

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	1 June 2016
Unique reference number	SC369825
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Registered provider address	City of Stoke-on-Trent, Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 1HH

Responsible individual	Susan Hammersley
Registered manager	Alan Davies
Inspector	Matt Hedges

Inspection date	1 June 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	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	Good
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

SC369825

Summary of findings

The children's home provision requires improvement because:

- Staff do not adequately support young people with their education.
- Managers fail to consistently challenge other agencies effectively when their response is poor.
- Staff practice in relation to medication is not robust.
- Some staff are not adequately trained due to shortfalls in the home's training programme.
- Graffiti and damage to some areas of the home do not create a homely environment.
- The registered manager does not consistently collate or record the views of young people, parents, staff and other professionals.

The children's home strengths

- Young people develop good relationships with staff.
- Overall, partnership working with other agencies is strong.
- Staff assess risk well and, generally, manage it effectively.
- Staff are wholly positive about the support they receive from managers.

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
5. Engaging with the wider system to ensure children's needs are met In order to meet the engaging with the wider system standard, with particular reference to challenge, the registered person must ensure that: (c) if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority's or a relevant person's performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met.	15 July 2016
8. The education standard In order to meet the education standard, the registered provider must ensure that staff: (2)(a)(i) help each child to achieve the child's education and training targets, as recorded in the child's relevant plans.	15 July 2016
13 The leadership and management standard In order to meet the leadership and management standard, with particular reference to training, the registered person must: (c) ensure that staff have the skills to meet the needs of each child.	15 July 2016
The registered person must ensure that medicine which is prescribed for a child is administered as prescribed to the child for whom it is prescribed. (Regulation 23(2)(b))	1 July 2016
The registered person must ensure that within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a	15 July 2016

child in the home, a record is made which includes the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure. (Regulation 35(3)(a)(vii))	
The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children ('a quality of care review'). This must provide for ascertaining and considering the opinions of children, their parents, placing authorities and staff. (Regulation 45(5))	7 October 2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Ensure that the home is a nurturing, supportive, and homely environment. The home should seek as far as possible to maintain a domestic rather than 'institutional' impression. (Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards, page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- Ensure that any sanctions used to address poor behaviour are restorative in nature, to help children recognise the impact of their behaviour on themselves, other children, the staff caring for them and the wider community. (Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards, page 46, paragraph 9.38)
- Ensure that the recruitment of staff safeguards children and minimises potential risks to them. (Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards, page 61, paragraph 13.1)

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home provides care and accommodation for up to two children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The home is operated by a local authority.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
29 January 2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
4 June 2015	Full	Requires improvement
24 February 2015	Interim	Declined effectiveness
24 July 2014	Full	Adequate

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home	Requires improvement
Some young people do not make sufficient progress in their education. Staff do not always give them the support they need in order to achieve their targets. For example, some staff are unclear which exams a young person has taken, or is yet to take. This prevents them from helping young people to prepare. Young people who struggle to get up in the morning for school are not consistently motivated to do so. Staff do not effectively explore the reasons for this or take steps to help young people to improve in this regard. This affects their attainment, and, consequently, their options in the future. Despite this, young people develop good relationships with staff and receive individualised care in some respects. These relationships help them to make progress in other key areas of their life, improving both socially and emotionally. Other professionals highlight this, one stating, 'He is more engaged, chatty, polite and enthusiastic... he feels more secure.' Young people also develop practical independence skills, including cooking and general housework tasks, as well as budgeting and using transport. This helps to prepare young people as they approach adulthood. Staff practice in administering medication is poor. On one occasion, staff changed the frequency of a young person's prescribed medication without consulting a medical professional. This contradicts the home's medication policy. This has the potential to affect young people's physical health, and to reduce the effectiveness of the medication significantly. Staff support young people to express their views, particularly in relation to seeing their friends and family, some of whom live some distance away. This ensures that young people keep in touch with the people most important to them. Staff have recently decorated some areas of the home. Most notably, a young person is proud of the improvement to his bedroom. This has helped to create a pleasant space that he can take pride in. In other areas, the decor is poor. Some doors have scratch marks, and offensive graffiti is visible in several areas. This does not promote a nurturing, homely environment and impacts on young people's day-to-day experiences of living in the home.	

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The registered manager and staff understand the risks that young people face, and in some cases may pose to others. As a result, they manage risk well and help young people to be increasingly safe. A youth offending professional states, 'Staff appreciate the risks and strengthen protective factors.' Clear guidance outlines the actions to take in response to young people who may go missing. This has resulted in a significant decrease in missing incidents. There have been none since the home's interim inspection in January 2016. This reduces the potential risks of exploitation and self-harm. Other risk-taking behaviours also lessen. For example, offending behaviour reduces. This helps young people to stay out of the criminal justice system. One young person highlighted this to staff stating, 'Thanks for all the support'. Staff ensure that clear and consistent boundaries in the home generate a feeling of security for young people. One young person states, 'I think the home is good... I feel safe here'. A social worker confirms this, explaining, 'Staff are firm but fair'. This helps young people's behaviour to improve and promotes good relationships with each other. Staff highlight and reward positive behaviour. Sanctions are used in response to negative behaviour. These are not always restorative in nature. As a result, they do not always help young people to recognise the impact of their behaviour on themselves or others. In addition, staff do not evaluate the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of these measures. This does not allow them to identify how successful they are, or assess when their response may need to change. Young people, families and professionals understand how to make complaints. The management team responds robustly, particularly if a complaint relates to staff practice. This helps managers to reflect on how practice can improve, and ensures that concerns are heard.	

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement
A suitably qualified, experienced registered manager is in charge of the home. He has been in post since October 2015. During this period, he has continued to develop positive relationships with a	

number of partner agencies. A range of professionals confirm this as a strength of the home, specifically highlighting effective communication. This benefits young people and ensures that there is timely sharing of key information. However, managers respond inconsistently when the performance of other agencies is inadequate. At times, the registered manager offers strong challenge and advocates for young people to receive the services they require. At other times, this challenge is lacking. Specifically, managers have failed to challenge the inadequate response from other agencies to a significant safeguarding incident. This failed to meet young people's needs and could affect the progress they are making.

All staff are appropriately qualified and hold the required level 3 diploma. In contrast to this, some staff are not adequately trained in key aspects of their day-to-day role, despite this being highlighted as a shortfall at the home's previous inspection. For example, many staff are not able to access training in how to help young people who display sexually harmful/inappropriate behaviour. Other staff have waited several months to update their medication training. These omissions affect their skills and their ability to meet the needs of some of the young people they support.

Staff recruitment and vetting processes are generally satisfactory, with one exception. Managers verify written references with telephone calls to the referee. However, they fail to record the details of these calls or the information provided. This risks the loss of key information and fails to evidence how managers assess some aspects of an applicant's suitability. This increases the risk that unsuitable adults may gain employment in the home.

The registered manager has made some recent improvements to the service. The staff team is more stable, and staff are very positive about the support they receive. The home's statement of purpose is up to date and accurately reflects the services offered by the home. The registered manager has also recently implemented new monitoring systems. These have started to identify areas for development and helped him to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the home better. He has also produced one formal 'quality of care review'. This provides a way of measuring young people's progress more effectively. However, this system does not gather or evaluate the opinions of young people, parents, placing authorities or staff. This shortfall reduces the opportunities to ensure that staff prioritise young people's needs, and to inform further the development of 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 children looked after 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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