

Children's homes inspection - Full

Inspection date	17/08/2016
Unique reference number	SC063683
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered manager	Michael Booth
Inspector	Sharon Lloyd

Inspection date	17/08/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Sustained 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

SC063683

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

Children report this is a good home where they feel well-cared for by a regular team of staff whom they like. They report staff listen to them, respect them and help them.

Developing supportive relationships with children is central to the home's operation and success. Staff are well led by the manager and deputy manager. They consistently apply the home's ethos, which promotes children's development and progress through positive interaction and encouragement.

The home places children's safety at the centre of its practice. Staff follow good systems aimed at keeping children safe. They help those who engage in dangerous, risk-taking behaviour to either reduce it or increase their ability to protect themselves. They provide a safety net for those children who are frequently missing by providing a warm, welcoming environment that children return to.

Over time, children make progress in their development, and some have improved educational outcomes that better prepare them for adult life. Children's health is well-promoted and they have access to the services they need. Children learn skills that help to prepare them for independent living.

The leadership and management of the home is good. Children are cared for by a consistent and stable staff team who know the routines and expectations of the home well. Staff are well supervised, qualified and trained. Collaborative working is good, with the home having positive relationships with partner agencies and making useful contributions to care planning discussions and decisions. The manager effectively challenges those who fall short in their offer to children.

Shortfalls in practice include insufficiently robust recruitment checks on agency and relief staff, and a lack of written evidence showing how the home uses feedback from children and others to inform the development of the home. In addition, impact risk assessments are not routinely carried out prior to the placement of a new child and independent reports on the conduct of the home do not yet consistently assess the home's safeguarding practice. No action has been taken in response to a recommendation from the Fire Safety Officer, in relation to the safety of the premises. The home is eager to address these matters urgently. There is no evidence to show they have had a negative impact on children living in the home.

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 with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
25: Fire precautions 25- (2) The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 applies to the home- (b) the registered person must ensure that the requirements of that Order and any regulations made under it, especially directives from the local authority fire safety officer, are complied with in respect of the home.	30/10/2016
32: Fitness of workers 32.—(1) The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. (2) The registered person may only— (a) employ an individual to work at the children's home; or (b) if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). (3) The requirements are that— (d) full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (7) The registered person may permit an individual to start work at the home despite the fact that the requirement in paragraph	30/10/2016

(3)(d) has not been met if— (a)the registered person has taken all reasonable steps to obtain full information about each of the matters in Schedule 2 in respect of the individual, but the enquiries in relation to any of the matters in paragraphs 3 to 6 of Schedule 2 are incomplete; (b)full and satisfactory information in respect of the individual has been obtained in relation to the matters in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 2; (c)the registered person considers that the circumstances are exceptional; and (d)the registered person ensures that the individual is appropriately supervised while carrying out the individual's duties, pending receipt of any outstanding information on the matters in paragraphs 3 to 6 of Schedule 2, which is then considered satisfactory by the registered person.	
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Recommendations

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

- use impact risk assessments as a basis for ensuring that the home only accepts placements for children where the service can effectively respond to the child's assessed needs as recorded in the child's relevant plans and fully consider the impact that the placement will have on the existing group of children (The Guide, page 56 para 11.4)
- ensure that an individual appointed to carry out visits to the home as an independent person makes a rigorous and impartial assessment of the home's arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the home's care (The Guide, page 65 para 15.5)
- consult children regularly on their views about the home's care, to inform and support continued improvement in the quality of care provided. In particular, establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the feedback and opinions of children about the children's home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it. (The Guide, page 22, para 4.11)

Full report

Information about this children's home

This is a local authority run home that accommodates up to six young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
30/03/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
20/01/2016	Full	Good
06/03/2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness
19/09/2014	Full	Adequate

