

Children's homes inspection - Full

Inspection date	15/06/2015
Unique reference number	SC063997
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	BetterCare Keys Limited
Registered person address	Laganwood House, 44 Newforge Lane, Belfast, BT9 5NW

Responsible individual	Mrs Heather Laffin
Registered manager	Miss Amanda Williams
Inspector	Mr Philip Cass

Inspection date	15/06/2015
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	Requires improvement
The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.	
how well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
the impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

SC063997

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is requires improvement because:

- Behaviour management strategies are not consistently effective. Consequently, young people do not make sufficient progress in improving their social skills. The failure to manage challenging behaviour assertively means that young people sometimes live in a chaotic home.
- Staff and managers do not always have high aspirations for young people. At times, they are too willing to accept that young people will not make meaningful social, educational or health progress.
- Educational progress is limited because young people do not have good school attendance.
- Recruitment strategies are not effective. High turnover and over-reliance on temporary staff restrict opportunities for young people to build stable, trusting, relationships.
- Some temporary staff are not robustly vetted to ensure that they have sufficient skills and experience. Other temporary staff work excessive hours. This limits their ability to provide high quality care.
- Young people are not sufficiently engaged in constructive, purposeful activity.
- Record keeping is not of a consistently good standard.

The children's home strengths:

- Young people are well supported to maintain appropriate contact with their family and other support networks in their communities.
- Incidents of young people placing themselves at risk by running away reduce markedly following admission to the home.
- Children do not experience bullying.

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
The registered person must ensure that the employment of any person on a temporary basis at the children's home does not prevent children receiving such continuity of care as is reasonable to meet their needs. (Regulation 31 (1))	24/07/2015
13. The leadership and management standard In order to meet the leadership and management standard the registered person must: (2)(c) ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child. This is with particular reference to staff provided by recruitment agencies to work in the home.	24/07/2015
11. The positive relationships standard In order to meet the positive relationships standard the registered person must: (2)(a)(ii) ensure that staff help each child to develop socially aware behaviour.	24/07/2015
8. The education standard In order to meet the education standard the registered person must: (2)(a)(iv) ensure that staff help each child to understand the importance and value of education, learning, training and employment.	24/07/2015
9. The enjoyment and achievement standard In order to meet the enjoying and achieving standard the	24/07/2015

registered person must: (2)(a)(ii) ensure that staff help each child to participate in activities which meet and expand the child's interests, and (iii) make a positive contribution to the home and the wider community.	
The registered person must ensure that within 48 hours of the use of a measure of control or discipline in relation to a child in the home, the registered person or a person who is authorised by the registered person to do so has spoken to the user about the measure: and has signed the record to confirm it is accurate. Within 5 days of the use of the measure the registered person or the authorised person must add to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35 (3) (b) (c))	24/07/2015

Recommendations

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

- Any staff member in a supervisory role such as 'shift leader' should have substantial relevant experience and have successfully completed their induction for the home. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 54, paragraph 10.21)
- The registered person should ensure that recruitment, supervision, and performance management of staff minimises potential risks to children. This is with particular reference to temporary staff working for excessive periods. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 61, paragraph 13.1)
- The registered person must have systems in place so that all staff receive supervision of their practice which allows them to reflect on their practice and the needs of the children assigned to their care. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 61, paragraph 13.2)
- The registered person should play a key role in shaping the ethos of the home through developing a culture of high aspiration for children which is demonstrated through the care and opportunities offered to children. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 52, paragraph 10.4)
- The relevant officer or teams within the local authority should be informed promptly of all allegations that come to an employer's attention. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 44, paragraph 9.18)
- Staff should be familiar with the home's policies on record keeping and

understand the importance of careful and clear recording. This is with particular reference to the home's log book, rotas, and missing from home records. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 62, paragraph 14.4)

- When a child returns to the home after being missing from care or away from the home without permission, the responsible local authority must provide an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. Homes should take account of information provided by such interviews when assessing risks and putting arrangements in place to protect each child. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 45, paragraph 9.30)

Full report

Information about this children's home

This privately owned children's home provides accommodation for three young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The provider organisation operates nationally, providing a range of care services for children and young people.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
15/01/2015	CH - Interim	Sustained effectiveness
16/07/2014	CH - Full	Adequate
04/06/2014	CH - Full	Inadequate
27/02/2014	CH - Interim	Inadequate Progress

