

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	09/11/2016
Unique reference number	SC372511
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Registered person address	Children's Services Dept, 2nd floor, 10 Duke Street, Blackburn BB2 1DH

Responsible individual	Karen Barrick
Registered manager	Jeremy Wood
Inspector	Ceri Evans

Inspection date	09/11/2016
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	Outstanding
The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the home contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help, protection and care.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding

SC372511

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is outstanding because:

- Children's and young people's experiences at this short-breaks service have had a significant impact on many aspects of their lives.
- Parents and professionals are extremely positive about the home and confirm that this is an 'outstanding' provision for children and young people.
- Staff know children and young people extremely well and are familiar with their communication preferences. Consequently, children and young people are able to give their views and feel understood.
- Staff provide exceptional day-to-day experiences. There is a strong emphasis on providing a wide range of activities. These fully engage children and young people, and help them to thrive socially.
- The staff team is very committed and demonstrates a high level of skill and understanding, which enables staff to meet the complex needs of children and young people effectively.
- Behaviour management is effective. Staff are consistent in their response to negative behaviour and have been successful in their efforts to help children and young people to manage their frustrations and anxieties, which are often brought about by their disability.
- The staff team is managed by a passionate, dedicated and inspirational leader who is committed to securing continual improvements for the benefit of children and young people.
- The staff are very well supported in their roles by the manager and have regular supervision and team meetings. They participate in regular training. This ensures that they are well equipped to meet the individual needs of the young people placed at the home.
- The shortfalls relate to records and do not detract from the high-quality care offered at this home. Shortfalls have not impacted negatively on the well-being and safety of young people.

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

Recommendations

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

- The registered person must ensure that all young people's case records are kept up to date. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)

This is with specific regard to ensuring that a copy of statutory documentation is obtained and kept on file.

- The registered person must ensure that the child's views, wishes and feelings are taken into account when planning and undertaking their care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 21, paragraph 4.5)

This is with specific reference to updating communication passports in order to capture the individuality of each child.

Full report

Information about this children's home

This children's home is owned and run by a local authority. The home provides short-break accommodation for young people with learning/physical disabilities and complex health needs. The service has two main functions. The home can accommodate up to five young people on a short break at any one time. Currently, 34 young people access the service.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
08/03/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
02/12/2015	Full	Outstanding
24/03/2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness
15/10/2014	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Outstanding
Children and young people who have disabilities and complex health needs enjoy well-planned short breaks that significantly improve the quality of their lives. Being able to be part of a sociable, safe and welcoming environment significantly enhances their well-being, overall progress and development. Parents and professionals hold the service in high regard. One parent said, 'There is no other place like Apple Trees; it's a real haven for me and my son. Staff here are loving, caring and very intuitive. He has made massive progress and I know that he is safe, well cared for and enjoys his stays.' Another parent said, 'Staff are part of the extended family. They treat my child like one of their own. I can't describe the difference that this service has made to my child and the family as a whole. This place is just amazing; a brilliant service.' The staff team provides child-focused care and support to enable children and young people to achieve positive outcomes. Staff are enthusiastic, skilled and knowledgeable, and have high aspirations for each individual child and young person. The ethos of the home is to provide a warm, welcoming environment that supports and promotes positive outcomes, and this is something that the whole team embraces. Significant improvements have been made to the overall quality of information within the short-break plans. They are now engagingly written and provide a detailed picture of the child's personality, interests, health, social and communications needs. Short-break plans are regularly reviewed to ensure that the support that they receive continues to meet each child's and young person's needs, reflect any changes, and identify and address any concerns about their progress. Records clearly set out and evaluate children's experiences and progress in meaningful ways that contribute to an understanding of their lives and abilities. The staff team has expertise in supporting disabled children and young people. Staff make sure that they receive an excellent level of good-quality personalised care. They know each child well and are extremely intuitive and attuned to their needs. They strive to understand young people's views and staff take time to understand what young people are saying. They expertly support and encourage every child, including those who do not communicate verbally. Staff make good use of a range of aids to assist communication that are child-friendly and visually attractive. However, communication passports are not regularly reviewed and lack personalisation. For example, all passports are written in the same format and the overall design is the same for each child. The manager has taken some action to address this shortfall. Moving forward, this will ensure that each child and young	

person has an updated and personalised passport.

