

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC065679
Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Staffordshire County Council
Registered person address	Staffordshire County Council, Wedgwood Buildings Tipping Street STAFFORD ST16 2DH
Responsible individual	Richard Ronald Hancock
Registered manager	Mark Guest
Date of last inspection	20/03/2014

Inspection date	25/11/2014
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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	good
Quality of care	good
Keeping children and young people safe	good
Leadership and management	good

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	good
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Since the last inspection in March 2014 the local authority has placed 19 young people in this short-term assessment home. Overall, young people make good progress across all aspects of their welfare and development. As a result, young people are supported either to move successfully to long-term placements or independent living, or return to their families. Since the last inspection, the home has also met well the needs of three young unaccompanied asylum-seekers from Afghanistan.

Young people's progress is due to the active and effective support provided by a skilled and well-trained group of staff. Practice is highly personalised. It draws on pedagogic principles of empowerment and participation of young people both in the home and out in the community. However, on occasions care planning is hampered by the lack of prompt information sharing and when young people first arrive at the home.

Staff demonstrate a good understanding of safe working practices gained from regular training and experience in using the local safeguarding and missing from care procedures. As a result, young people feel safe in the home and comfortable with the boundaries and expectations associated with group living which are consistently followed in all but a few instances.

The home enjoys good quality, long-standing leadership. The manager is not afraid to tackle key issues, such as the appropriate matching of young people and the challenges associated with providing a short-term assessment function within the local authority. Staff are well supported and demonstrate good skills and a high level of commitment. As a result, outcomes for young people are good. The manager regularly monitors the home and identifies key improvements. However, consultation as a tool to inform planning and improvement work is under-developed. Additionally some reports are not being forwarded to Ofsted as required.

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home is a local authority children's home that provides short-term residential accommodation for five children who have emotional or behavioural difficulties. The young people usually stay for up to 12 weeks. During this time support is provided either to enable the young person to return home or to assist them in moving to an appropriate long-term placement.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
20/03/2014	Interim	good progress
29/04/2013	Full	good
04/01/2013	Interim	good progress
23/04/2012	Full	good

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

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 Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
34 (2001)	ensure that the registered person shall supply to the HMCI a report in respect of any review conducted by him for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 and improving the quality of care provided in the children's home (Regulation 34 (2))	30/12/2014
34 (2001)	ensure that the system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 and improving the quality of care provided in the children's home shall provide for consultation with children accommodated in the home, their parents and placing authorities	30/12/2014

	(Regulation 34 (3))	
5 (2001)	ensure that the HMCI is notified of any revisions to the statement of purpose and the children's guide within 28 days. (Regulation 5 (b))	30/12/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the views of the child, the child's family, social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) are sought regularly on the child's care, (unless in individual cases this is not appropriate) (NMS 1.4)
- ensure that the registered person makes every effort to achieve continuity of staffing so that children's attachments are not overly disrupted. In particular, review shift patterns to maximise consistency and continuity for children and young people (NMS 17.8)
- ensure that the registered person works with the responsible authority to ensure effective sharing of information held in the home's records about the child and information held in the responsible authority's records. In particular, ensure that when young people first arrive the home has the contact details for their social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers and previous placements in order to be able to liaise with them and use the information obtained to in the planning and assessment process. (NMS 22.7)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **good**

Young people make good progress and say it is 'better than I thought.' They become more emotionally resilient and develop a sense of belonging to the home without becoming institutionalised. This is because young people are also involved in the local community. For example, young people learn to negotiate with the staff and gain their trust to be allowed to go out on bicycles. They participate in sporting activities at the local leisure centre. Young people also attend local entertainment and community events. At one such event they helped to explain the idea of social pedagogy as a way of positively engaging and contributing to the community and society. Young people also collect photos and keep individualised diaries and records of their stay. Overall, young people's confidence increases; risk-taking is reduced and when they move on young people are more able to get involved in their community.

Young people enjoy healthy lifestyles. Their daily routines are much improved and they are more active: they get up in the morning, are busy during the day and settle down to sleep at night. They enjoy playing table tennis and regularly attend an outdoor educational activity centre. Many of them engage with specific services to help them address alcohol and drug misuse. Every young person has a medical assessment and many are helped to resolve outstanding health issues, including for example overdue dental treatment. Young people eat well and are encouraged to take part in budgeting, shopping and preparing food, including food that meets their religious or cultural needs.

