

## Children's homes inspection – Full

<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>1 June 2016</b>
<b>Unique reference number</b>	<b>SC036304</b>
<b>Type of inspection</b>	<b>Full</b>
<b>Provision subtype</b>	<b>Children's home</b>
<b>Registered provider</b>	<b>Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council</b>
<b>Registered provider address</b>	<b>People Directorate, 9th Floor, Merton House, Stanley, Bootle, Merseyside L20 3JA</b>

<b>Responsible individual</b>	<b>Dwayne Johnson</b>
<b>Registered manager</b>	<b>Sally-Ann Edwards</b>
<b>Inspector</b>	<b>Nick Veysey</b>

<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>1 June 2016</b>
<b>Previous inspection judgement</b>	<b>Improved effectiveness</b>
<b>Enforcement action since last inspection</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>This inspection</b>	
<b>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are</b>	<b>Good</b>
The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
<b>How well children and young people are helped and protected</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>

**SC036304**

## **Summary of findings**

### **The children's home provision is good because:**

- Children live in a friendly and supportive home that provides them with the stability that they need. They benefit from a consistently good standard of personalised care, tailored to meet their individual needs. They get the right help at the right time to make sustained progress in all aspects of their development, including in building positive relationships, understanding their experiences, managing their feelings and behaviour, education, and healthy lifestyles.
- Children enjoy strong and trusting relationships with their staff. They are always treated with respect and dignity. They are listened to, their views are taken seriously and staff always do their best to help them.
- The registered manager and staff have created a safe place for children to feel safe and protected from harm. Children are increasingly resilient and they have a good sense of emotional security. This is reflected in their developing skills to manage their feelings and frustrations and in a significant reduction in aggression and risks of neglect, exploitation, going missing and self-harm.
- Skilful staff use reflective and creative practice to enable children to resolve their difficulties and to learn skills to manage their feelings and conflict appropriately. When children, however, struggle to deal with their feelings and behaviour, the staff take safe and suitable action to manage the situation. Staff work cohesively to provide individual children with a clear and consistent approach that helps them to understand socially acceptable behaviour.
- Staff have strong working relationships with children's families, social workers, schools, therapists, and health services. They work collaboratively to understand children's personal needs and ensure that they get the best possible support. They work closely with schools to tackle any barriers to children's participation in education, and with health services to monitor and promote good physical and emotional health.
- The registered manager and staff prioritise children's needs and help children recover from trauma and emotional and behavioural difficulties, and support them to move on to live in a permanent family. However, leaders and managers do not consistently ensure that the home is run in line with its conditions of registration and its statement of purpose.

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

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that must be taken so that the registered persons 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 persons must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>5: Engaging with the wider system to ensure children's needs are met</p> <p>In order to meet the quality standard the registered persons must ensure that:</p> <p>(c) if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority's response to be inadequate in relation to their role, staff challenge the placing authority to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's relevant plans.</p> <p>In particular, they must ensure that the placing authority is actively working to find children suitable permanent family placements that meet their assessed needs in a timely way, to enable children to move on successfully when they are ready to live with a family.</p>	30 June 2016
<p>6: The quality and purpose of care standard</p> <p>In order to meet the quality care standard, the registered persons must:</p> <p>(2)(b)(vii) provide to children living in the home the physical necessities they need in order to live there comfortably;</p> <p>(c)(i) ensure that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed and furnished so as to meet the needs of each child.</p> <p>In particular, the registered persons must ensure that the premises are decorated and furnished to a good standard and provide children with a comfortable and pleasant home environment.</p>	30 June 2016

