

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	30/11/2016
Unique reference number	SC469411
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Next Stage 4 Life Ltd
Registered provider address	28 Manchester Road, Westhoughton, Bolton BL5 3QJ

Responsible individual	Richard Guy
Registered manager	Post vacant
Inspector	Sharon Lloyd

Inspection date	30/11/2016
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	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	Requires improvement

SC469411

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- The provider, manager and staff team have a strong commitment to children and go the extra mile to provide positive, enjoyable experiences from which children benefit.
- The home provides stability and a sense of belonging for children who have had a high number of moves and placement breakdowns in the past.
- Children receive good-quality care in a nurturing, pleasant environment. They feel safe and say that they are well cared for. For example, they said: 'It's good', 'They look after us' and 'I like living here'. Over time, they learn to trust the staff team and build meaningful bonds that support their all-round development.
- Children's safety and well-being are central to practice. The home works extremely well with the police, health professionals and safeguarding agencies. This helps to protect children whose behaviour threatens their own safety and that of others. There is a clear focus on helping children to reduce their involvement in criminality and dangerous behaviour.
- The home works in effective collaboration with partner agencies. This enables children to access support aimed at improving their mental health and emotional well-being. For example, a professional said: 'What they're doing is "above and beyond". They have worked really hard and dealt with things appropriately when others have not. From the markers that we use, their care is better than anywhere else.... They're willing to listen, take on new ideas and work with us.'
- Progress in meeting the requirements and recommendation made at the last inspection has been slow and there have been gaps in the quality of leadership, including the monitoring of practice. Weaknesses in the leadership and management of the home have been recognised and action has recently been taken to improve them. A new manager took up post in October 2016 and has identified and begun to address shortfalls in the service. This has strengthened the home's capacity to improve. Although there has been some impact on children, the overall quality of the service remains good.

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
Restraint in relation to a child is only permitted for the purpose of preventing: (1)(a) injury to any person (including the child); (b) serious damage to the property of any person (including the child). (2) Restraint in relation to a child must be necessary and proportionate. (3) These regulations do not prevent a child from being deprived of their liberty where that deprivation is authorised in accordance with a court order. (Regulation 20(1)(2)(3))	31/01/2017
The registered person must provide a copy of the independent person’s report to HMCI. (Regulation 44(7)(a))	31/01/2017

Recommendations

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

- Ensure staff continually and actively assess the risks to each child and the arrangements in place to protect them. Where there are concerns for a child, their placement plan and risk assessments, agreed between the home and their placing authority, must include details of the steps the home will take to manage any assessed risks on a day-to-day basis. (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 42 paragraph 9.5)

This specifically relates to clearer risk management and strategies in relation to monitoring young people believed to be under the influence of alcohol or harmful substances.

- Make best use of information from independent and internal monitoring to ensure continuous improvement. The registered person should be skilled in anticipating difficulties and reviewing incidents such as learning from disruptions and placement breakdowns. They should proactively implement lessons learned and take responsibility for sustaining good practice. (‘Guide to the children’s

homes regulations including the quality standards', page 55, paragraph 10.24)

- Ensure that the information set out in the statement of purpose accurately reflects the service so that, as an essential part of the process of agreement between the registered person and placing authority, it demonstrates that a placement in that home is the right one for that child, and that the home will be able to respond effectively to the child's assessed needs. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.6)
- Ensure that staff have the skills to respond to each child's individual behaviour. In particular, ensure that staff are appropriately trained and supported to respond effectively to children's assessed needs, such as an individual child's complex attachment disorder. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.14)

