

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC047483
Inspector	Sharon Treadwell
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Mulberry House Care Homes Limited
Registered person address	Tollgate Business Centre Tollgate Drive Stafford Staffordshire ST16 3HS
Responsible individual	Karen Elizabeth Ingley
Registered manager	POST VACANT / Elizabeth Diane Nixon
Date of last inspection	10/02/2014

Inspection date	18/09/2014
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Previous inspection	inadequate progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	none

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

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	adequate
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The home's inspection history demonstrates that this service is often operating in a reactive, rather than a proactive and constructive way. Whenever Ofsted, as the regulator, identifies that regulations and national minimum standards are not being met the home takes appropriate action to address the shortfalls highlighted, in a timely way. However, there has been insufficient demonstration that leaders and managers have consistently and effectively utilised their monitoring of the quality of service delivery to progressively improve outcomes and services for young people. For this reason, steady progress has not been effectively sustained. This situation has been exacerbated by two changes of manager since the last full inspection and by the lack of a consistent, permanent staff team. These factors limit the opportunity for young people to make meaningful attachments and impact on the home's capacity to provide consistency of care. The current manager is acutely aware of the home's strengths and weaknesses and reflects a determination to implement a progressive programme of service development. She has begun to implement more rigorous monitoring practices. Current staff recruitment activity reflects the organisations realisation that it needs to employ experienced staff and improve its capacity for staff retention.

The home provides an adequate standard of care and young people feel happy and safe at the home. Staff reflect a real commitment to supporting young people to

maintain positive contact with their families and to be proud of their achievements. Young people's families speak very positively about staff and about their children's placements generally. Some placing social workers speak positively about the real commitment staff have to helping young people to moderate those behaviours, which place them at risk. Some young people feel that they have made positive progress whilst at this home and have developed a better ability to look after themselves. They feel more in control of their emotions and feelings and say that they have good relationships with some of the staff. Young people's demonstrated satisfaction with their placements reflects the fact that their positive relationships with staff have protected them well from the impact of the practice shortfalls identified.

Two requirements have been identified during this inspection. Independent monitoring visits, commissioned by the provider organisation, need to sufficiently consider the views of young people, their families and placing authorities about the conduct of the home. The provider organisation must also urgently address the current shortfall in the home's permanent staffing complement.

Seven recommendations have been made. The home must identify suitable arrangements for staff to deputise for the manager, when she is absent, and the manager must demonstrate, through effective planning and rota management, that the home is always efficiently staffed. The home must recognise, and record, how the potential risks associated with lone working are managed. Some of the very positive work, which staff undertake with young people, is not being recorded in such a way as to demonstrate its impact on outcomes for those young people. Records should demonstrate the advocacy carried out by the home in relation to promoting the need for further education opportunities and also how the independence training is suitably focused around the individual needs of the young people. The record keeping should also be carried out in such a way as to enable young people to understand what has occurred and the progress they have made should they request to see their records in the future.

Full report

Information about this children's home

This privately owned children's home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to two young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
10/02/2014	Interim	inadequate progress
16/05/2013	Full	good
13/09/2012	Interim	inadequate progress
31/05/2012	Full	inadequate

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
25 (2001)	ensure that a sufficient number of competent and experienced persons are employed at the home, having regard to the statement of purpose and the number and needs of the young people accommodated, in order that young people's continuity of care is not disrupted by the regular use of agency and temporary staff (Regulation 25(1))	31/10/2014
33 (2001)	ensure that independent monitoring visits to the home, commissioned by the provider organisation, incorporate interviews with young people, their parents, relatives and staff. The written reports	31/10/2014

	must reflect clear opinions about whether young people are effectively safeguarded and how their wellbeing is promoted (Regulation 33(8))	
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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 that records demonstrate pro-active work with young people's placing local authorities to advocate for young people's appropriate access to relevant educational opportunities, particularly in relation to further education opportunities (NMS 8.7)
- ensure that records clearly demonstrate that the support young people are given, to prepare and support them into adulthood and independence, is tailored to their individual needs and provides them with all of the skills identified under this standard (NMS 12.1)
- ensure that the registered manager has the capacity to effectively manage the staffing of the home in such a way as to deliver sound quality care and meet the needs of individual young people accommodated at the home (NMS 14.5)
- demonstrate, through the completion and implementation of an effective plan, how the home will maintain compliance with regulations and National Minimum Standards when staffing levels fall to a level, which renders this problematic (NMS 15.4)
- implement appropriate arrangements for staff to deputise in the registered manager's absence ensuring that the person designated to this role has at least one year's supervisory experience (NMS 17.4)
- ensure that policies, procedures and risk assessments fully address the risks associated with one-to-one working, particularly where this involves temporary or agency staff (NMS 17.9)
- ensure that information about young people is recorded in such a way as to help young people when they access their files now or in the future, specifically to understand and appreciate the progress they make whilst at the home (NMS 22.6)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **adequate**

Young people say that they are happy at this home and that the staff care about what happens to them. In recently completed provider feedback sheets, the young people and their parents were asked to rate their happiness with this placement on a scale of one to ten. The young people and their parents all gave scores of either nine or ten. One of the parents commented, 'The staff are kind, understanding and make me very welcome. You could ask me any question about the home and I have nothing but good to say.'

