest changes I have seen. He is calm and talking more about things that annoy him, rather than flaring up.'

There is careful consideration given to how young people can be supported to develop safer and more appropriate behaviours. The use of sanctions or consequences is adapted to meet young people's individual needs. For example, it was agreed that in the case of one young person, using sanctions to support them in developing safe behaviours would not be effective, and as such alternative strategies were agreed. Sanctions are not used excessively and are proportionate and relevant. However, it was noted that on a small number of occasions their use had not been properly recorded. It is important that the use of sanctions is carefully recorded and monitored and, as such, a recommendation is raised to support further improvement.

Young people are provided with safe, comfortable accommodation. The home is well maintained and furnished to a high standard. A variety of health and safety checks are carried out on a regular basis. This helps to ensure that any potential safety issues are dealt with quickly and that young people's safety and well-being is promoted.

There are well established procedures in place, which means that all new staff members are carefully recruited. All prospective employees are required to undergo a range of background checks before they are offered employment. Some checks, such as police record checks, are periodically updated to ensure that any new information is obtained. This reduces the risk of young people being in contact with adults of unsuitable character, and therefore helps to safeguard them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The home benefits from outstanding leadership by a suitably qualified and experienced registered manager. The registered manager demonstrates a strong commitment to child-centred practice and shows high ambition for the young people in her care. There is a strong management team in place that demonstrates that it is keen to develop the service on an ongoing basis, by continually developing new and innovative practice.

Feedback from young people, parents, staff and external stakeholders about the management of the home is consistently positive. A parent commented, 'You can talk to them. They have time for you and you are not made to feel like a problem.' A social worker said, 'In my opinion, it is one of the best homes I have worked with.'

Staff are dedicated and highly motivated. The turnover of staff at this home is extremely low. This means that young people benefit from stability and receive their care from

people who know them well. A social worker commented, 'Many of the staff have worked at the home for a number of years. Therefore, this provides consistency and experience.'

Staff speak highly of the management team and describe a positive and open culture. Staff feel that their views are encouraged and heard. One staff member explained that after she had given the registered manager some feedback about how she felt the induction process could be improved, she was invited to take part in the development of a new induction process in the new year. She said, 'It is great to have your opinion valued.'

Staff report an excellent level of support from managers. They confirm that regular supervision takes place and that managers are available to provide advice and guidance at any time. One staff member said, 'You couldn't ask for anything better.' The registered manager has considered how the support to staff can be enhanced further and has recently introduced development evenings for casual staff. This is to assist them in developing their knowledge and practice, and includes discussions about various aspects of their role and good practice.

All team members receive a good range of training to support their professional development. All staff were highly complimentary about the training provided and felt it enhanced their skills and knowledge. One staff member spoke about additional support she had received to complete her training programme. An apprentice staff member described her support and training as 'excellent' and felt she had been supported to develop both personally and professionally. The majority of staff members hold nationally recognised qualifications in caring for children and young people. The small number of recently appointed staff who do not yet have these qualifications are in the process of obtaining them.

The registered manager makes effective use of quality monitoring, and carries out regular checks of safety and quality across the service. This enables her to identify and address areas for improvement on an ongoing basis.

Managers constantly look for ways to develop the service. They are aware of the home's strengths and weaknesses and are keen to understand the experiences of young people when assessing the effectiveness of the service. There is evidence of a creative approach to gaining young people's views. For example, as part of the staff appraisal process, young people were recently invited to help organise a staff award ceremony. Young people were asked to decide on what they felt were strengths of individual staff members and present awards. This was a very successful event, enjoyed by the young people, their parents and social workers.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children

and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and 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.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, 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'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC039673

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Lancashire County Council, PO Box 78, Preston PR1 8XJ

Responsible individual: Paul McIntyre

Registered manager: Gwyneth Monk

Inspector

Marie Cordingley, social care inspector

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