Staff provide exceptional day-to-day experiences. There is a strong emphasis on providing a wide range of activities. These fully engage children and young people and help them to thrive socially. Children and young people have plenty of opportunities to try new experiences and explore the world that they live in. One professional commented, 'I have seen an improvement in the planned activities and outings, and there has been more advanced planning for group sessions. It was positive to see children accessing a Southport trip and something more adventurous. I also see the theme nights as a real positive, and the children enjoy them.' This clearly demonstrates that children's and young people's complex needs do not hinder their opportunities.

Staff work collaboratively with families and placing social workers to gain a comprehensive understanding of children and young people's complex health needs. They are supported to have access to a full range of health services and receive excellent support with any health problems. Staff closely monitor children's and young people's health needs and work closely with parents and health professionals to ensure that children and young people continue to receive appropriate support during their stay.

Children's and young people's all-round independence skills have increased. The focus is placed on helping children and young people to progress through promoting a variety of experiences that enhance social, emotional and physical development. These experiences are important aspects of learning to cope with transition and adulthood. With respect to children and young people with complex needs, small steps represent big improvements in terms of their emotional literacy, self-determination and independence. For example, one young person is being encouraged to dress himself. A staff member has started to lay his clothes out in a particular manner so that he can dress independently with limited support. It is clear that the progress made by some children and young people is beyond expectations and that they are flourishing in all aspects of their lives.

The home is warm, spacious and well-furnished to meet the needs of children and young people. The building has been adapted to meet their needs and is very well maintained. Bathrooms are adapted and equipped to meet the children's personal care and mobility needs. Children's bedrooms are well designed and furnished to promote their privacy. Externally, there is a secure play area and sensory garden, with a range of toys and play equipment for them to enjoy.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
The home makes outstanding provision in safeguarding children's and young	

people's welfare. Everyone involved in supporting them plays a role in ensuring that children and young people stay protected from harm. This includes staff being confident in all areas of child protection, and having the necessary knowledge and skills to keep children and young people safe. Another example of why the home is outstanding is its strong and robust partnerships with other agencies. The home forms part of an integrated service called the 'hub'. The 'hub' provides a range of support which includes outreach work and joint service delivery with social workers, health and education. Robust partnerships enable professionals to take decisive and immediate action to protect children and young people, should any issues of concern arise. This ensures that children and young people receive the support that they need to remain safe and protected from harm.

Risk assessments are thorough, insightful and individualised. They are regularly updated, and reflect the complex and diverse needs of each child or young person. Staff have a comprehensive understanding of the risks to individual children associated with their disabilities, levels of understanding and communication, and health conditions. They are vigilant in their supervision and observation, which significantly reduces known risks and potential hazards. Regular evaluation of risk also ensures that staff are aware of any changes to agreed risk management strategies. These measures further promote children's and young people's welfare and well-being.

The ethos of the home is one of encouraging positive behaviour, kindness and respect. Staff work very effectively as a team, and this means that children and young people are supported in a consistent way. Staff are skilled and meticulous in using de-escalation and communication techniques to lessen children's and young people's anxiety and to channel behaviour in a positive direction. Records verify that restraint has not been used since the last inspection. Staff are extremely successful in helping children and young people to manage their frustrations and anxieties in a positive manner. Consequently, the atmosphere can remain relaxed, settled and safe.

Child protection concerns are addressed swiftly and robustly. Staff have a clear understanding of safeguarding procedures and understand what action to take in the event of allegations, suspicion of abuse or unsafe practice. Various professionals confirm that the organisation is transparent and that concerns are reported appropriately. No allegations or complaints have been made in this inspection period. However, procedures are in place to ensure that any investigation or concerns about staff practice can be handled fairly, quickly and in consultation with appropriate external agencies. This provides effective protection for children and young people.

