

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC458021
Inspector	Sharon Treadwell
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Stoke on Trent City Council
Registered person address	City of Stoke-on-Trent, Civic Centre Glebe Street STOKE-ON-TRENT ST4 1HH
Responsible individual	Susan Hammersley
Registered manager	POST VACANT
Date of last inspection	26/02/2014

Inspection date	18/12/2014
------------------------	------------

Previous inspection	good progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	none

This inspection	
Overall effectiveness	adequate
Outcomes for children and young people	good
Quality of care	good
Keeping children and young people safe	adequate
Leadership and management	adequate

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	adequate
-------------------	-----------------

The home provides very individualised care to young people, which effectively meets their needs and helps them to become more confident. The establishment of clear boundaries, and the consistent recognition and reward of individual achievements, helps young people to make positive progress and to refine some of their more challenging, socially unacceptable and unsafe behaviours.

Young people feel safe. They have good attendance at school and college and staff are proactive in ensuring that they receive input and support from specialist associated professionals to enhance their wellbeing and achievements. Staff reflect a commitment and dedication to putting young people first and to ensuring that their experiences at the home are positive.

Three requirements have been made during this inspection. These reflect the fact that there have been shortfalls in management monitoring practice since the previous inspection. Written reports have not been routinely completed to demonstrate management oversight of recording and care practice and to illustrate how that monitoring is utilised to develop and consistently improve the service. The content and quality of reports completed when visits are made to the home by independent visitors is varied. This means that those reports do not always provide a robust overview of the care young people experience. Records relating to complaints

and concerns received by the home are not comprehensive or sufficiently robust.

Six recommendations have been made during the inspection. Young people's records do not always properly reflect the impact that their positive relationships with staff, and the individual work undertaken with them, has on their life experiences and on their life chances. Consultation with young people is not always well recorded and this makes it difficult for the home to evidence how young people's views influence the way their care is delivered or how the home develops. When young people go missing from the home records do not effectively reflect the reasons for this or the action taken to prevent recurrence. Lack of clarity in categorising and recording concerns and complaints means that, even though the home is taking appropriate action, records do not reflect this adequately. Staff are not routinely receiving training to fully equip them to meet young people's very specific individual needs and the home's training records are not properly maintained. This makes it impossible for the manager to properly keep the skill base of the staff team under review. At present staff are sometimes left in sole charge of the home whilst they are still within their probationary period.

The new manager of the home is aware of the shortfalls, specifically in relation to management monitoring and oversight and maintenance of records, and has begun to take appropriate action to address these. Significant changes are proposed in respect of young people's records with a view to making these more accessible and meaningful for the young people. The changeover process has begun but is not yet fully implemented. The manager has begun to complete written reports to demonstrate monitoring.

Young people have been protected from the impact of these shortfalls because of the child-centred focus of staff and the very sound understanding of, and commitment to meeting, their very individual care and support needs. Young people's experiences of care at this home are positive.

Full report

Information about this children's home

This is a small group home operated by a local authority. The home provides care and accommodation for two children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
26/02/2014	Interim	good progress
19/06/2013	Full	adequate

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)	maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at least once in every 3 months and provide written reports of these reviews to Ofsted. (Regulation 34 (1)(2))	31/01/2015
33 (2001)	ensure that visits by the independent person consistently reflect consultation with children accommodated, parents, relatives and staff to inform an opinion as to whether children are effectively safeguarded and the home promotes the wellbeing of the children accommodated there (Regulation 33 (8(a)))	31/01/2015
24 (2001)	ensure that a full written record is retained of any complaint received, the action taken and the outcome of any investigation and that the	31/01/2015

	complaints procedure is available, in an understandable format, to anyone wishing to make a complaint. (Regulation 24(3) (8))	
--	---	--

