

Children's homes – Interim inspection

Inspection date	1 March 2017
Unique reference number	SC039689
Type of inspection	Interim
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Lancashire County Council
Registered provider's address	Residential Services, Lancashire County Council, County Hall – Room C17, Preston PR1 8RJ

Responsible individual	Paul McIntyre
Registered manager	Post vacant/Steven Searle
Inspector	Jackie Line

Previous inspection date	02/06/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Good
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection This home was judged good at the last full inspection. At this interim inspection, Ofsted judges that it has sustained effectiveness. The new manager's application to register with Ofsted has progressed and a suitable-person interview has now taken place. The outcome of the interview is that a recommendation to register the manager has been forwarded to the regional inspection manager for a decision. The manager provides strong and effective leadership to staff and young people. Clear expectations and guidance enable staff to understand and carry out their role and responsibilities well. As a result, staff provide young people with good standards of care, which promote young people's development and progress. Staff report that they feel well supported by the manager. They welcome the appointment of a permanent manager and say that this has helped bring about stability and consistency for them and for young people. The manager presents as being very knowledgeable about the needs of young people and staff. He understands the strengths and needs of the service well and identifies developmental priorities. Robust internal monitoring systems support the home's development. For example, the introduction of bi-monthly quality assurance days carried out by a fellow children's home manager provides an additional layer of oversight. It allows shortfalls to be identified and addressed and this ensures that good standards are maintained. Furthermore, it shows a commitment by the manager to drive improvements forward. Initiatives benefit young people. For example, staff have designed and introduced a 'Looking after me' booklet that they complete with young people. This gives young people input into their daily care and outlines things that are important to them. Furthermore, it is a tool which helps young people to understand why they are in care and what is happening with their future plans. This represents good practice and is an initiative worthy of wider dissemination. Young people enjoy a range of activities that reflect their interests and talents. For example, one young person now enjoys going trampolining regularly, another goes	

cheerleading after school and two young people go horse riding. Young people enjoyed either a summer holiday to the coast or a series of days out, in line with their individual needs. As a result, young people participate in different activities and experiences that help them to learn new skills while having fun.

At the time of the last inspection, five recommendations were raised and all have been addressed.

Improved record-keeping means that daily records contain more information and context. This makes it easier for the reader to understand the events that take place in the home.

Good systems are now in place to check on young people's welfare when they spend time in the community with their friends. Staff have a good understanding of whom young people spend time with and where they go. This promotes young people's safety and well-being. Young people have sleepovers with their friends and so enjoy ordinary childhood experiences. Staff adopt a good parenting approach by talking to friends' parents to ensure that arrangements are safe.

Staff respond robustly whenever they have concerns about a young person's welfare. If young people are not where they are supposed to be, or are late home, staff take action to locate them and ensure their safe return. The staff liaise well with the police, when necessary, and share any concerns appropriately. They have a positive working relationship with the missing-from-home co-ordinator, who describes staff as 'extremely proactive'. For one young person, missing episodes have reduced significantly and he has not been reported missing since October 2016. This reflects the good progress he has made with this aspect of his behaviour.

Some young people misuse drugs. Staff understand the risks associated with young people's drug misuse better than they once did. They talk to young people about the dangers of this behaviour, limit access to monies, and ensure that they have access to specialist services. As a result, staff take action to minimise the harm that drug misuse can cause.

Staff understand and manage risk well. Robust risk assessments contain sufficient detail and provide good guidance for staff to follow. One young person presents particularly risky behaviour both at home and when he is out in the community. This includes causing damage to property, being threatening and abusive, and on occasions being aggressive towards others. Managers and staff know this young person well and have developed good strategies to help minimise the risk of harm that he poses to himself and others. The staff work well with partner agencies including the police and the youth offending team to share information and manage challenging and risky situations. Staff have provided this young person with placement stability and consistency, which has enabled him to make progress relative to his starting point. The efforts of staff reflect their resilience, tenacity and compassion when working with challenging young people. The young person's

social worker described the staff team as 'one of the most dedicated teams of staff I have the pleasure of working with'.

Staff report that balancing the highly complex needs of some young people while meeting the needs of others is difficult. Resources, time and attention are drawn away from other young people to support those who present the greatest risk. Although staff work hard to minimise the effect of some young people's behaviour on others, there is an impact nevertheless. Young people report that it is hard to live alongside young people who present challenging and volatile behaviour, and that sometimes they find this scary. This undermines young people's right to live in a calm and stable environment, compromises their sense of safety, and does impact on their experience of living in this home. A requirement is raised so that leaders and managers fully listen to young people's views about their experiences and take this into account when care planning.

This inspection highlights shortfalls in some aspects of care planning. Young people with highly complex needs continue to reside in a multi-occupancy children's home. This is in spite of the challenges that this presents and the impact that this has on other young people. Furthermore, some young people have been admitted into the home in an emergency, regardless of the fact that impact assessments stipulate that this is not appropriate. Although the manager has raised concerns about this with senior managers within the authority, these are not acted upon. This highlights deficits in care-planning processes which undermine young people's safety and welfare. The inspector also identified that the recommendations from one young person's statutory review meeting differ from what the staff believe was discussed and agreed. This needs to be clarified without delay, to ensure that staff are working in accordance with this young person's care plan.

Young people's education outcomes vary. Some young people make very good progress relative to their starting points. For example, two young people now access more hours of education each day than they did when they first arrived. This reflects the improvements that they have made over time and it promotes their learning. One young person is successfully engaged in a farming project and his attendance has increased. However, one young person is currently refusing to attend school and the professionals involved are at an impasse, unable to progress and agree upon an alternative plan. Another young person no longer attends full-time education and this has occurred without due planning. Managers and staff are liaising with education professionals and the virtual school to address these matters, but as yet they remain unresolved. Delays in resolving education plans for these young people are likely to impact on their learning and progress.

Young people's ability to manage day-to-day routines varies. Those young people who are not in education engage intermittently in structured activities within the home during the school day. They are slow to rise in the morning, despite the efforts of staff. This does not help young people get into good habits and prepare them for when they do return to school. A recommendation is raised to bring more consistency to young people's daily routines.

Information about this children's home

This service is a local authority children's home. The home provides care and accommodation for six young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
02/06/2016	Full	Good
28/01/2016	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
18/08/2015	Full	Requires improvement
26/03/2015	Interim	Sustained effectiveness

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
7: The children's views, wishes and feelings standard In order to meet the children's views, wishes and feelings standard, ensure that children receive care from staff who— (1)(a) take their views, wishes and feelings into account in relation to matters affecting the children's care and welfare and their lives.	14/04/2017
14: The care planning standard In order to meet the care planning standard, ensure that children— (1)(a) receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home.	14/04/2017

Recommendations

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

- Ensure that the home meets children's basic day-to-day needs and physical necessities. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph, 3.8)

Specifically, that staff support young people to develop good routines to enable them to get up in the mornings in preparation for the school day.

- Ensure that when children placed in the home are not participating in education because they have been excluded or are not on roll for some other reason, the registered person and staff must work closely with the placing authority so that the child is supported and enabled to resume full-time education as soon as possible. ('Guide to the children's home regulations including the quality standards', page 28, paragraph 5.15)

In particular, ensure that the registered person challenges professionals to progress young people's plans so that they return to school and increase their participation in education, in line with their individual needs.

What the inspection judgements mean

At the interim inspection we make a judgement on whether the home has improved in effectiveness, sustained effectiveness, or declined in effectiveness since the previous full inspection. This is in line with the 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

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. Whenever 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 whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This inspection focused on the effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection.

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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