No children or young people have gone missing and none are identified as being at risk of child sexual exploitation. However, these potential risks are clearly identified in risk assessments, and staff have a good awareness of the signs and symptoms of abuse.

The arrangements for managing children's and young people's medication are safe. When staff have any questions or concerns about a child's medication, they always contact parents and the prescribing doctor for advice to make sure that they give only the correct medication. The home has a separate room for the storage and safe administration of medicines. Effective medication audit systems ensure that practice remains safe. Furthermore, each staff member receives refresher training before being allowed to administer medicines, and safe medicine administration is continually promoted as a regular agenda item in team meetings to promote good practice.

Regular health and safety and fire safety checks protect children and young people, staff and visitors to the home. Close monitoring, maintenance and servicing of specialist equipment also make the home a safe place. Visitors are vetted and checked, and sign the visitor's book. This ensures that as much as possible is done to ensure that children and young people are not exposed to unsuitable adults.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding
The home continues to be very effectively led by an experienced and aspirational manager who has been in post since September 2015. He is suitably qualified and has now successfully completed his national vocational qualification level 5. The manager is well supported by one deputy manager and two principle workers. The management team members all work extremely well together, and provide visible and confident leadership based on professional respect, autonomy, fairness and transparency. The manager has successfully created a culture in which staff undeniably place the needs of children and young people at the heart of their practice. The manager demonstrates real care and ambition, and is passionate about children and young people achieving and doing well. He has invested in the team, and his enthusiasm and commitment have helped to inspire staff and shape the overall ethos of the service. Families, placing social workers and other professionals are extremely positive about the service. They all report that the care and support provided at the home is child focused and that there are excellent levels of communication. Partnership working is a great strength of the home. A relative said, 'Communication is fantastic. The information sharing booklet is really helpful and provides a detailed overview of my child's time in the home.' The aims and objectives of the home are clearly outlined in the statement of purpose. In addition, all children and young people have personalised children's guides which provide details about their own stay at the home, including pictures of the home and information about their stay. This helps children and young people to settle and understand what to expect during their short break.	

The staff team is cohesive and supportive, and all members have a variety of different skills which are valued and acknowledged by their manager. The staff work very closely together, and share positive and supportive relationships with each other. The staff share the manager's ambitions for children and young people, and work well together to promote positive outcomes. Staff spoken with during the inspection demonstrated an excellent understanding of each individual child's and young person's needs, and were clearly passionate about their work. One staff member said, 'This is more than just a job. I absolutely love working here.' The open culture within the home ensures that children and young people feel well cared for and are happy during their stay.

The leadership team values the individual strengths and skills brought by each member and offers a supportive environment in which practice can develop. Professional development plans are thorough, and provide clear objectives which are reviewed regularly. Staff also access regular internal and external training that helps them to develop their knowledge of specific issues relating to the children and young people in their care, for example sensory training, medication awareness and suction training. Supervision is regular, purposeful and progressive. Staff confirm that they feel very well supported in their role. They are helped and encouraged to expand their competence and confidence in all areas of work. Consequently, the home is continuing to improve, and the staff team remains motivated and well equipped to meet the individual and complex needs of the children and young people.

Case records are detailed and offer a good overview of the experiences and progress made by children and young people. However, not all case files contain a copy of statutory documentation, such as child in need reviews. The manager has taken some action to address this with the placing authority, and protocols are in place to ensure that relevant documents are received in a timely manner.

Regular internal and external monitoring systems are robust. Reports are of high quality and demonstrate sustained improvement over time. The manager continues to strive to improve all aspects of the home, consulting with the staff team in the development of processes to ensure that there is safe and consistent child-focused practice. Shortfalls are quickly identified and prompt action is taken to effect improvements. This results in a home where there is ambition to provide continued outstanding care for children and young people.

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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