<p>14: The care planning standard</p> <p>In order to meet the care planning standard, the registered persons must ensure that:</p> <p>(2)(a) children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home's statement of purpose.</p> <p>In particular, they must not exceed the number of children for whom it is intended that accommodation is to be provided, and for which the home is registered. Also, they should only accept placements for children when they are satisfied that they can respond effectively to the child's assessed needs, risks and circumstances, and when they have fully considered the impact on the existing group of children.</p>	31 May 2016
<p>The registered persons must ensure that the home is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. Nothing in paragraph (5) requires or authorises the registered person to contravene or not to comply with any conditions in relation to the registration of the registered person under Part 2 of the Care Standards Act 2000 (Regulation 16(5)(6)(b)).</p>	31 May 2016
<p>The registered persons must ensure that all employees receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience, and in particular, that supervision for every member of staff takes place at least monthly as set out in the home's statement of purpose (Regulation 33(4)(b)).</p>	30 June 2016
<p>The registered persons must help the independent person carrying out the visit to interview in private children's parents, relatives and persons working at the home. In addition, the independent person's report about the visit must set out, in particular, the independent person's opinion as to whether children are effectively safeguarded, and whether the home promotes children's well-being (Regulation 44(2)(a)(4)(a)(b)).</p>	30 June 2016
<p>The registered person must ensure that the quality of care review monitors, reviews and evaluates the feedback and opinions of children about the children's home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it. In particular, the children's views must be included in the quality of care report (Regulation 45(2)(b)).</p>	30 June 2016

## **Recommendations**

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

- Ensure that children's risk reduction and behaviour management plans are routinely reviewed and revised to include up-to-date information about assessed risks for individual children, and clear and comprehensive details of the specific steps that the staff 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 9.6).

## Full report

### Information about this children's home

This local authority children's home provides care and accommodation for up to four children who may have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The primary task of the home is to provide short- to medium-term care to prepare children to live in a foster family.

### Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
9 February 2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
12 May 2015	Full	Good
4 February 2015	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
14 July 2014	Full	Adequate

## Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
<b>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are</b>	<b>Good</b>
<p>Children make sustained and significant progress living in this friendly and supportive home. The registered manager and staff provide them with the stability that they need to feel safer and loved, and to start to recover from difficult experiences. As they become more settled, their emotional well-being and resilience have improved. They are building positive relationships with other children, staff and their families. They are learning to deal with feelings constructively and, as a result, incidents of aggressive behaviour have notably reduced.</p> <p>Children benefit from a consistently good standard of personalised care, tailored to meet their individual needs. They are getting the right help at the right time to make sustained progress in all aspects of their development. Most of the children are now ready to live in a family. Children enjoy strong and trusting relationships with staff. They are always treated with respect and dignity. An independent reviewing officer said, 'Children have excellent relationships with the staff. Their key workers are very strong advocates for them. The key workers are very proactive, protective and fight for their children. They have a healthy commitment to and investment in the children, and the children know that their keyworkers are battling for them. The staff work extremely hard to try to provide as normal a family life as possible. The children play on the green and make friends with local children, their friends visit and they have birthday parties.'</p> <p>The staff support children to reflect on and to understand their experiences. They sensitively encourage children to recognise and understand their feelings about challenging life events. For example, staff supported a child to visit her mum's grave and to celebrate the anniversary of her mum's birthday with a card, flowers and baking a cake. The staff encourage children to keep memory books and photographs of their time at the home and help them to record significant life events.</p> <p>Children actively take part in the running of the home and the decisions affecting their lives, including choosing what they have to eat and what they do in their spare time. They feel that the staff always listen to them, take their complaints seriously and deal with problems. They are fully involved in planning for their care and support, including helping to write their placement plans and choosing their goals. Their placement plans are written from their perspective and use language that they find easy to understand. The plans clearly show what they want to achieve, what they need to do and what support they need to help them. Staff regularly spend time with them reviewing plans, so that they have an opportunity to talk about what is going well, to celebrate their achievements and to think about</p>	



what they want to tackle next. This promotes a sense of achievement and builds their confidence. Children also have opportunities to contribute to the running of the local authority's children and young people's service. One child recently interviewed candidates for senior management jobs and is involved in the 'Making a Difference' project, looking at ways to improve the experiences of children in care and care leavers. She feels that her views are being taken seriously and is proud of her contribution to the project.

The registered manager and staff have strong working relationships with children's families, social workers, schools, therapists, and health services. They work collaboratively to understand children's personal needs and to ensure that they get the best possible support. They ensure that children's placement plans are consistently followed. Children's plans are routinely reviewed to ensure that they continue to meet their assessed needs and that the plans for their future remain appropriate. The registered manager and staff make sure that social workers have up-to-date information about children's progress to assist them to find and match children to suitable foster carers.