Inspection Judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
A key strength of the home is the interaction between staff and children, which is warm and positive. Children feel well cared-for and say staff listen to them. They say staff give them good advice and take action quickly in response to their queries or comments. One child explained: 'Staff are good. They listen to you. I've got a good key worker who always listens. Staff sort things out for us and if we want to do something, they arrange it. We have meetings to discuss things - it's all ok. They listen to what we want and sort it.' Children could not think of any way to improve the home, rating it as 'good' or 'outstanding'. The home provides a nurturing, homely environment, in which children feel relaxed and comfortable. This is achieved, despite the institutional nature of the premises. The home helps children, from the point of admission, to understand why they are living there and what they need to do to change their lives and have a brighter future. Staff encourage children to have aspirations and to take steps towards achieving their goals. Their support enables children to re-establish positive relationships with their families and to re-engage with and succeed in education. Asked what the home could do better, one young person said: 'There's nothing I would want to change. It's a really good place to live.' The home provides individualised care that is based on an on-going assessment of each child's needs. Children make varying but often steady progress in their development. Aided by close and effective partnership working between the home and school, one child has fully embraced school life and achieved 100% school attendance and a positive school report. A young person, with a previous history of poor attendance and low attainment, explained: 'I've got an apprenticeship starting next week. They've put me on level 2 because I've done ok at school.' However, many have missed a good deal of education before moving to the home and, despite continuing encouragement from staff and other professionals, some children resist all efforts to help them re-engage with learning. Consequently, despite the home's interventions, some reach school-leaving age with poor literacy and numeracy skills, at a distinct disadvantage and unprepared for the world of work. The Looked after children nurse visits children soon after they move to the home and carries out a health assessment. Effective liaison between the home and nurse helps children to access the health services they need, including specialist	

consultancy services, sexual health clinics and mental health services. Consequently, most children receive the medication and treatment they need. For example, one child was diagnosed with a degenerative condition as a result of this partnership working. This has helped the child and those caring for him to have a good understanding of his health needs and how best to meet them to enable him to live as full a life as possible. Some children resist seeking medical attention, when they need it and staff continue to encourage a positive attitude towards health professionals and help children to take care of their own health.

Children who have presented high levels of anxiety and anti-social behaviour in previous placements benefit from positive social interaction and build self-esteem and confidence. They learn to develop their practical and social skills and, over time, reduce their challenging behaviour. The home recognises and rewards children's efforts. For example, a child has latterly begun to make progress by responding to the positive and persistent encouragement of staff to attend and engage with school. He has developed his talents and is benefiting from increased time in education, overcoming significant emotional barriers, and is being rewarded with a holiday. This recognises his huge achievement, which has enabled him to secure a Level 2 apprenticeship.

The home uses monthly group meetings and frequent key worker sessions to encourage children to make their views known and to engage in the day-to-day life of the home. Staff encourages children to engage with them in a variety of activities and outings, including trips to the cinema, gym, fishing and camping. The current group of children are reluctant to join in with activities organised by staff, preferring to meet up with friends locally or in their home areas. This means they do not benefit from all the home has to offer and in some cases, continue to be drawn towards negative influences and anti-social behaviour.

Staff provide good support to children moving on to independence or back to families. A young person explained: 'The best thing is the staff. They're really nice. They give us good advice. They are helping me learn to budget and live on £57 a week so I know how to survive independently- I'll be moving on soon.'

Children learn to look after themselves by taking responsibility for cleaning their own bedrooms, choosing and preparing meals and doing their own washing. Staff support children to complete application forms and accompany them to attend interviews, helping them to be brave and proud of themselves. They ensure children's views are represented and taken into account in decisions that affect them and their future. Children confirm they are fully involved in care planning and in decisions affecting their day to day lives.

Two children have had well-planned transitions from the home during 2016. Two other children have been admitted. In one case, the child was admitted to the home without a visit, when he was missing from home. On his arrival, he was

made very welcome and this has helped him to settle in the home and reduce the length of his missing incidents, so his safety is better protected.