Recommendations

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

- ensure that all children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support and that the views, wishes and feeling of children are taken into account in monitoring staff and developing the home; specifically that recording systems effectively demonstrate how the young people's views impact on the delivery of their care and support and on the development of the home (NMS 1.3 and 1.7)
- ensure that the written records kept by the home when a child goes missing detail the circumstances of the child's return, any reasons given by the child for running away from the home and any action taken in light of those reasons to prevent a recurrence (NMS 5.10)
- ensure that staff members placed in charge of the home and other staff at particular times have successfully completed their induction and probationary periods (NMS 17.5)
- ensure that staff are always provided with training to equip them with the skills required to meet the specific needs of individual children and that the staff training records are properly maintained to fully reflect the training they have undertaken (NMS 18.1)
- ensure that there is effective management oversight of records relating to concerns, complaints and potential child protection concerns to ensure that these are accurately categorised and properly recorded (NMS 21.1)
- ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future; specifically to help them to understand and appreciate the progress made whilst at the home. (NMS 22.5)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **good**

Young people are in stable placements, which are meeting their individual needs well, and have been placed at this home for more than a year. During their time here young people have developed in confidence, and become more emotionally stable, because of their positive relationships and trust in the staff providing their daily care. For some young people this has meant an end to some of their fears for their own safety, and to a reduction in the emotional upset they feel because of their past experiences.

Young people are progressively helped to understand how important it is to eat healthily. This helps young people who have become dependent on junk food to begin to actually like fruit and vegetables. It also supports young people who have developed very irregular eating habits to get used to three meals a day and begin to gain weight.

Young people have positive role models, in the staff team members, who help them to appreciate how important it is to get on with your neighbours and to behave in an appropriate way. Young people begin to realise which elements of their behaviour are not acceptable and are supported to moderate these. Young people are strongly encouraged to make friends in the community. These friends are welcomed into the home and are often invited to participate in organised activities. Young people are often invited into their friend's homes. This helps young people, who are looked after, to feel very much a part of the community in which they live.

Young people are in full time education or college placements and are attending and achieving well. Staff advocate well to ensure that young people receive appropriate levels of specialist support to help to sustain their educational placements and achieve good levels of success. One young person's most recent school report notes, 'His concentration has really developed and he is keen to produce work that is of good quality. He is clearly proud of his own much improved performance'.

Young people's wishes regarding family contact are recognised and supported by the staff. For some young people this has resulted in additional time spent with the family. For others they do not have contact with family members they do not wish to see. Staff have helped some young people to improve relationships with immediate family and for others they are facilitating continuing contact by providing transport and by welcoming family into the home.

Young people have good access to a wide range of activities of their choosing. Some young people are demonstrating excellent dramatic ability and have appeared in the local authority's Children in Care Pantomime. The local authority's responsible individual said that, 'There wasn't a dry eye in the house,' because everyone was so

proud of the young person's achievement. She additionally comments that, 'He would not have had the capacity to achieve this when he first came to the home'.

Quality of care

good

Staff are dedicated and committed to ensuring that young people achieve to their full capability, not only educationally but in all aspects of their lives.

The manager and staff advocate well for young people to ensure that they receive the services they need from associated professionals. Young people's social workers say that the staff are very pro-active when it comes to requesting extra support from health or educational professionals because it is clear that young people need specialist support. One placing social worker said, 'The home has been great at ensuring he gets all the support he needs. They don't just wait for someone else to do it. They often arrange it and then let me know'. This means that some young people receive high levels of educational support and others have accessed emotional and mental health support through CAMHS. Some young people have received specialist input in respect of specific health conditions and have been well supported with regular consultant appointments. Medication is well managed. Some young people have received support to better understand and manage their sexual health and sexualised behaviours. Staff have promoted and supported comprehensive assessments of the impact of young people's emotional and behavioural difficulties on their educational capacities. Where appropriate staff have supported young people to access alternative educational provision where this meets their needs more effectively than full time mainstream schooling. Staff do not expect young people to stand still with regards their achievements. They are ambitious for young people and are persistent in encouraging continuous improvements.

Young people have very different views about their placements. Some young people see this as their 'forever home' whilst others are anxious to return to their family and see this as 'the best option at the moment'. The staff reflect a very good understanding of young people's very different support needs and are able to tailor their relationships with young people accordingly. The staff utilise their skills well and use positive behaviour management strategies to help the young people to build relationships with adults, peers and family. There is a strong focus on establishing clear routines, boundaries and expectations. A good example of this is the help provided to a very physically demonstrative young person to help him to learn about appropriate hugging and touching and about respecting people's personal space.