Importantly, the registered manager and staff have developed open and supportive relationships with children's parents. They make sure that children see their families regularly. This is a safe and rewarding experience that promotes and builds children's relationships with important people in their lives. A child said, 'The most positive thing to happen since I moved in is seeing more of my dad and family.'

The staff provide parents with excellent advice and guidance to help them to maintain suitable routines for their children and to manage challenging behaviour. They are helping parents to build their confidence and relationships with their children. The staff have developed a better understanding of the quality of family relationships and parents' capacity to meet their children's needs, and to inform the plan for the future.

The registered manager and staff actively promote children's learning and their participation in education. Children's attendance and progress at school have increasingly improved since they first moved in. They have plenty of books, computers, art materials, toys, games and other educational resources. The staff have a detailed understanding of children's educational needs, plans, progress and achievements. They keep in regular contact with teachers and learning mentors, and they work very closely to support children's education and to tackle any barriers to their learning and progress, for example, working to devise a suitable and interesting education programme for a child who is struggling socially in school.

The staff also encourage children to follow their interests and to develop their skills outside formal education. They are supporting a child to train as a child mentor, and have got another child a place on a bicycle maintenance course at a youth club, to help him to learn how to do up his bike. The children take part in a wide range of fun and exciting activities both inside the home and in the community. They enjoy the same opportunities and social experiences as other children,

including seeing the latest films at the cinema, going out for meals, seeing friends and having sleep-overs, going to youth club, playing computer games, having a go on zip wires and climbing, and going to a school prom.

Children live in a healthy environment that actively promotes their physical health and emotional well-being. They enjoy very healthy and varied diets and get plenty of physical exercise. They have easy access to community and specialist health services, including the child and adolescent mental health service. Staff have an excellent understanding of children's specific health needs and manage their health with sensitivity and confidence. They closely monitor children to make sure that they are healthy, supporting them to attend routine health checks. They also ensure that the children always get suitable medical advice and treatment when they are feeling unwell or they are concerned about their health. They make sure that treatment plans are consistently followed and that the arrangements for dealing with medication are safe. A social worker said, 'Since moving in, his eating habits and daily routines have improved, and we are starting to see him take more responsibility for his personal care. His relationship with his dad is better. His therapist has also noticed a difference in their sessions. He is more focused on what they are doing.'

	Judgement grade
<b>How well children and young people are helped and protected</b>	<b>Good</b>
<p>The registered manager and staff work effectively with children to create an open, positive and safe place to live. Children feel safe and know that they have trusted adults whom they can talk to when they are worried. A child said, 'I talk to my key worker when I have problems. She listens and tries to help me and sort things out.'</p> <p>The staff have detailed knowledge of child protection and individual children's risks and vulnerabilities to abuse and exploitation. They take prompt and decisive action to deal with any concerns about the children's safety. This includes sharing information with the social workers, the police and safeguarding agencies, and working together effectively to manage the risks that the children face and to take action that protects them. The risks to children of neglect, exploitation, aggression, going missing and self-harm have significantly reduced and the children are increasingly safer since they first moved in. The staff work extremely well with the children to help them to understand about personal safety, identify dangers and risk, and to recognise healthy relationships. Children are fully aware of the benefits and risks of using social media and know what to do if they are concerned.</p> <p>Over time, children have made significant progress in managing their feelings. Staff</p>	

help children to resolve their difficulties and to learn skills to manage conflict in ways that do not lead to aggression. Children move into the home at extremely stressful times of their lives. They may often feel confused, anxious and angry and express these feelings through aggressive behaviour. It may take them time to feel safe and settled. They are making good progress in managing their feelings with significant reduction in the frequency and intensity of aggressive behaviour. However, there are still times when children struggle to deal with feelings and disagreements with other children, staff, friends and family members. On occasions, rough play and arguments have resulted in aggressive behaviour. The staff understand how difficult it can be for children to get along with each other and they work hard to understand the underlying causes of children's behaviour. They show a strong commitment to supporting the children, regardless of the challenges that they face. They encourage and support the children to have positive relationships and behaviour. They manage aggressive behaviour calmly through effective communication and positive interactions with the children involved, without the need to use restraint.