Young people make good progress educationally because their cultural and linguistic needs are met. For example, young asylum-seekers who are unable to speak English receive tutoring in English at the home. One young person made such good progress that by the time he was ready to move on he was able to hold a detailed conversation and even make jokes in English. Young asylum-seekers benefit from attending the local mosque and having an interpreter for key meetings. They receive good support to prepare appropriate foods and complete their religious observances. As a result, one young person successfully enrolled in college and after a period in foster carer was able to move into independent living close to peers and adults from his country of origin. An Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) stated, 'cultural needs have been better met than was envisaged.'

Young people enjoy lots of different activities. This promotes their self-esteem, offers them positive alternatives to risky behaviours and gives them an experience of positive relationships with adults. Young people enjoy the tongue in cheek 'Fun Club' which they have established as a 'front' for going out together as a group rather than looking like they are all from the same children's home. As an outlet, many of them enjoy using the drum kit or playing one of the guitars that are available in the home; 'jamming' with members of staff or other young people. Other young people discover

painting and crafts. Since the last inspection, young people have been go-karting and BMX riding, completed assault courses and zip wire rides, visited theme parks and museums, gone to watch cricket, stayed in a yurt and gone on trips to London, Blackpool and Manchester.

Quality of care

good

Young people feel that the staff are genuinely concerned for their welfare. As a result, young people feel able to trust and 'open up' to staff. These positive relationships mean that when young people move on they are able to trust new carers or re-establish trust in their own families. Other young people have made successful moves to new foster carers or residential homes. By the time they leave most young people are able to sustain attendance at college or a pupil referral unit and those who live near enough to do so continue to visit the home.

Staff ensure that young people have access to the services and support they need. This helps young people develop skills in managing conflict and developing positive relationships, even if that involves having to overcome linguistic, cultural or historical barriers. For example, when young unaccompanied asylum-seekers first arrive staff ensure that interpreters are available to explain to them available what a children's home is, why they are there and what will happen to them. Staff ensure that young Muslims have prayer mats in their rooms and are taken to Friday prayers at the local mosque. The children's guide is also available in young people's first language. Staff are proactive in working with social workers, youth offending workers and voluntary agencies to provide advice, guidance, support, education and activities for young people who are struggling to engage in education or are involved in risk-taking behaviour. As a result, most young people's social confidence and behaviour improves. They are able to gain some insight into the impact of their behaviour on others and learn to act more appropriately both in the home and out in the community.

The home is very well furnished and maintained. Good use of colours, soft furnishings, posters, photo displays and soft lighting mean that this large, purpose-built children's home does not have an institutional feel. A parent said, 'the home was clean and had all facilities that a young person needed. His room was a good size and furnishings okay.' Although young people only spend a short period of time at the home, the staff ensure that every day counts. They communicate well with young people and adopt an enabling role, actively overcoming obstacles to activity and participation. A parent said, 'staff took time to talk to my child when he was down. The support offered to us as a family has been excellent.' However, the current shift system means that there are changes of staff in the morning, afternoon and evening. This makes it harder for young people to know who is looking after them and slightly undermines the family feel of the home. Nevertheless, good communication and effective team work ensure that young people still receive good quality care.

Staff ensure that the views, wishes and feelings of young people have a significant influence on the day-to-day running of the home. Every shift involves listening to young people and ensuring that they accomplish all planned tasks and engage in enjoyable activity in a way that maximises their personal development. Young people participate in constructive weekly planning meetings together. Staff act on the lessons learnt from complaints from young people. For example, if someone's possessions go missing they ensure that the young person is promptly and fully compensated. All young people receive positive support and advice about taking care of their things and managing their money responsibly. Members of staff employed as pedagogues say, 'each young person is an explorer, the pedagogue shows the child various ways of navigation, helps the child build a vessel and test it in the open sea, teaches them how to fish and then lets them set sail.' As a result, young people enjoy their time at home, take good memories and mementoes away with them and gain the skills they require to succeed when they move on.

Knowing that young people are only likely to stay for a short time, staff start work with young people the moment they arrive. When the plan is for a possible return home, the staff are proactive in ensuring that the local authority intervention team is involved at the earliest opportunity. Staff organise fortnightly planning meetings to ensure that all of the professionals involved with the young person are contribute to the assessment and planning process. However, staff do not routinely and immediately establish contact with young people's previous placements or with social workers and independent reviewing officers. The staff do not always have vital contact details, particularly when placements are made in an emergency and there is a delay in appointing a case accountable social worker. Staff are not always sufficiently creative or proactive in overcoming these barriers. This has the potential to impact on the quality of the first phase of assessment and planning.