Young people are supported well to maintain contact with their families. Staff provide transport for young people to visit families on a regular basis and families feel very welcome at the home. One parent stated, 'We are not only made welcome but are also very well looked after and a meal is often provided too.' Some placing social workers also say that the home provides a homely and welcoming environment: one reported, 'The home environment is very welcoming. She is allowed to display posters and pictures that are meaningful just to her and this makes for a really homely environment.'

Some of the young people have made significant progress in dealing with their emotions and feelings, and in controlling their anger, because of work done with them by staff and by health care professionals. One of the young people said, 'My behaviour is better. I deal with frustration better.'

The young people have diagnosed health conditions such as autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and some have allocated learning disability support workers to provide additional support with these conditions. These conditions exacerbate their emotional and behavioural difficulties. Some young people have engaged positively with input from mental health professionals to help them manage their more challenging and unsafe behaviours. One of the parents commented, 'She has done really well. She has really calmed down and her behaviour is really much better.' However, some of the young people, have been reluctant to access the additional support offered.

The young people, currently living at the home, are older teenagers who have left mainstream education. The young people have generally been well supported and encouraged to engage with specialist college and training placements to further develop their knowledge and life skills. For some young people though their presenting behaviours have meant that such placements have not been sustained. Currently none of the young people are in employment or education and this is not good for their development or their morale.

Young people say that they have learnt some skills to help them move more positively

into independent living such as cooking, self-care, washing, ironing and keeping their home clean. The young people are of an age where they are generally reluctant to engage in activities with staff, preferring to meet with friends. However they do sometimes go shopping with staff, indulge in make-up and manicure sessions and go out for meals. They appear relaxed and comfortable when talking with staff and say that they have particularly good relationships with their key workers.

Some young people's placing authorities are less positive, than the young people themselves or their parents, about the progress they have made whilst placed at this home. One authority fed back that care within the home 'has only ever been just good enough' and say they feel this way because of the inconsistencies in management and staffing

There are regular house meetings where young people can express their views about life at the home and there are good individual opportunities for young people to talk, with staff, about more personal issues. Young people say that they feel listened to but were unable to tell inspectors that had changed as a result of their suggestions.

Quality of care

adequate

Relationships between young people and some staff were observed by inspectors to be very positive. Young people are relaxed, chatty and comfortable in their home environment. One of the young people said, 'Some of the staff really care about me and keep me safe.'

Staffing at the home has been extremely inconsistent over the last year with changes of managers and permanent staff. There is currently very high usage of agency staff and, although the home endeavours to use agency staff who are familiar with the young people to cover shifts, this does not promote consistency of care or support young people to make positive attachments.

Young people's placement, health and behaviour management plans do guide staff in meeting young people's individual needs and in promoting the achievement of placement aims and objectives. In many instances, however, the good quality of some individual pieces of work undertaken by staff, with young people, is not reflected in records retained. Key work sessions, for example, are not clearly linked to placement plan objectives. The home has a very comprehensive independence skills folder to support staff work with the young people and in helping the young people to develop skills and knowledge to promote effective transitions to independent living. Currently, though, there is insufficient indication of this programme being individually tailored to young people's needs. In some instances, staff have signed young people off as competent in particular areas of knowledge or skill, for example independent travel, with no indication of how this has been demonstrated. The result is that, whilst young people have clearly achieved some good practical skills to support them in caring for themselves, their overall

knowledge, awareness and capacity to function independently is not well demonstrated.

There were concerns identified, during the previous interim inspection of the home, regarding poor management of medication. This has significantly improved with the implementation of effective systems for the receipt, administration and disposal of medication and of clear, efficient recording practices. All staff have received training to ensure that they fully understand the new system.

There are instances where staff have worked hard to facilitate young people's continuing access to education after they have left school. However the home does not always advocate pro-actively enough with placing authorities, and education providers, to highlight the importance that obtaining and sustaining such placements plays in building young people's confidence and competence as they move towards adulthood. This means that the sustained efforts of staff to promote young people's educational engagement are not always well supported by partner agencies.

The home is appropriately located and is maintained, decorated and furnished to an acceptable standard. Some young people have inflicted significant damage around the home and repairs have generally been affected quickly to maintain the homely environment. The home's development plan demonstrates a commitment to ongoing redecoration and replacement of furniture and fittings to keep the home looking clean and tidy. This is very much though work continually in progress.

Keeping children and young people safe adequate

Young people say that they feel safe at the home. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and, more recently, are benefitting from the expertise and demonstrated knowledge of the new manager, who is a qualified child protection trainer. This is supporting staff to become more skilled and aware with regard to the practical implementation of the theoretical knowledge that their training provides. Placing social workers say that the staff prioritise young people's safety well: one worker reported, 'He has very complex needs and the staff are very committed to him. They focus on keeping him safe.'