Some very positive individual work is undertaken with young people to help them to refine some of their more challenging and unsafe behaviours. Staff are more adept at delivering this work than at reflecting on and recording its impact on young people's life experiences. The young people's records do not adequately reflect the real

progress young people make whilst living here. On an informal basis the staff consult well with young people helping them to understand their past histories, develop their life skills and appreciate and build on their personal strengths. However, the ongoing potential for young people to influence how their care is delivered is not always well recorded.

The staff support young people's individual interests well and facilitate a range of interesting activities. Young people have enjoyed day trips to the seaside, days out at adventure parks and weekend caravan holidays. Some young people are very sporty and enjoy taking the staff cycling and beating them at pool.

Keeping children and young people safe adequate

The home provides a very homely and comfortable environment for young people. It is well decorated and maintained and there is a good focus on ensuring that the environment is safe for young people and staff. There are regular professional checks on gas and electrical installations and appropriate premises risk assessments.

Staff prioritise young people's day-to-day safety well. Individual risk assessments focus on the capacity of presenting behaviours to place young people at risk and identify how these risks are managed and effectively reduced.

The home has significantly improved in its demonstrated understanding and awareness of fire safety. This was an area of concern at the time of the previous inspection. The fire officer has visited the premises and provided the manager with advice about fire safety and this has been acted upon. There is now an appropriate fire safety risk assessment, regular fire drills and also consideration of a range of scenarios for evacuation. There was a recent incident at the home where young people and staff were placed at risk when a member of the public set light to an article attached to the front door of the home. The young people, in particular, responded very quickly and appropriately with one passing a fire extinguisher to a staff member and the other using his mobile phone to dial 999 for the fire brigade. This demonstrates the effectiveness of young people's learning about fire safety.

Young people's relationships with each other are described by the home's independent visitor as, 'very much like siblings'. The age difference means that there is sometimes a demonstrated lack of patience and understanding. Staff demonstrate good awareness of this and are vigilant to any indications of bullying. Any concerns are challenged immediately with young people. Young people do not identify bullying as a problem and say that they feel safe at the home. One young person said that by far the best thing about the home is, 'the great carers'. The young people feel confident they can talk with staff if they are worried.

Restraints are rarely undertaken. Where they do occur they are properly recorded and incorporate a subsequent discussion with the young person about why the

restraint happened and how they feel about it. Young people's behaviours improve whilst at the home because such improvement is recognised and rewarded. Young people have identified areas to work on, for example swearing or personal hygiene, and are able to earn additional spending money when they show progress.

Young people are rarely reported missing from the home. There have been two instances since the last inspection, and there have also been a number of unauthorised absences where young people refuse to return at the agreed time, often from their family home. Where young people do go missing the records currently do not contain sufficient information to demonstrate why the incident occurred and what action staff are taking to prevent a recurrence.

Young people know how to make a complaint. They receive good information about the procedures to follow and an advocate occasionally visits the home to talk with them about their rights. No young people have made a complaint since the previous inspection.

The home is situated in a densely populated urban area, which features elements of social deprivation. Young people sometimes become involved in peer relationships which expose them to negative influences, and there have been periods of concern regarding young people's exposure to local gang culture. Staff are pro-active in promoting positive peer relationships and discouraging those which have the potential to jeopardise young people's safety. They make young people's friends welcome at the home and this helps the staff to monitor friendships. Sometimes young people's presenting behaviours have resulted in concerns being raised by near neighbours. The home has instituted a community liaison log to record their exchanges with neighbours. This is very effective as a means of recording minor concerns raised and immediately addressed where neighbours have no wish to formalise their complaint. Examples are a young person kicking a football against the house wall and the neighbour asking staff to stop them doing this or a young person throwing mud at a neighbour's window and staff taking the young person round to clean this off. An inappropriate balance has now been reached in the home's use of this record. The home is sometimes failing to differentiate between these routine day-to-day issues and areas of graver concern, which effectively constitute complaints. There is no leaflet available, in an understandable format, for staff to give to any neighbour wishing to formalise a complaint. In one instance a neighbour has raised an issue, which has potential child protection elements and is recorded in the community liaison log. Although the home has taken appropriate action, liaised with appropriate professionals, and ensured that young people's safety is prioritised records to evidence this are disjointed and not sufficiently robust.