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home is operated by a private company. The home provides care for four young people who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties or learning disabilities.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
30/08/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
30/03/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
13/01/2016	Full	Good
24/03/2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness
17/07/2014	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
<p>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>Children have a positive experience of living in the home and make good overall progress. Professionals speak very highly of the commitment and expertise of the staff team and the positive impact of good-quality, nurturing care on children who have had repeated placement breakdowns in the past. Children benefit from consistent care in a stable, secure placement.</p> <p>Professionals and parents are unanimous in their praise of the home and the difference that it is making to children's lives. For example, one said: 'He's doing really well since moving there. His previous placements were not working, but they are doing a really good job, on all counts. They have insight and they invest time in him, so he likes living there and is learning to manage his emotions better.'</p> <p>Good placement planning ensures that children receive individualised care that meets their needs. They are encouraged and assisted to explore new opportunities and enjoy positive experiences. For example, one child has learned to swim, and enjoys baking, shopping and playing board games with staff. Another enjoys playing pool and having outings with staff, and is developing independence and self-care skills. This helps to build their self-esteem, confidence and enjoyment of life. Through providing and participating in fun activities, the staff team encourages the development of meaningful bonds that children value and benefit from. Over time, staff are able to influence children to reduce their dangerous behaviour and engage more readily in purposeful activities and education.</p> <p>Where children have dips in their progress, usually resulting from external influences such as setbacks in relationships with family and friends, the home still demonstrates a sound commitment to them. It supports children through periods of high anxiety and volatile behaviour, encouraging them to make the right choices and providing emotional warmth and security within clear boundaries. A social worker explained: 'It's a really good home. They keep working with him and they don't give up on him. He's had a lot of let-downs in his life, but the commitment is there for him. They love him to pieces. His relationships with staff are significant and they give him the opportunity to turn things around. He wants to stay there even though, at present, he is not doing well and is struggling emotionally.'</p> <p>One young person has left the home since the last inspection. Her discharge was brought forward when the home reluctantly served notice on her placement. The young person had made significant progress at the home across all areas of her development, particularly in her emotional well-being, but her unsafe behaviour had escalated in response to external influences, necessitating the authorisation of</p>	

deprivation of liberty safeguards, which the home implemented appropriately. However, her unsafe behaviour was beginning to impact negatively on other children and the home worked effectively with the placing authority to secure a more suitable placement. The transition was well managed.

Staff involve children in decision making about their daily lives and encourage them to be fully involved in care planning meetings. They help children to reflect on incidents, and to explore their feelings and ideas. Children know how to make a complaint, but say that they are happy at the home and can think of nothing that needs to improve. One child has made a complaint about a member of staff since the last full inspection. It was appropriately investigated, but withdrawn when the child admitted that it was fictitious.

The home supports contact with family and friends well and in accordance with children's individual needs and the wishes of the placing authority. With staff support, children are able to rebuild damaged relationships with their families, develop a sense of belonging and establish realistic expectations for future contact. Parents speak highly of the care that their children receive, even when they are not satisfied with the level of contact agreed.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
<p>Staff know children very well and know how to help individual children stay safe. They are fully aware of each child's safety needs and take action to meet them. For example, they supervise children at risk of self-harm very closely and this prevents serious injury to those children. Written risk assessments are in place to guide staff, but are not fully up to date, and the shortfalls in these documents that were identified at the last inspection have not been met. This is a managerial oversight and, to date, has not impacted on the home's ability to protect the children.</p> <p>Staff take robust and swift action to protect children who go missing. They maintain phone contact with children and, in most instances, children are missing for short periods only before either the staff or the police find them and bring them home. A police officer explained: 'They search for the child straight away and they can contact me before the time when they have to report the child as missing (in line with the agreed protocol for that child). It works well – other homes don't do that, because they don't have such good relationships with us. For example, they'll let me know that a boy is missing and I'll contact him and go and get him. He communicates well with us, because we visit the home and he knows us. Nine times out of 10, we get him back easily. I think they do a brilliant job here and we have a very good relationship with them.'</p> <p>The home makes children welcome on their return from being missing.</p>	

Independent return interviews are conducted within 72 hours by local authority advocates or specialist workers whose focus is to support missing children and those at risk of exploitation and drug misuse. Professionals give feedback to the manager of the home which ensures that the home is quickly made aware of any concerning information shared by a child on their return. This means that children are well supported by the home's good collaborative working with agencies involved in safeguarding them.

Children say that they are safe in the home. Behaviour management strategies are regularly discussed and reviewed to promote their effectiveness. Some children have presented extremely challenging behaviour that has resulted in extensive damage to property and some assaults on staff. Incidents are shared with relevant professionals, and advice on behaviour management is provided by specialists, including from the child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). A professional said: 'I've seen the incident reports and they use the strategies that I suggest, and he is responsive. They are helping him to build emotional skills, slowly but appropriately. They have a good understanding of the impact of early trauma. He is responding.'

