

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC065059
Inspector	Sharon Treadwell
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Stoke on Trent City Council
Registered person address	City of Stoke-on-Trent, Civic Centre Glebe Street STOKE-ON-TRENT ST4 1HH
Responsible individual	Susan Hammersley
Registered manager	Helen Marie Malanaphy
Date of last inspection	18/03/2014

Inspection date	06/11/2014
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Previous inspection	good progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	none

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

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	good
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No requirements or recommendations were identified during the previous inspection of the home.

Young people are happy living at this home. They have good relationships with the staff who look after them very well. Young people feel well cared for and valued as individuals. A young person says: 'It's the best home ever because it's got the best staff'.

Once they become settled in the home, young people make good progress across all aspects of their welfare and development. Young people's progress is fairly consistent, with only occasional relapses, because the support provided by staff is consistent yet flexible, effective and guided by good awareness and understanding of young people's very individual needs.

Young people feel safe. Their safety is effectively promoted by the ability of the staff to work effectively and co-operatively with partner agencies. This means that young people have ready access to professional advice and expertise to improve their capacity to protect themselves and, where this is slow to develop, to people who can act to protect them from their own inappropriate behaviours and choices.

Some of the home's records do not fully reflect the work done by staff with young people or the impact this is having in helping young people to make progress.

Five recommendations have been made during the inspection. Four of these relate to the content of records. Young people's placement plans are not regularly updated to reflect their current support needs and clearly identify current placement aims and objectives. When young people go missing from the home records do not reflect proper exploration of the incident with young people. Young people's individual records do not adequately reflect how living at this home has helped them to achieve better outcomes. Consultation with young people is not always well recorded making it difficult to identify how it has influenced the way in which their care is delivered or how the home develops. The manager is already aware that further work is needed to improve record keeping of young people's placements. She is involved in a management review of recording systems to identify what improvements are needed to better demonstrate young people's achievements during their time at the home.

At present staff undertake sleeping in duties while they are still on probation which leaves them in sole charge of the home overnight. This contravenes National Minimum Standards.

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home is part of the provision operated by the local authority. This home provides care for up to two young people who have emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
18/03/2014	Interim	good progress
05/12/2013	Full	good
24/01/2013	Interim	good progress
21/06/2012	Full	outstanding

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

Recommendations

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

- ensure that all children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support and that the views, wishes and feeling of children are taken into account in monitoring staff and developing the home; specifically that recording systems effectively demonstrate how the young people's views impact on the delivery of their care and support and on the development of the home (NMS 1.3 and 1.7)
- ensure that the written records kept by the home when a child goes missing detail the circumstances of the child's return, any reasons given by the child for running away from the home. and any action taken in light of those reasons; the point being that that information can then be used to try to prevent a recurrence (NMS 5.10)
- ensure that staff members placed in charge of the home and other staff at particular times (e.g. as leaders of staff shifts) have successfully completed their induction and probationary periods (NMS 17.5)

- ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future; specifically to help them to understand and appreciate the progress made whilst at the home (NMS 22.5)
- ensure that the result of all statutory reviews and reviews of placement plans are recorded on the child's file; specifically to make sure placement plans are up to date. (NMS 25.8)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **outstanding**

Young people benefit from very high quality individualised care. A placing social worker said: 'The staff act like parents would, they advocate and fight for young people to ensure that they get the best service from everyone'.

Young people are in long term, stable placements. Whilst at this home they have developed more positive views about themselves and grown in self-confidence and emotional stability, largely because of the positive relationships they have developed with the staff. Young people feel safe, well cared for and, above all, valued as individuals. Discussions with young people about their care, their wishes and their future plans are part of everyday life at the home. This makes young people feel very much part of the decision-making process. Young people, who are able and willing, have sat down with staff to write parts of their own placement plans.

Young people's behaviour improves because they have positive role models who are helping them to learn and understand what is, or is not, socially acceptable. Where young people arrived at the home presenting extremely challenging and potentially unsafe behaviours those behaviours have progressively reduced. Young people who caused significant damage to the premises in the early days of their placements, often because they resented being placed at the children's home, now value the environment and their relationships with the staff. A young person said: 'When I first came I was really unsettled. I broke everything. I'm better now simply because I trust people here'.

Young people are robustly supported to access services to promote their physical, emotional and mental health. Their engagement with psychologists, drugs and alcohol professionals and teenage relationship specialists, alongside their positive relationships with staff, has helped them to reduce negative behaviours such as self-harm.

Young people are justifiably proud of their educational achievements. Some young people have progressed from virtually not attending school at all to full school attendance and are predicted capacity to achieve very good examination results. One school said of a young person: 'This young person has made extremely positive progress in education over the last 6 months and, as she enters year 11, she is now on track to achieve and work towards 8 GCSE's including Maths and English, whilst also managing to stabilise her behaviour'. The young person said: 'My attendance was shocking and I was always running away. Look at me now'.