Leadership and management

adequate

The Registered Manager left the home at the end of November. The former assistant manager has taken on management responsibility. This appointment is subject to a three month probationary period. The post holder is in the process of completing an application for registration with Ofsted. The management role incorporates management responsibility for another of the local authority's children's homes, which is located nearby and accommodates young people with the same category of needs. The current manager has appropriate qualifications for the management role.

One requirement was made during the previous inspection because an event had not been notified to Ofsted within the required timescale. One notification has been received since that inspection and this was made in a timely way.

Two recommendations were made during the previous inspection. The home has now significantly improved its fire safety and is more consistent in ensuring that fire drills are properly recorded and that young people and staff are fully aware of the evacuation procedure. The recommendation raised regarding the required submission of three monthly reports to Ofsted, to demonstrate effective management monitoring, has not been addressed. No management monitoring reports have been received from the home since the interim inspection in February. A requirement has been made in respect of this shortfall.

The current manager has rapidly become aware of significant shortfalls in terms of demonstrated management oversight of care and recording practice within the home. She has ensured that the local authority's designated responsible individual is aware of these shortfalls and has begun to take appropriate steps to address this. She has conducted a management review covering the period from September 1st 2014 to December 1st 2014. This report is of good quality and is ready for submission to Ofsted.

An independent person undertakes monthly, unannounced visits to the home, on behalf of the local authority, to monitor the standards of care. A range of individuals have undertaken these visits during the last year and reports of the visits vary in their content and quality. Some do not provide a good independent overview of the way the home operates and the quality of care experienced by young people. The views of young people, staff and associated professionals are not always well represented.

The current manager has held some responsibilities for staff management in her role as assistant manager. Staff are familiar with her management style and describe her as, 'Very child focused' and, 'Ambitious for the home'. She has a highly visible presence around the home and is accessible to staff, young people and associated professionals. She has recently been part of a local authority management review of young people's records and has already begun to implement agreed changes. Currently young people's records, and particularly their placement plans, do not provide a good reflection of their involvement in determining how their care is delivered. Young people's records, generally, do not highlight the impact of individual

work undertaken by the staff, on young people's life experiences and outcomes. This means that, when young people look back at their records, they cannot immediately see how much progress they have made whilst placed at this home. The new recording systems are not yet fully implemented but there is an increased focus on young people's involvement and on making them accessible and meaningful to young people.

Staff feel that their cohesion as a team is a real strength and that both management and mutual support enables them to meet young people's needs well. They are confident that their establishment of clear boundaries and their high expectations of young people help them to achieve well and make positive progress.

There are currently some gaps in staff training, specifically where young people have the propensity to exhibit potentially high risk behaviours such as self-harm. Staff are not routinely being equipped with the skills they need to manage these behaviours safely. Staff have regular access to core training in areas such as child protection, first aid and behaviour management. The home's central staff training records have not consistently been maintained well. The manager has obtained training dates from the local authority's training department and is updating the records to properly reflect staff skill levels. Recently appointed staff say that their induction has equipped them well to meet the needs of young people and that they have had robust support and guidance from managers and established staff members. Although newly appointed staff are receiving good support, there are occasions, specifically when they are sleeping in at the home, where they are left in sole charge of the home whilst still within their probation period. This contravenes the National Minimum Standards.

The manager has begun to use team meetings to develop staff and to promote positive engagement with associated professionals. Representatives from Connexions, the youth offending service and specialist sexual health practitioners are amongst those invited to speak with staff about their services. The home has particularly good relationships with the local police. The police community support officer is a regular visitor at the home and staff ensure that his relationship with young people is effectively used in promoting positive behaviours and young people's awareness of their own personal safety.

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.