

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	05/10/2016
Unique reference number	SC065679
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Staffordshire County Council
Registered address	Wedgwood Buildings, Tipping Street, Stafford ST16 2DH
Registered individual	Richard Hancock
Registered manager	Post vacant
Inspector	Louise Whittle

Inspection date	05/10/2016
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

SC065679

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- Young people are welcomed for short breaks into a comfortable, spacious and well-maintained home. Creative staff have decorated the living rooms with large, colourful posters and child-friendly noticeboards. Bedrooms are colour themed and young people like to choose their room.
- The extremely committed staff provide each young person with the personal attention and time required to meet their individual needs.
- The highly trained and skilled staff have an in-depth understanding of the pressures faced by the young people and their families. They are proud of the service's vital role in preventing the admission of young people to the care system.
- Young people have fun with enthusiastic staff, who engage them in outdoor and sporting activities, including bike rides and badminton. Staff also spend quiet time with young people, playing board games and providing them with opportunities to talk and develop trusting relationships.
- Sensitive and child-focused staff listen to young people, proactively using the young people's meetings to ascertain their views, wishes and feelings.
- Staff maximise the development opportunities for young people during their stay by skilfully matching them with other young people with similar interests.
- The competent and well-qualified staff keep young people safe. They prepare and review effective risk assessments and behaviour support plans. Careful matching by staff of young people for the short breaks reduces risk.
- The new manager is highly regarded by the staff. She ensures that they maintain exacting levels of organisation and communication with families and professionals, thereby running a service effectively that responds to rapid changes on a daily basis.
- Staff who undertake skilled and insightful work with young people to support their safety do not always record this work in sufficient depth for this to be useful to the young people.
- On more than one occasion, senior managers within the local authority have directed the manager to accept placements of young people whose needs are not consistent with the home's statement of purpose. In order to ensure the safety of all young people, the manager has had to cancel a number of pre-arranged short breaks. This had a negative impact on staff morale and reduced the support provided to the young people and families for whom the service was created.

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 within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
16: Statement of purpose The registered person must ensure that the home is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. (Regulation 16(5))	28/10/2016

Recommendations

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

- Staff should be familiar with the home's policies on record keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Staff should record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

Full report

Information about this children's home

Prior to April 2016, this home provided short- to medium-length placements for children and young people. In June 2016, the home changed its statement of purpose to provide a short-breaks service.

This children's home is managed by the local authority and provides residential short breaks for children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, aged between 12 and 17 years. The home also provides outreach services to support children, young people and their families.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
02/02/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
05/08/2015	Full	Good
11/03/2015	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
25/11/2014	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
Young people enjoy coming to this welcoming and spacious home for short breaks. Creative staff have cleverly designed the decoration and furnishings to make young people feel at home, despite the short length of the stays precluding them from personalising their bedrooms. The bedrooms are bright and colourful, and young people like to choose which one they will sleep in. Throughout the home, there are child-friendly boards on the walls, which inform young people about the staff who are on duty, the activities on offer and what to do if they have concerns or complaints. Young people form warm and trusting relationships with the highly motivated, nurturing and caring staff. Staff emphasise the importance of allowing young people to leave the pressures of home behind for a short time and 'just be children'. They enjoy cooking and playing board and card games with staff, as well as going out on bike rides and playing badminton. This strongly supports young people to make progress in their physical, emotional and social development. Because of the short breaks, young people are beginning to manage their emotions and behaviour more effectively, and some have improved their school attendance. The sensitive, highly trained and experienced staff have the time to work intensively with young people, giving them personal attention that they may not receive at home. Staff listen to young people who engage in meetings to discuss their views, wishes and feelings. They encourage young people to talk about any issues that they may have and to make suggestions about changes that could improve the service. Young people reflect on their stay and receive feedback from staff regarding issues raised in previous sharing sessions. They comment that they are happy here, get on with staff, and enjoy their bedrooms and activities such as football and running. Days out and activities are planned. The cook ensures that young people have any foods that they request to support their cultural and religious needs. One parent commented, 'He has only been coming for a few weeks, but the difference it makes to us all as a family is very noticeable... He is really enjoying his weekends. He can't wait to get his bag packed on a Friday night!' Another parent stated of her daughter, 'Staff have brought much-needed light relief into her life, particularly with her badminton sessions, keep fit and walks. They have successfully got her out and about, which is something that she completely refused to do at home'.	