Inspection Judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	requires improvement
Young people do not make good progress because staff have low expectations of them. Staff are too willing to accept that young people are unable to participate in the routines of the home. For example, instead of encouraging them to enjoy sociable meal times, they are allowed to eat in their bedroom. Also, staff do not effectively challenge young people who refuse to help with household tasks. This approach does not help them to develop their interpersonal skills or become confident in social situations. It means that some young people do not develop the practical or social skills required to make a successful transition to adulthood. Low expectations are also reflected in the fact that young people are not routinely challenged to display age-appropriate manners and courtesy. Consequently, they do not learn to communicate maturely. Education progress is not consistently good. Some young people regularly attend school but make little academic progress. Other young people refuse to attend school for significant periods of time. They also refuse to engage with tutors who come to the home to support them. Some young people say that they do not aspire to gain qualifications or become employed. However, there has been some progress in recent weeks. Some current residents are both attending and achieving at school. They are likely to gain qualifications that will lead to further education or employment opportunities. Managers are becoming better at advocating for the educational needs of young people and challenging any barriers that prevent young people making good educational progress. Engagement in purposeful and enriching activity is sporadic, particularly for young people who choose not to attend school. There is little expectation that they make constructive use of their time during school hours. They are often bored and unstimulated. Outside school hours, a range of leisure activities are offered to young people, including trips to the cinema, bowling, and go-karting. Young people often decline these activities. Recent efforts to arrange a holiday were undermined by the lack of interest displayed by young people and the inability of staff to stimulate their enthusiasm. Consequently, young people do not access a good range of social and recreational opportunities. Health care arrangements are good because young people have access to a range of local services when they need them. The home has arranged for young people to undertake smoking cessation programmes delivered by specialist nurses. While these programmes have not yet resulted in young people overcoming their addiction, they have made progress in reducing the amount that they smoke.	

Young people's drug use reduces significantly following their admission to the home. The home has recently commissioned the services of a therapist. Although, her practice is not yet established, it is envisaged that significant therapeutic input will enable better care planning, and support young people to develop improved emotional health.

Staff and managers take great care to listen to the views and wishes of young people. A range of formal and informal consultation systems are used well to encourage them to provide feedback. Young people's meetings provide a good opportunity for them to be involved in decisions about the day-to-day operation of the home. The Registered Manager responds positively to ideas that stem from this forum. For example, the decoration of the home has been improved to suit the tastes of current residents. Individual work with young people through key worker sessions is of a good standard. Key worker sessions provide young people with opportunities to understand and contribute to their care plans.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement
Staff are not consistently good at managing challenging behaviours. They are not always able to command the respect of young people so that they can enforce boundaries and set high expectations of conduct. Because some young people do not develop an ability to manage their own behaviour, they do not make good progress in placement. Difficulties in managing complex behaviours have resulted in the arrest and prosecution of young people as well as placement breakdown. At other times it has led to the home being a chaotic environment. Since the last inspection, external agencies and the home's neighbours have raised concerns about the ability of young people to thrive in the absence of clear and enforced boundaries. Managers have responded positively to these concerns. Additional behaviour management training has been provided and staff are now better supported by managers to review and reflect on incidents where young people display challenging behaviour. However, there remain instances in which overtly defiant behaviours are not addressed well. For example, a young person who refuses to store his bicycle securely is allowed to leave it at the front of the home where there is a risk that it will be stolen. In addition, staff often fail to challenge young people who display inappropriate language in the home. This means that they sometimes fail to provide young people with a nurturing home environment. Although there are no serious failures in safeguarding systems that place young people at risk of harm, improvement is required in the way staff respond to allegations. Confusion over specific roles and responsibilities has caused	

unnecessary delay in notifying local authority safeguarding officers following allegations against staff. This has the potential to hinder the effective investigation of abuse. However, on most occasions the home responds well to any safeguarding issues that arise. The Registered Manager ensures that all staff receive training so that they can protect children from abuse. Staff have a thorough understanding of child sexual exploitation that enables them to effectively safeguard vulnerable young people. Young people are further protected from exploitation because staff are trained in gang awareness.

