

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	31 May 2016
Unique reference number	SC062651
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Care Focus Limited
Registered provider address	Capital House Bury Street Stowmarket Suffolk IP14 1HH

Responsible individual	Jean Lloyd
Registered manager	Adele Irons
Inspector	Fiona Littlefield

Inspection date	31 May 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	Good
The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good

SC062651

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- Young people make progress because they develop caring relationships with staff who provide high-quality nurturing care, respond to their concerns and help them to settle. As a result, young people are safe.
- All young people have an individual daily programme that includes education and routines in the home and is based round the school day. Care and educational staff are consistent in their expectation that young people attend and engage in learning.
- Risk assessments are thorough, identifying areas of concern and matching them with management strategies. Records are routinely reviewed and updated so that they are accurate and effective. Young people contribute to their care plans through regular key-working sessions.
- Staff and managers understand that young people's volatile behaviour reflects inner turmoil and they are empathetic and sensitive to helping them feel calmer and happier. Good behaviour and achievements are celebrated. Young people learn to resolve conflicts through discussion. Incidents of negative behaviour have reduced.
- An experienced and skilled management team leads the staff group, which is provided with supervision, training and support. This gives the staff confidence to meet the needs and vulnerabilities of young people.
- The staff team works together extremely well. It is alert and observant and picks up on negative behaviours, and deals with them decisively and firmly. Young people are aware of this and feel contained and secure.
- This inspection identified some areas for improvement. These are in relation to staff training records, staff recruitment files and access to information about what academic levels young people are working to in school. These matters are not currently having an impact on the safety and well-being of young people.

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

Recommendations

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

- Ensure that staff have knowledge and skills to understand each child's education and training targets and their next steps for learning, with particular reference to ensuring that they have access to full information about what educational levels young people are working to ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 28 paragraph 5.11).
- Ensure that appropriate records for staff are kept in the home, with particular reference to making certain that staff recruitment records are complete ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.8).
- Ensure that the workforce plan is updated to include any new training and qualifications completed by staff while they are working at the home, with particular reference to compiling and maintaining a single updated record of training, which will be available to the registered manager ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.8).

Full report

Information about this children's home

This home is one of a small group of homes run by an independent provider. It offers care for up to four children and young people. Education is available within the setting. Young people have direct access to therapy as part of the services offered to them by the company.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
6 January 2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
29 September 2015	Full	Good
10 March 2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness
17 December 2014	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
Young people make progress because they develop close relationships with staff who become important to them and whose opinion matters to them. Staff go out of their way to spend time with the young people during the day, getting them up in the morning and helping them to settle at night. Staff are first to hear of achievements and problems at school. Staff speak fondly of the young people and recognise that volatile behaviour can reflect inner turmoil. All young people are engaging with therapists who liaise with staff and managers, alert them to concerns and try to work out the best techniques to encourage good behaviour. One member of staff said that young people needed to be 'nurtured so they settle in. They learn to earn trust. We are constantly negotiating and getting them to reflect and show respect.' Interaction between staff and young people is purposeful, but also relaxed and playful. Mealtimes are important occasions during the day when staff and young people come together. Some young people help to prepare the meal, but everyone is expected to contribute, including clearing up afterwards, so that all young people develop some independence skills. Staff are accomplished in making sure that everyone is included in the conversation. They observe the dynamics in the group and are quick to intervene if they recognise negative influences. Young people learn to relax in this calm and controlled atmosphere. All young people attend school. Education and care staff work closely to ensure that young people are up and ready in the morning. For some young people who have a history of exclusion or being school refusers, this change has not been easy. Staff have been persistent in enforcing the expectation that they have to attend school and actively engage in learning. Staff are creative and insightful in helping young people to achieve results. Some young people study in separate rooms where they are able to concentrate, supported by specially chosen team. Despite some initial resistance, young people are making progress and plan to take maths and English at GCSE level. This helps their self-esteem and optimism about the future. Young people benefit from a range of activities and leisure pursuits that reflect their personal tastes and interests from shopping and the cinema to various sports such as fishing or riding. For some young people, this presents an important opportunity to develop their social skills and senses of identity. For instance, one young person plays sports for a local rugby team, which was successful in a recent tournament, and he attended a presentation ceremony along with his team. The team coach commented on how well he fitted in with the team. This greatly	

enhanced his self-confidence.

Some young people are placed at some distance from their families and communities. In these circumstances, young people need regular, predictable contact with their families. Staff and managers appreciate this and support contact arrangements, including frequent telephone contact and transporting young people for visits. As a result, young people have been able to build new, more positive relationships with their parents and siblings. One young person was heard to reassure an unsettled newcomer to the home: 'Don't worry. They have done so much for me here.'