Staff work with placing social workers and others to ensure that pathway and transition plans meet children's individual needs. The home discharges the child only when the child is ready to move to a new placement. For example, the home kept a bed open for one young person who was undergoing a parenting assessment in a specialist provision. Staff worked very well with other services to ensure the young person had the best possible support to be successful. After discharge, the home continued to provide this and other young people with intermittent, informal support. The young people benefit from knowing that staff are interested in their welfare and will signpost them to services and support, should they need any.

The home is located in a residential suburb and is easily accessed by bus from the city centre. This means that children are never far from their homes and families; and can access schools and amenities with relative ease.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
Individually tailored risk assessments support staff to manage children's risk taking behaviour so that risks apparent in previous placements reduce over time. Staff provide clear and consistent boundaries. This helps children to understand what is expected of them and promotes a calm, relaxed environment. Over time, rewards and positive behaviour support reduce children's anxieties and challenging behaviour; and promote tolerance and understanding of others. A small number of children continue to express themselves through violent outbursts, particularly towards staff; and this has led to staff injuries and extensive damage to the furnishings and fabric of the home. Repairs are effected quickly so that the home continues to provide a pleasant, homely environment. Staff receive advice and guidance from the Child and adolescent mental health advisor who attends monthly staff meetings and helps them to reflect on children's behaviour and how best to manage it. A placing social worker commented: 'One of their key strengths is that they create a safe environment and can manage behaviours that are complex and challenging.' Children report they feel safe in the home. They say that bullying is challenged and staff intervene where necessary to protect those at risk from bullying or fighting. For example, one child said: 'I feel really safe here. There's no restraints. We do	

have issues. I smashed a bedroom door because I thought another young person had got my coat. I had to clean the car in reparation. They're really fair with us. They say they use sanctions but they never do. We always calm down and things get sorted out in about an hour. Sometimes we argue as we all live together but mostly we get on. We have the occasional fight and staff try to get us to stop and we always get on ok in the end. It's not bullying, but we all wind each other up sometimes.'

The use of restraint is comparatively low, with two children being restrained a total of nine times since the last full inspection. Restraint is used appropriately, only to prevent injury to others or serious damage. Children report it is carried out safely, without injury. They have made no complaints about this or any other aspect of their care.

Children say that staff do their best to keep them safe and provide good advice about how to stay safe in the community. They acknowledge that they do not always follow this advice. For example, some are frequently missing and most misuse cannabis, which exacerbates the risks to their health and safety.

A child who persistently goes missing said: 'It's a safe place. They want you to come in but they can't stop you going out – it's not a secure unit. They tell you not to but I just go. I am always missing – I'm not really missing and am safe but I'm always late back. I'm out with my mates. It's safe here because you get a place to sleep – a bed for the night, so that's good. And I like it because it's close to my family. It's great here. They're all good people. Staff are really nice. They look after us well. The food is good and the bed is comfy. I've got a nice room.'

At 326 incidents over seven months, the number of missing incidents is high; with most children following patterns of behaviour established prior to their admission to the home. There is a well-coordinated response to each incident with staff searching for children and trying to establish and maintain phone contact with them, and with their families and police. A staff member explained: 'We are on the ball. We make sure we know exactly what he's wearing when he goes out so we can give the police the details they need; and if he comes back on a bike, we log that as well.'

Some children regularly return in the early hours of the morning but will not share their whereabouts with staff or with independent visitors who provide a return interview service. Consequently, professionals who are working together to safeguard children, are unable to fully assess the level of danger to individual missing children. There is good strategic overview of these children and close collaboration between relevant agencies. However, the impact of strategies aimed at protecting them is hard to assess. Some children continue to be missing, much of the time, but by regularly touching base with the home, where they feel welcome and safe, they manage their own safety needs and reduce the likelihood

of getting drawn into ever more dangerous situations.

Staff are trained in and alert to the signs of children at risk of sexual exploitation and radicalization. Currently, no children are deemed to be at such risk, but the home remains vigilant in its observations and shares any concerns with partner agencies.