Staff do not adhere fully to Runaway and Missing From Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols agreed with local police and other partners. This is because they do not take account of information provided by social workers following return home interviews. In some cases this information is not shared with the home at all. In addition, the home does not take robust action to challenge placing authorities who fail to conduct return home interviews. Despite this shortfall, young people significantly reduce the scale and frequency of missing from home episodes following admission to the home. This means that they become safer. The safety and well-being of young people are further promoted because young people do not experience bullying during their placement.

Health and safety arrangements are robust. Specialist contractors support the Registered Manager to carry out regular audits of fire safety, risk assessment, and food hygiene procedures. Consequently, the likelihood of accidental injury or illness is low. The home has significantly improved the way that it responds to young people smoking in their bedrooms. As a result, there are now much fewer incidents of this behaviour. This greatly reduces the risk of fire.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement
Efforts to recruit and retain experienced, knowledgeable, and qualified staff are not successful. High staff turnover and high levels of sickness absence exacerbate the shortage of skilled carers. However, the Registered Manager has chosen to admit young people so that the home has operated at full occupancy. In doing so, she has relied on temporary secondments and redeployments of staff from other homes. This strategy has been ineffective in ensuring consistent care to young people. Staff on temporary secondments have not been well managed or supervised. They are not always provided with a suitable induction to the home and are sometimes on duty for excessive periods of time. The home relies on very high levels of temporary staff provided by recruitment	

agencies. These staff are sometimes very inexperienced. In one instance, a worker was sent to the home without any evidence that he had previously worked in residential care or with young people in any capacity. In most cases, those agency workers who have experience and skills in residential care are unwilling to take up permanent positions at the home.

The Registered Manager has considerable experience in the delivery of residential and therapeutic care. She has been in post for more than three years. Although she has been working towards a recognised management qualification throughout this period, she has not yet completed the award. This means that she is not suitably qualified.

Staff are not good at keeping records. The home's policy states that a log must be kept to show the staff on duty, the times that they enter and leave the building, and any incidents. Because the log is not always an accurate reflection of the events of the home, it is not a useful document and does not enable effective monitoring of the home. Monitoring is further complicated by poor recording of the home's rota, so that it is sometimes not possible to clearly identify the staffing arrangements on a particular day. Shortfalls in recording are also evident in management records. Although the Registered Manager does evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of sanctions, she has failed to record this evaluation or ensure that the views of young people are noted. Poor recording demonstrates that staff do not understand the important role that records have in enabling young people to reflect on, and understand, their history.

Staff shortages and high levels of absenteeism contribute to difficulties in providing staff with the tailored support they require to improve the home. The Registered Manager notes that, 'you can't develop the team when you are in crisis'. She acknowledges that the quality of leadership has not been consistently strong. However, she is able to provide evidence of considerable recent improvements to the way staff are supported. For example, team meetings have been used very effectively as workshops to address particular practice issues, and the staff have been provided with additional training. The frequency of supervision has also improved. Despite this, some staff still do not receive regular supervision.

A range of additional support has been provided to the Registered Manager to improve the quality of leadership. She is mentored by an experienced Registered Manager from another home and is supported each week by other senior managers. This demonstrates that the organisation understands that improvement is required and is committed to achieving it. Senior managers have also now recognised that the home cannot operate at full occupancy without first recruiting sufficient numbers of competent staff. To this end, pay scales have been revised so that the home is better able to attract and retain high calibre staff. In addition, senior managers have recently made a commitment to limit occupancy levels until sufficient staff are employed and trained. The appointment of a permanent deputy manager, who is growing in confidence and has a clear understanding of

improvement objectives, has further improved the capacity of the home to improve.

Managers have acted on the recommendation, given at the previous inspection, to create a development plan for the home. This plan is realistic and achievable. It recognises that the home does not yet deliver consistently good quality care, and sets clear improvement objectives. Managers say that they have 'gone back to basics' by focusing on core elements of practice. These include engaging young people in constructive activities and ensuring that young people attend school. The home's development plan also provides evidence that managers understand how their own practice needs to improve. For example, they have committed to undertake more regular staff supervision and carefully monitor the quality of record keeping in the home.

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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