The staff know how individual children's ages, experiences and levels of understanding affect their ability to make changes. Thus, they adapt their approaches depending on the child. For example, they know that for a particular child issues need to be dealt with immediately because he operates in the 'here and now', but another child needs to be given time and space to feel calm before they talk to her. The staff work closely with individual children and therapists to find creative ways, including play therapy, to help children to manage their strong emotions safely. For example, staff encourage children to blow up balloons or crumple up pieces of paper to help them to release their feelings of tension and to change the focus of their anger. When, a particular child becomes upset and is shouting, staff will shout out 'jelly and ice cream', and this quickly helps the child to calm down and prevents further difficult behaviour. The child said, 'It works. You can't help but laugh when someone is shouting "jelly and ice cream" at you.' The interventions create a space for children to feel calm, to manage their feelings and to start to talk about what has upset them. Staff also use relaxation techniques to help children to soothe and feel less agitated. A child said, 'Listening to meditation music helps me calm down and get to sleep at night.' His sleeping patterns and bedtime routines have improved, and he is now getting a restful good night's sleep.

The registered manager and staff continue to reflect on their approaches to supporting children to manage their feelings, and they learn lessons from difficult situations to improve their practice. Changes to the reward system, in consultation with children, have been successful in improving children's behaviour and ability to meet their individual goals. Rewards place more emphasis on enabling children to see that they can achieve and build their confidence and self-esteem rather than focus on negative behaviour that reinforces their feelings of being unloved. This approach celebrates what children do well and enjoy doing, and helps them to make changes in things that they find more challenging. For example, one child is praised and rewarded for cooking and baking, while one of her targets is to try to

keep her room tidy. The use of rewards with another child has led to improvements in his behaviour at school. His social worker said, 'His behaviour at school is much better. He is more caring and more able to share with other children.'

	Judgement grade
<b>The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
<p>The registered manager has been in charge of the home since 1999. She has substantial relevant experience and has the appropriate professional and management qualifications. She leads an experienced, committed and skilled team that provides children with a sustained high standard of care and support. This good quality of care enables children to make measureable progress from when they first move into the home. The day-to-day management of the home prioritises children's needs, delivers the objectives and ethos set out in the home's statement of purpose to help children to recover from trauma and emotional and behavioural difficulties, and support them to move on to live in permanent families.</p> <p>However, leaders and managers do not consistently ensure that the home is run in line with its conditions of registration and the arrangements set out in its statement of purpose.</p> <p>The local authority made a decision to accommodate a child at the home overnight, on 29 May 2016, in an emergency to prevent her from having to spend the night at a police station. The decision was made despite the concerns raised by the registered manager about the suitability of the plan. It meant that the home was providing care and accommodation for more children than it is registered for, and as a result, it failed to comply with its legal requirements. Because the home was fully occupied, a bedroom was not available for the child, and she spent an uncomfortable night on a sofa in the lounge. The registered manager and staff did not have sufficient information to be satisfied that they could respond effectively to the child's assessed needs, risks and circumstances, and to consider fully the impact on the existing group of children. The registered manager ensured that sufficient staff were available to support the child and to reduce the impact on the welfare of any of the children.</p> <p>Weaknesses in care planning are potentially stifling the progress and development of some children. In particular, delays in the placing authority identifying suitable permanent family placements that meet individual children's assessed needs mean that some children have not been able to move in a timely way when they are</p>	

ready to live with a family. Some children are frustrated that they are not getting the opportunity to live with a family, while seeing other children move on before them. One child is finding it increasingly difficult living with younger children, and this appears to be having a negative impact on her emotional well-being and behaviour. The registered manager has interesting ideas for working more effectively with social workers and family placement teams to identify suitable carers for specific children. This includes working more closely with social workers to make better use of the staff's knowledge of each child, and staff getting more involved in writing accurate profiles about children's needs, and meeting foster carers at an earlier stage to share information about the support that the child requires, including their routines and strategies for helping children to manage their feelings. The registered manager now needs to discuss her ideas with senior leaders and managers to make the improvements that she has identified.

Children live in a suitably located and designed house. They have a plenty of personal space with comfortable bedrooms and a large garden to play in. However, the home's aspiration to provide a pleasant and homely environment is being impeded by the quality of the furniture and decoration of the house. The walls and paintwork in places are tired and damaged; the furniture in the lounge, dining room and some bedrooms do not match; cupboards in the lounge are missing doors; some children's bedding is faded; and the family room is cluttered with stuff in black plastic bags, unused picture frames, and a guitar with four strings missing.