Keeping children and young people safe good

The environment is physically safe and appropriately secure for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Each young person has a key for their bedroom. All of the bedrooms have en-suite bathrooms with safe fittings, such as motion-sensing lights and water outlets. This provides young people with good levels of privacy while at the same time minimising the potential for self-harm or damage.

High staffing levels are provided and all staff are robustly vetted by the local authority. All staff are trained in first aid, food safety and child protection. They are conscientious and committed to spending time alongside young people. This means that young people feel safe and are safe, whether alone or in company. Two waking night staff and a member of staff sleeping in ensure that young people are safe at night and that their individual routines are respected. For example, one young person who did not feel safe sleeping in an upstairs bedroom was allowed to sleep downstairs on a sofa while the issues were being explored and worked on.

Young people are protected effectively because staff are well trained in positive behaviour management and de-escalation techniques. This means that young people receive appropriate help to overcome their difficulties with anger and frustration. Staff use attentive positive relationships and de-escalation as a daily 'way of being' so that young people are able to find ways of communicating and managing their emotions safely and effectively. Male and female staff consciously conduct themselves in a warm, empathic way in order to deflect and diffuse some young people's sexist, defensive and competitive attitudes and behaviour. Young people who have witnessed violence and are inclined to use it themselves to deal with their fears are able to channel their anxieties safely. As a result, physical intervention is generally unnecessary and rarely used. However, all staff are trained in the use of physical restraint. A parent said, 'we felt our child was safe, it was only when he stepped away from the home and disregarded their advice that we had concerns but they can only do so much. They always showed our child positive choices and encouraged him to take them.'

Most young people's risk-taking behaviour reduces significantly while they are living at the home. An Independent Reviewing Officer said, 'one young person's substance and alcohol misuse have stopped since being in the home as it is the person's intention to join the army.' A worker who provides support for young people when there is a plan for them to return home said that one young person 'would have stayed forever if she could and was able to turn her back on risky behaviours to an extent.' These successes are due to the fact that staff are well trained and alert to the problems associated with drug and alcohol misuse and the risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE), particularly when young people go missing. Staff are sensitive to things that trigger young people's behaviour and use their skills to avoid or minimise them. Staff say, 'we believe in giving experiences - we do all we can to avoid boredom - we encourage them to open up to us and have been working particularly on engagement levels at night time.' For example, staff organise enjoyable activities and outings.

During the summer of 2014 when the demand for placements was high, the local authority overruled the manager and staff's assessment of the potential risk of admitting some young people because of the likely impact on the rest of the group. That led to young people going missing and being at risk of CSE. However, staff used their knowledge of CSE and child protection very effectively in their work with police and social workers. They were able to minimise the opportunities for young people to disengage from the home and at the same time encourage young people to disclose what had been happening. The staff worked well with specialist police teams, sharing information and intelligence appropriately, and were able to secure urgent and appropriate moves for some young people in order to safeguard and protect them.

Leadership and management

good

Young people benefit from a home that is well run. The Registered Manager has managed the home for five years and, in addition to his social work degree, has appropriate qualifications in care and care management. Staff say they feel well supported by the Registered Manager, that they enjoy good access to training and that the quality of training and team working improves the care they are able to provide. For example, in the annual Ofsted survey staff comments included the following: 'Our home manager welcomes and encourages staff participation at weekly team meetings which discuss the running of the home and the needs/care of our young people'; 'SKIP training has helped me look at preventative measures in behaviour control - getting to know the young people as individuals and recognising triggers for challenging behaviour. This helps me to use diffusion skills to calm a situation before it escalates'.

Leaders and managers ensure that the home is regularly monitored. Monthly reports produced by the home's independent visitor provide appropriate challenge and are acted on. Monitoring reports prepared by the Registered Manager are equally effective in identifying areas for development. For example, monitoring has led to improvements in matching and care planning, the interface with the placements panel and relationships with social workers. However, regular consultation with young people, social workers and IROs as part of the monitoring and quality assurance process is under-developed. Their feedback is not being used to influence or inform the management and development of the service. There are missed opportunities to consult with young people at the end of placements and to consult IROs early in placements about the appropriateness of emerging plans and the strategies used to help and support young people. Additionally, Ofsted has not been sent copies of the periodic reviews of the care provided under Regulation 34 or updates to the home's Statement of Purpose.

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.