Routine health and safety checks and fire drills help to ensure the home provides a safe environment for children and staff. However, a recent fire officer's report raised a breach in building regulations that could pose a threat to the group's safety, in the event of a fire. The home has not taken action to address this.

Agency and relief staff files are not sufficiently detailed to enable the registered person to be assured of the suitability of the person prior to them working at the home.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good
The manager took up post in April 2014 after 23 years of successfully managing another local authority home, which closed. He has extensive experience of working with looked after children who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. He is suitably qualified to NVQ level 4 in management and holds the Certificate in Social Services qualification. He is a competent and knowledgeable manager who leads a stable and well-gelled staff team. Together, they apply the home's ethos and through consistent care practices, they meet the statement of purpose. A member of staff explained: 'We all know what we have to do and we do it.' There have been no new staff since the last inspection, but one member of staff has gone to work in a sister home. Children confirmed there are sufficient staff on duty to meet their needs and they are cared for by staff whom they know well and like. All permanent staff are suitably qualified and agency staff are undertaking qualifications. The manager and staff confirmed they receive regular, helpful supervision that promotes their skills development and focuses on how well they are meeting children's needs. This effectively supports the continuing delivery of a good service. A member of staff explained: 'The manager and deputy are full on. Both of them go that extra mile and are very supportive.' Staff complete on-going mandatory training and additional training, that helps develop their skills. For example, all staff have recently completed the Signs of Safety training and the manager is looking at how their practice should change to	

ensure risks are better assessed and managed and strong safety plans are in place for each child.

The manager knows the children well and works with staff and partner agencies to deliver good quality care that meets children's needs. A social worker commented: 'I have no issues with the support they given him. They are fully involved in pathway planning, and provide regular updates on his progress and notifications of each absence. They attend all the meetings and are proactive in updating me with changes and incidents.' While children's progress is variable, there is clear evidence that children make progress from their starting points, over time.

The manager has a good overview of the operation of the home, its strengths and weaknesses and staff skills. He is assisted in maintaining effective scrutiny of children's safety and wellbeing through monthly visits from a councillor. The quality of reports from these visits is improving but the visitor does not always assess the quality of safeguarding practice and does not always submit the report to the home and to Ofsted within the 28 day timeframe. This causes delay to the implementation of actions raised following the visit.

The manager provides monthly scrutiny and governance statistical analysis that informs senior managers about matters arising and matters of concern. This ensures senior managers stay informed about the quality of care and children's safety. He maintains regular monitoring of records and safety concerns and he completes a six monthly report on the operation of the home and children's progress. Although consultation with children is good, there are no formal systems for ensuring their views about the home are captured in this report.

Through weekly meetings with the service manager and other registered managers of the local authority children's homes, the manager keeps abreast of matters pertaining to all the homes and drives improvement across the service. For example, improved practice around matching children has been sustained and the manager has been empowered to select only children whose assessed needs indicate they will be able to live satisfactorily alongside others already living in the home. Written impact risk assessments are not maintained for children who are offered a placement. This means the quality of assessment and decision making cannot be verified.

Improved relationships with the virtual school mean that the home is able to work faster and more effectively with education case workers to identify an appropriate education placement for each child. This relationship is in its infancy and clear education arrangements are not yet in place for children admitted to the home at the end of the summer term. The manager takes responsibility for challenging other professionals to deliver an appropriate service to children. For example, he prompts care planning meetings and missing from care strategy meetings so that informed and considered decisions can be made following multi-agency

discussions.

A residential services review has been completed by the local authority. While the registration of this home is to continue, the staff posts will be open to applications from those working at the three homes that are closing as well as this one.

Although the local authority are progressing the changes quickly, staff are understandably anxious and morale has dipped. It is to the credit of all that there is no apparent impact on the quality of care to children.

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 looked after children 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 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 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 who 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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