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The highly trained and experienced staff keep young people safe during their short breaks, skilfully matching young people to reduce conflict and risk. Staff comment that the length of stays, usually only one or two nights a week, mean that young people do not experience the high levels of anxiety experienced by children looked after in new placements. This, in turn, reduces the time that staff are required to spend managing challenging behaviours. Staff consistently undertake detailed and effective risk assessments and behaviour management plans. They regularly review these and all staff read them. These valuable working documents include strategies for young people who may go missing or be at risk of child sexual exploitation. Staff meticulously count and safely store young people's medications, recording and planning for any health needs or food allergies. Staff take each young person through the fire safety procedures when they begin to come for short breaks. Staff training is up to date and relevant. Refresher training in child sexual exploitation and more in-depth training to counter self-harm are booked in order to make staff even more effective in managing safeguarding issues. When young people leave the home without authorisation or go missing, staff follow and report them to the police, when appropriate. Staff consistently follow clear guidelines for each young person, as agreed with parents prior to the placement. Staff engage in close collaboration and excellent communication with a range of professionals. One childcare professional confirmed that effective communication between the short-breaks service and her service means that they share concerns in a timely way to ensure that young people are safeguarded. Since the service began to admit young people for short breaks, local authority senior managers have, on more than one occasion, directed the manager to admit highly vulnerable young people to the home on an emergency basis. Staff could not support their complex behavioural and mental health needs while any other young people were present in the home. Consequently, the manager ensured that all young people were safe by cancelling a number of the short breaks. High staffing levels and detailed risk assessments enabled staff to protect the young people in the emergency placements. One highly vulnerable young person confirmed that he feels safe here. Parents and childcare professionals are confident that staff keep young people safe, and the social worker for one young person said, 'The young person would be in care if not for the service – risks have been reduced and risk assessments are shared and	

updated'. A parent commented, 'We know that he is being cared for in a safe environment.' Another social worker stated: 'Short breaks have reduced the risk of him engaging in criminal activities, and his level of understanding of the impact of his behaviours has improved. He appears to be making more insightful choices.'

While staff describe key work with young people regarding their behaviour and the issues that affect their safety, the records for this work lack sufficient detail to be useful to the young people. This is an area for improvement.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good
The manager came into post in August 2016 to manage the new short-breaks service. She has applied to become the registered manager. She has 16 years' experience in childcare, including 13 years as a manager, and managed another short-breaks service, one year. She holds a level 4 diploma and the registered managers award. The staff either hold level 3 diplomas or are undertaking them. All of the staff have first aid qualifications. The manager has made a very positive impression on the staff, who value her strong child focus and sensitive approach to them at a time of significant change. She has consulted carefully with staff and has begun to bring in new ways of working which benefit young people and increase staff effectiveness. These include allocating staff areas of responsibility, such as reviewing the locality risk assessment and arranging a parents evening. She is keen to understand the social pedagogy approach which underpins staff practice in the home, and to pass on her own knowledge and experience to staff. The staff team is very enthusiastic about the change to short breaks. Established staff comment that the new staff who have recently joined the team are inspirational. One staff member said that she loves the new service. Several staff echo this, and feel that the new service is working well and is developing. Staffing levels are good and the manager ensures that young people receive consistent care from staff who have the time to meet their personal needs. The manager provides staff with receive regular supervision which encourages reflection and is both supportive and challenging. Staff training is up to date and relevant, enabling staff to fulfil their roles confidently and develop, both individually and as a team. The success of this service relies on highs level of organisation and communication with young people's families and professionals, and the manager evidences real strength in these areas. One parent said, 'Top marks to the staff for excellent communication' and 'I cannot see any faults anywhere with the service'. The social	

worker for one young person said, 'The new manager has a "can do" approach, flexible and adaptable'. Another social worker stated, 'Communication is excellent. The manager is very child focused and tries to meet each young person's individual needs.

The manager and staff liaise closely with agencies including education and the intensive prevention service. They share information, which enables the agencies to together work with families and young people to meet their needs.

With regard to review of the service, the manager is proactive in ascertaining the views of family, young people, staff and childcare professionals. One social worker commented, 'They value feedback' and a parent said: 'The home is inviting and it has a lovely atmosphere. The staff are always willing to listen to our views and opinions for our son's care.'

While the manager has made significant strides towards establishing this new service, decisions made by senior managers within the local authority have threatened to hamper her progress. They have directed the home to admit, or retain, highly vulnerable young people on emergency placements for several days, due to no other placements being available. In order to keep all young people safe, the manager has cancelled short breaks over a period of nearly three weeks in total. While the home's statement of purpose allows for emergency placements, it does not specify that these may be lengthy and take complete priority over the short breaks. She has informed senior managers that her staff team does not have the skills or training in mental health, for example, that are necessary to meet the needs of these young people. The manager has been highly proactive in escalating her concerns both within the local authority and to other services that are failing to provide the young people with appropriate resources.

This additional demand on the service has lowered the morale of the highly motivated and effective staff. They have fully embraced the new service in order to prevent the admission into care of vulnerable young people in the community, and want to prioritise this work at all times. The local authority has assessed young people and families who access the short-breaks service as requiring the full range of edge of care services. Withdrawing a key element of that package at very short notice threatens the effectiveness of this highly valued new and developing service.

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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