Usually, the registered manager and staff ensure that all serious events relating to the welfare and protection of children are notified to appropriate authorities, including parents, social workers, the police, safeguarding teams, and Ofsted. However, on one occasion they failed to inform Ofsted of concerns about child sexual exploitation. In this case, they had worked effectively with the child, her parents, social worker and police to take the necessary action to ensure that she was safe and protected.

The registered manager and the staff are committed to improving the effectiveness and quality of care that they provide for the children. They have an accurate understanding of their strengths, including their abilities to build positive relationships with children and their families and to help distressed children to develop the skills to manage their feelings safely. They continue to make every effort to develop their understanding of children's needs and to build their knowledge to meet the specific needs of each child. Training in social pedagogy, communicating effectively with children, autism, managing difficult behaviour, emotional and mental health has continued to build their expertise. Also, they take on board the advice and guidance from other professionals, such as therapeutic social workers, to improve their practice. They work together to discover how to help children to tackle difficulties and previously unmet needs, including dealing with strong emotions and settling at night.

The staff are very experienced, knowledgeable, highly competent and suitably qualified. An independent reviewing officer said, 'The staff are highly skilled and do really well working with children with very difficult and traumatic backgrounds.'

Thoughtful and well-planned staffing arrangements mean that there are sufficient staff available to provide children with continuity of care. They are always cared for by adults whom they know and have every opportunity to develop meaningful and trusting relationships with them. The registered manager has adjusted the staffing levels effectively to meet the assessed needs of the children and the group as a whole. She has increased the number of staff available to ensure that younger children are able to receive one-to-one support, and to enable children to take part in different activities at the same time.

The changes to the staffing arrangements have also made more time available for handover meetings between staff and for regular team meetings. This has helped to improve further communication and consistency between staff, including more structured planning of each day, activities and direct work with the children. Everyone is fully informed about children's support plans. They understand behaviour management strategies, and have up-to-date information about children's progress. At the end of each shift, staff have the opportunity to reflect critically on the events of the day, children's experiences, and their practice. This is an extremely useful exercise to identify and understand children's needs and their progress. They feel that they are able to recognise the difference that they are making to children's lives and to share strategies that have worked well and what could be improved, in a safe and supportive forum. Reflective practice is now firmly embedded in staff's day-to-day practice and is helping to improve how they work together to meet children's needs.

The staff work in an open, supportive environment and are effectively supervised and guided by their managers. However, some staff are not having one-to-one professional supervision with a manager at least once a month, as set out in the statement of purpose and supervision policies. This means that they are missing opportunities to have dedicated personal time to review their work and to promote their professional development.

The system of independent monitoring provides impartial and detailed scrutiny of the home. An independent person visits every month and prepares a helpful report of their findings, which is now supplied to Ofsted. The reports identify relevant recommendations for improvement, including reducing the delays in finding suitable foster placements and the careful matching of children's needs. The visitors always talk to children and observe staff working with them. However, the visitors' reports since the last inspection have included the views of parents and the staff about the running of the home. Also, the reports do not always explicitly show the visitors' assessment of the home's effectiveness in protecting children and meeting their needs. These improvements would further assist the leaders and managers to understand the effectiveness of the home's approaches.

The manager completes a thorough, in-depth review of the quality of care against the expectations of the quality of care. She raises reasonable action points to improve the service. It also shows how previous recommendations have been followed, including a review of the reward system, staff arrangements and training, and it clearly shows the impact of the changes made. She clearly shows how staff

seek children's opinions about the home and the support that they receive, but she does not record what they actually say and how their views are being used to improve the standard of their care.

The staff keep clear and detailed written records about children's experiences and progress. These records provide an important contribution to the understanding of individual children's lives and planning for their future. However, the written risk assessment and behaviour management plans are not routinely reviewed and revised. Consequently, the plans do not include up-to-date information about assessed risks for individual children, or take into account children's progress and any changes in their circumstances. They do not outline comprehensive details of the specific strategies that staff are currently using to support children to manage risks on a day-to-day basis. This lack of clarity may impede the consistent use of effective protective measures to help children by different members of staff.

## 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 that 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 that 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 whom 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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