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
Young people are safe as the result of close relationships with adults who know their needs and vulnerabilities in detail and who work consistently to ensure that they remain protected. Each young person has a team of key workers, and staff rotas are organised so that one of the team is always available for them. This means that they have someone whom they can turn to, and any worries or complaints are dealt with in a timely fashion. Formal complaints are very rare, young people preferring to raise issues with staff and managers immediately. They are not always satisfied with the outcome but are confident that they will be listened to. This is crucial for young people who are new to the home. One young person said: 'Staff do bother with you here. I feel safe.' Staff receive regular safeguarding training and are confident that they would know what to do in the event of a child protection allegation. Staff are aware of the need for constant vigilance. For instance, on occasion staff have been alerted to a concern about the well-being of some young people in the home. They worked together firmly and decisively to ensure that all young people were protected, and took immediate action to prevent recurrence. Staff and managers have received training in the risks of sexual exploitation, and access to the internet is controlled within the home. Consequently, young people are safeguarded. Many young people come to the home with a history of risk-taking behaviour. Staff and managers are careful to ensure that they have full background histories for new arrivals, so that they can match needs and vulnerabilities with detailed management strategies. This means that young people are supported as soon as they arrive. As young people's placements progress, staff and managers review these plans with the young people regularly, so that they remain accurate. This	

core activity lies at the heart of safe practice in the home.

Staff and managers work with young people to help them to manage their behaviour and reduce negative incidents, and to help them to feel calmer and happier. Each young person has a daily programme that is tailored around the school day and details their individual routines and activities. Staff apply these consistently and, as a result, young people know exactly what to expect. A review of one young person noted: 'He responds to a highly structured environment that contains his need to be constantly entertained.'

Staff and managers support young people to improve their behaviour through a balance of rewards and sanctions. Young people earn points for managing their daily routines, attending school and engaging in their lessons. If young people have made a special effort in school or are noticeably managing their anger, staff and managers make a point of celebrating this. Young people and their families enjoy this recognition. The mother of one young person said: 'She's made loads of progress. She's more contained and calmer.'

If young people are having difficulty in managing their behaviour, staff and managers work together to clarify areas of work. Techniques such as using a yellow card warn them that their behaviour is becoming unacceptable and this can lead to noticeable improvements over time. A review for one young person noted: 'He is generally more respectful, i.e. not leaving the grounds so he is managing his desire to leave the home.' If staff and managers notice a deterioration in the behaviour of the whole group, their response is immediate and decisive. The subject is raised in key-working sessions and young people's meetings and appropriate sanctions are imposed consistently. Young people learn that their behaviour has consequences. While some young people are still prone to challenging behaviour, there has been a noticeable decrease in the number of negative incidents.

Staff are recruited using robust procedures. The registered manager works with senior officers in the company to ensure that applicants have the requisite skill, experience and aptitude to work in the home. Recruitment files for members of staff who have been in the home for more than three years have some gaps. For instance, they do not hold copies of qualifications. There is no indication that this has compromised the safety of young people. The registered manager accepts that records for all members of staff in the home should be complete, and has started to work so that all files are consistent.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good
There were no requirements or recommendations following the last inspection. The registered manager has considerable experience in residential work with young people. She gained her national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 4 in 2009, so is appropriately qualified for the role. She has been in post for a year and has gained confidence in her authority and approach to the work in the home. She assesses referrals and considers their compatibility with the current group. She and senior staff meet the young person in advance. As a result, young people come to a home that is well prepared for them, and this helps them to settle. Staff speak highly of the management team, commenting on its consistency and its children-centred approach. There is a high value placed on continuous professional development. Senior members of the team are completing their NVQ level 5. Other staff are either qualified at NVQ level 3, in the process of completing their training or due to commence this after their induction programmes are completed. All staff receive regular recorded supervision that includes a discussion about their work with individual young people, issues in the home and the opportunity to reflect on the impact of the work on them personally. One member of staff said about the senior team: They are really good and empathetic, and I am comfortable talking to them. This is key when a young person is pushing a member of staff. You can feel isolated.' Staff are motivated and work as a team, relying on one another for support and delivering a coordinated, consistent approach. Detailed handovers between staff ensure that they are up to date with day-to-day behaviours and alert to any potential concerns. Staff meetings allow for more reflection and the opportunity to develop strategies. One member of staff said: 'They look at inconsistencies and discuss concerns about young people what works and what doesn't. We agree on the use of sanctions and how effective they are. This was important when one young person was so dismissive. We agreed to stick with it.' All staff receive mandatory induction training, and staff and managers have a schedule of professional development training that is updated regularly. However, records held by head office are not always consistent with records held by the registered manager, with the result that it is not clear what training staff have completed and what needs to be refreshed. This has not affected the safety or progress of young people. The manager has started to address this and is working with colleagues at head office to produce a consistent record of training for staff and managers at the home. The management team maintains scrutiny of the progress made by young people, to ensure that the service is commensurate with their needs. Managers use weekly and monthly reports produced by the young people's key-work team, behaviour	

management records and complaints and comments from young people, their families and social workers. In addition, comments and observations from young people's meetings and staff meetings are taken into account. Consequently, plans for young people are rigorous and effective. Incidents of young people going missing are extremely rare, and many young people have not engaged in this at all.

Information about young people's progress is shared with parents and professionals continuously. Education is valued as the key area from which young people gain basic skills that they will need as they grow up. Staff and managers regularly review their attendance and behaviour in school. However, details of what academic levels young people are working to in school are held by educational staff and not available to care staff during school holidays. The registered manager and senior colleagues in the organisation accept that this is crucial information that they need access to at all times. Despite these shortfalls, there is no indication that a young person has been adversely affected. The management team are reviewing current arrangements to ensure that this information is available in the future.

Managers work well in partnerships with social workers and outside professionals, so that young people receive a coordinated service. Staff and managers have confidence in their judgements and will advocate vigorously for them to ensure that their best interests are met.

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 that 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 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. 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 whom 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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