There is good evidence that, over time, children reduce their level of aggression and the intensity of their destructive behaviour lessens. A therapist explained: 'How he responds today is different from when he first came. The level of his violence is much reduced. He causes a lot less damage... The boundaries are in place. The staff team are on board with me. They work well therapeutically. They try to get it right and learn from it. They look for solutions and are proactive.'

The home works extremely well with the local police. A police officer explained: 'We know all the children well here and all the staff. The children do a lot of criminal damage. The staff do everything possible to safeguard them for their own welfare and well-being. The relationships that they have with the children are very good. The staff are not treating it as a job, but treat them as their own. We see them use "change of face" tactics, and we see them doing their best and dealing with them in a way that we wouldn't, but that's the right way for these children.'

Some children continue to be drawn into criminality when with friends in the community. Staff try to reduce the impact of negative influences by involving children in fun activities and holidays, but this is not always successful for children who have low self-esteem. The home and police have a strong and effective working relationship that serves to reduce the likelihood of children being charged unnecessarily, while ensuring that they receive the guidance and advice that they need to deter them from crime.

In most instances, the home does not press charges for criminal damage. It works with the police, CAMHS and the youth offending service to ensure that children have the support that they need to reduce their criminality, and it is rare that convictions ensue. Despite this, serious damage to cars has led to one child being

convicted for criminal damage. Staff encourage him to attend appointments with the youth offending service and work on reducing the likelihood of him reoffending.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement
<p>Weaknesses in the leadership and management of the home have been recognised by the provider, and the manager appointed in March 2016 has stepped down. A new manager has been recruited and took up post in October 2016. She has submitted an application for registration to Ofsted. She has drawn up a realistic development plan based on her assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the home. This is aimed at supporting the home to make improvements and address shortfalls in practice, but is in its early stages so improvements are not yet established.</p> <p>Some shortfalls remain outstanding, and more needs to be done to strengthen and improve further the otherwise good practice in the home. The requirements and recommendation made at the last inspection have not yet been addressed. They relate to weaknesses in the standard of restraint records and risk assessments. The manager has not reviewed or monitored these records well. This means that the risk assessments and restraint records remain variable in quality. Some do not fully reflect practice, and monitoring by the manager has not identified or addressed the shortfalls. For example, the reasons why restraint has been used are not always sufficiently detailed to demonstrate without doubt why restraint was necessary, yet the manager’s scrutiny of the record has not identified poor recording practice when it occurs. The home’s independent visitor has raised concerns about record keeping which has prompted further training in record keeping for the staff team. The new manager is tackling this underperformance.</p> <p>The home was also required to send in copies of the monthly independent visitor reports to Ofsted to enable the regulator to maintain effective oversight of the home between inspections. This has not been done, because responsibility for this task has not been clearly assigned. This has not impacted on children’s welfare and the quality of the visitor reports remains good, which supports the manager to monitor the operation of the home.</p> <p>For the most part, the home meets the aims and objectives set out in the statement of purpose. However, the document does not accurately and explicitly reflect the arrangements for therapeutic intervention. Nor does it clearly show under what circumstances it might consider that it can no longer meet the needs of children for whom it purports to offer a service – that is, ‘those who pose a risk to themselves or others, those unable to live in a family setting, those with behavioural or other difficulties and those who need intensive support’. This means that placing authorities do not have full information on which to base a decision to</p>	

place a child in the home.

Eight of the 12 staff members have started working at the home since the last full inspection. They report good recruitment and induction processes. However, recruitment records were not checked at this inspection. All new staff have social care experience, but four members of staff are not yet suitably qualified. They are currently undertaking the children and young people's workforce diploma level 3.

Regular team meetings and training events support staff to develop the skills that they need to provide effective care. All staff have received at least basic training in caring for children with attachment disorders, but some staff do not demonstrate that they have the necessary depth of understanding about how to respond effectively to children with specific types of attachment disorders. Consequently, they sometimes miss opportunities to diffuse a child's rising anxieties and avert aggressive and challenging behaviour.

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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