Young people, and their families, are aware of the procedure for making a complaint. Young people have used the home's complaints process and been happy with how their complaints have been addressed. The manager has made changes to how complaints are recorded to improve the clarity regarding the procedures followed and actions taken when complaints are received.

Staff recruitment procedures are sound and ensure that all required checks are completed before staff commence employment at the home. Where agency staff are used the manager retains wholly appropriate records to demonstrate their suitability to work with young people. Visitors to the home are properly supervised. All of this

ensures that young people are not placed at risk of exposure to people who may be a danger to them.

For some young people their engagement with staff, and with mental health professionals, has helped them to reduce some of their more challenging and unsafe behaviours. This has resulted in a reduction in self-harm and in fewer instances of them going missing from the home. Clear and robust, individual protocols are in place to detail what action is taken when young people go missing. Staff share information appropriately with young people's placing authorities, and work co-operatively with the police, to promote young people's safety when this happens.

The staff rarely restrain young people and will only do so if the safety of young people or staff is compromised by a young person's behaviour. Appropriate records are retained when restraint is used. The home has good links with the local police and local community support officers visit the home and build relationships with young people. This helps young people to develop more positive views about the police and, when incidents do occur, promotes more positive co-operative working to resolve them.

Young people, staff and visitors are protected within the home by the completion of regular servicing and checks on gas, electrical and fire safety equipment.

Individual risk assessments are in place to identify how any particularly hazardous or potentially unsafe behaviours are managed to reduce risks. However, the home does not have robust policy and procedural guidance, or sound risk assessments, to demonstrate proper consideration of the risks posed by lone working, particularly for the agency staff who are less familiar with the young people.

Leadership and management

adequate

The current manager has been in post since August 4th 2014 and holds relevant qualifications. She has considerable experience in managing children's homes, accommodating young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and has been registered as a home manager with Ofsted since 2009. A suitable person interview has been conducted during this inspection and the manager has been judged suitable to be registered as the manager of this home. The manager additionally manages another of the provider organisation's children's homes, which is registered to accommodate one young person. Currently there are not appropriate, permanent arrangements, at this home, for staff to deputise for the manager in her absence. Temporary arrangements have been put in place, since the inspection, and notified to Ofsted in writing.

There have been a number of management changes at the home, over the last two years, and in the permanent staff compliment at the home. Currently there is a significant shortfall in the numbers of permanent staff at the home resulting in heavy

use of agency staff. The rota system operated within the home has too little flexibility and company director oversight of staffing decisions places too much emphasis on the staffing of all of the organisations homes. The manager has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that this home is effectively staffed to meet young people's demonstrated, individual needs. The provider organisation is currently endeavouring to appoint both a deputy and permanent staff to remedy the staffing shortfall. In the interim the manager is integrating the staff teams across the two homes she manages to make best use of experienced staff in promoting consistency of operation. This action though is not clearly recorded, within the home's development plan, as a means of addressing the staffing shortfall.

The current manager is very aware of the areas still requiring improvement at the home and reflects that the home now needs to clearly demonstrate a pro-active approach to improving service standards progressively rather than reacting when shortfalls are highlighted by the regulator. She has, in her previous home management roles, demonstrated a capacity to contribute to raising standards in both care and recording practice.

Ofsted has had considerable regulatory involvement in this home, since the previous full inspection, because of concerns raised in relation to care practice in the home. The home was judged to have made inadequate progress at the interim inspection in February 2014. In the last year the home has been served with seven compliance notices and four statutory requirements have been made. Monitoring visits have been undertaken, during that period, and the home has taken action to address all regulatory shortfalls within the timescales prescribed by Ofsted.

Young people's records have improved since the previous inspection and all young people have current care and placement plans to guide the provision of individualised care. Daily and weekly summaries are completed, and shared with placing authorities and parents, to provide an overview of young people's placements. However, young people's individual records contain a lot of factual information but often little reflection on the impact of the work staff have undertaken with young people. This renders it difficult currently for the home to properly demonstrate the progress young people have made or the impact that being placed at this home has had on outcomes for those young people.

The home's statement of purpose has been updated to incorporate all the information required. Staff are receiving regular formal supervision and team meetings are being utilised to develop staff knowledge and to promote improvements in recording and care practice. Staff say that they value the manager's knowledge and expertise, find her approachable, and are benefiting from her experience. The manager and staff say that the home is adequately resourced financially to enable them to meet young people's individual needs.

Management monitoring reports, of satisfactory quality, have been submitted to Ofsted at timely intervals since the last inspection. Independent monitoring visits, commissioned by the provider organisation, are undertaken to ensure that the home

is conducted in such a way as to promote the well-being and safety of young people accommodated. Reports of these visits though are not consistently of good quality and do not reflect proper consultation with young people, their families and placing authorities to inform opinions about the conduct of the home and whether young people are well cared for.

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.