Young people have good contact with family members. The young people appreciate that the staff have helped them to improve their relationships with their families and have sometimes acted as mediators to maintain those relationships when problems

have arisen.

Young people are acquiring life skills and self-care skills, as part of their everyday life at the home. This is helping them to learn about personal responsibility and to become progressively more independent. Some young people, who arrived at the home lacking the confidence to even go to the local shop alone, are now able to travel a significant distance, independently and on public transport, to visit family. A social worker said: 'This young person was extremely restricted in his previous placement and the staff at The Willows have dealt sensitively with him ensuring that he has developed skills to allow him to grow in confidence and independence'.

A young person, who is very artistic, has designed posters for the staff with their names surrounded by the traits she values. These include: 'kind', 'lovely', 'wise' and 'fun'. The posters are displayed in the home and provide a very visual expression of young people's satisfaction with the home and positivity about the staff who care for them.

Quality of care

good

Young people are cared for by a dedicated, committed and very child-focused team of staff who operate very much on the 'good parent' model. A real strength of this home is the collaborative working with other professionals, which robustly promotes the 'team around the child' ethos. The manager and staff advocate well for young people to ensure that they receive the services they need from all associated professionals. The staff team has established good links with specialist health care services and the police and makes good use of the skills of these professionals in undertaking preventative work with young people and addressing behavioural concerns.

Young people are happy here because it feels like their home. The house is homely and welcoming and is maintained and decorated to a good standard. Staff feel strongly that the establishment of routines and boundaries, and the provision of consistent care, are the key elements in the contributing to the success of young people's placements. Staff are reflective and flexible in their approach; this ensures that they are very responsive to young people's changing moods and helps them to predict, and often prevent, negative behaviour.

Young people require and receive a lot of individual attention from the staff. Sometimes record keeping suffers because of this. The staff demonstrate good awareness and understanding of young people's very individual needs and are effective in meeting those, although written placement plans are not always kept up to date. In some cases elements of the placement plan are dated a year ago and are supported by reams of handwritten additions. This is not helpful in helping new staff members to meet young people's identified support needs. Processes for consultation with young people are largely informal. Young people are reluctant to engage in

group meetings because they see them as 'not normal'. Young people's contributions to placement planning are not always clearly recorded. Although observations of, and discussions with, young people strongly support their view that they are actively involved in making decisions about their futures and how the home is run, the records do not demonstrate this well.

Staff promote young people's educational attendance and achievement well. Staff have been instrumental in pushing for statutory assessments to recognise the impact that young people's emotional difficulties have on their education, resulting in young people receiving extra support to promote their attainment. The staff have also, where appropriate, promoted and supported young people to access alternative educational provision where this option meets their needs more effectively than mainstream schooling.

Young people have good access to a range of activities and these very much reflect the young people's individual interests and choices. For some this means outings are focused arts and crafts, whilst others prefer to go go-karting and enjoy visiting local leisure parks, including for example recently at Halloween. Young people have independent visitors which gives them an 'independent ear' should they need one and increases their opportunities for outings and activities. An Independent Reviewing Officer said: 'The young person says she is happy living at the home. I have observed good relationships with staff members. A wide variety of social and leisure opportunities are introduced to her. It is noted that she likes to do these with staff, although the team is trying to encourage her to be more independent'.

The local authority commissions psychological support services for its young people and a therapeutic social worker acts as the liaison between the home and that service. He also provides training and shares research findings with the staff team to support their individual work with the young people. The young people who are currently living at the home have benefitted greatly from regular access to psychological support because it has helped them to cope with attachment issues and to come to terms with some of their past traumatic experiences, such as the breakdown of long-term foster placements and the loss of family members. Staff have helped young people to better understand the importance of accessing health care in an appropriate way. This means that young people visit dentists and opticians at regular intervals when previously they were reluctant to do so.

Keeping children and young people safe good

The staff prioritise young people's safety very well at all times. There are appropriate staffing levels at the home and staff consistently monitor young people's interactions to make sure there is no bullying. Young people's relationships with each other fluctuate from day-to-day; sometimes friendly, sometimes not. During the inspection young people referred to other young people as the thing they disliked most about the home. The staff strive to overcome what they see as something akin to sibling

rivalry by creating an environment in which young people are strongly encouraged to value and respect each other. Young people feel safe; they are very aware that the staff will always act to prioritise their safety. It is particularly helpful for young people that, as well as promoting their safety, staff also focus on increasing young people's ability to safeguard themselves. Staff achieve this by talking to young people about the situations, which have the potential to place them at risk of harm.

Young people rarely go absent without authority. This is because young people are well supported to deal with issues that concern them in more appropriate ways. Young people are very aware of how to make a complaint but to date have not felt the need to do so. Individualised protocols guide staff in taking appropriate action when young people go missing. Individual risk assessments are robust and highlight particular areas of concern and how these should be managed to promote young people's safety.

There had been no instances of young people going missing from the home in almost a year. Very recently, however, young people have been reported missing on two occasions. This behaviour resulted from their involvement with a new, and inappropriate, friendship group. It is to the credit of the staff team that the danger these friendships posed to young people was swiftly recognised. The manager and staff are working closely with other professionals, including specialist police officers who work with vulnerable young people, a specialist team of workers who support young people with relationships, drug and alcohol specialists and young people's social workers, to strengthen support and protection for the young people in response to this recent behaviour. The pro-active actions of the staff are ensuring that young people do not become entrenched in behaviours which place them at extreme risk of harm. When young people have been reported missing and return to the home return interviews are conducted by the Brighter Futures organisation on behalf of the police. However, the home does not immediately receive a copy of the record of these interview which means that there is not always a written record fully detailing the reasons given by the young person for running away.

Young people's behaviour has improved significantly while they have been at the home because positive behaviour is recognised and rewarded. The staff are ambitious for young people and this means that they are very proud of the progress young people make. There is good use of positive feedback. Physical restraint is rarely used, although all staff have been trained and know how to use it appropriately. The quality of the relationships that staff have with the young people enables them to de-escalate situations without the need to intervene physically to keep young people safe. There have only been two instances of restraint since the previous inspection and these are appropriately recorded.

A strong and very effective focus on risk management is demonstrated by the fact that all young people have very comprehensive risk assessments which are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect any change in risk levels. The regular servicing of, and checks on, gas, electrical and fire safety equipment help to ensure that young

people, staff and visitors are safe

Staff undertake regular training to ensure that they fully understand their recording and reporting and responsibilities in relation to child protection and safeguarding situations. The manager has recognised that child sexual exploitation (CSE) is an area of particular risk for looked after children and staff had a briefing on this at their development day in October. At that point there was nothing to suggest that young people living at the home were at risk of sexual exploitation. More recently concerns about young people's possible exposure to CSE have been heightened and all staff have accessed additional training to equip them to support and promote young people's safety more effectively.

Staff recruitment is undertaken centrally by the local authority. The manager has been instrumental in improving access, for all homes' managers, to information about recruitment checks on all local authority residential staff. Developments in this area were prompted by the manager's concerns that, when staff from other homes provide cover for staff sickness or annual leave at this home, she needs ready access to information confirming their suitability to work with young people.

Leadership and management

good

The manager has been in post since August 2010. She is appropriately qualified and experienced. Staff members and associated professionals comment positively on her leadership qualities, knowledge and capacity for flexible, collaborative working. One professional, who has regular contact with the home, referred to the manager as 'an outstanding leader' and 'a true professional'. The manager also manages another of the local authority's children's homes, which is located nearby and accommodates young people with the same category of needs.

The manager provides a very visible presence around the home and is very accessible to both staff and young people should they wish to speak with her. The manager robustly monitors the operation of the home and provides the required reports to Ofsted in a timely way. Her reports identify any patterns or trends, highlight any practice shortfalls and detail what action she will take to tackle these. Most of the shortfalls identified during this inspection had already been identified by the manager and work has begun to make the necessary changes. For example, young people's records do not fully reflect the extent of the work done by staff to promote young people's development. Young people's records read more like chronologies of their time at the home rather than reflecting the impact of the work undertaken in improving outcomes. This means that, when young people review their records, now or in the future, the progress they have made is not immediately apparent.

An independent person undertakes monthly, unannounced visits to the home on behalf of the local authority to monitor the standards of care. The independent

visitor's reports reflect the views of young people, staff and associated professionals as well as identifying areas for improvement.

Staff receive regular, good quality supervision and say that robust, informal, mutual support systems enable them to do their job effectively. Recently appointed staff feel that their induction has equipped them well to support young people and that the established staff team has been good at sharing information to help them understand the specific needs of individual young people living at the home. Newly appointed staff are currently able to commence sleeping in duties, once their six week induction is completed, provided the manager confirms their competence to do so. This leaves the staff member in sole charge of the home from 10.00 p.m. to 10.00 a.m. Although there are very clear support arrangements for those staff, should they require it during the night, this contravenes the National Minimum Standards.

The home's Statement of Purpose contains detailed and appropriate information about the operation of the home and is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect any changes.

The manager is able to demonstrate that, where practice concerns arise, staff disciplinary procedures are implemented appropriately and robustly. The manager has well-established and effective working relationships with the local authority safeguarding professionals ensuring that any investigations carried out or actions taken properly prioritise the safety of young people. The home's complaints procedure is clear. No complaints have been received since the previous inspection.

Working relationships with other professionals are particularly effective in supporting young people's progress. The manager recognises the value of this, particularly for the young people, and reflects that: 'There has been a real improvement in young people's behaviour. Initially there were several serious incidents involving criminal damage, threatening behaviour and assault. The turnaround has been remarkable. A very pro-active multi-disciplinary team from different services has supported this process of change'.

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.