

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	01/11/2016
Unique reference number	SC013402
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Action for Children
Registered provider address	Action for Children, 3 The Boulevard, Ascot Road, Watford WD18 8AG

Responsible individual	Shelagh Frankcom
Registered manager	Gaynor Wicks
Inspector	Bridget Goddard

Inspection date	01/11/2016
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

SC013402

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- The recording structure captures the progress made by young people. Young people make appropriate progress particularly in their emotional health.
- Staff treat young people with dignity and respect them, especially when meeting their personal care needs.
- Staff and the management group are generally keen to hear and act on young people's wishes and feelings. This applies both in their daily care and in their influence on the wider running of the home.
- Staff have good safeguarding knowledge and experience, and know how to respond to concerns.
- Behaviour management is focused on positives, and there are low rates of physical restraint and use of sanctions.
- The registered manager has maintained her commitment to delivering an effective service to young people, in the context of significant staffing issues.
- The independent visitor offers the home effective and useful challenge.
- The home has difficulties in both recruiting and retaining staff, and functions on high numbers of agency staff.
- Some young people's risk assessments are significantly out of date.
- Staff do not receive regular formal supervision, nor has their performance been appraised.
- Young people do not always have access to a choice of activities.

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
13: Ensure that there are sufficient, experienced, qualified and skilled staff to meet the needs of each child. This relates both to staff vacancies in the home, and the large number of agency staff that are used. (Regulation 13 (2) (c) (d))	06/02/2017
12: Ensure that staff assess whether each child is at risk of harm, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child. This relates to staff promptly updating risk assessments as required. (Regulation 12 (2) (a) (i))	06/01/2017
33: Ensure that all employees receive appropriate continuing professional development, practice-related supervision from a person with appropriate experience and have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. This relates to both temporary and permanent staff. (Regulation 33 (4) (a) (b) (c))	06/02/2017

Recommendations

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

- Ensure that children are offered a wide range of activities inside the home and are encouraged to participate in these activities. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 31, paragraph 6.5)
- Ensure that each child is provided with support for example, by using a daily visual schedule, to communicate their views, wishes and feelings and participate as fully as possible in all aspects of their care planning and daily care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 22, paragraph 4.6)
- Ensure that no more than half the staff on duty at any one time by day or night at the home should be from an external agency. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.17)

Full report

Information about this children's home

This children's home is run by a registered charity in partnership with a local authority. Care and accommodation are provided in two separate and distinct houses on the same site with the same registered manager. The home provides care and accommodation for four children under short-break arrangements, and two further looked after children in one house, and for five children who live permanently in the other house. Children may have a learning disability and/or a physical disability. The long-stay residential house specialises in work with children with a range of complex needs.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
16/03/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
23/06/2015	Full	Good
21/02/2015	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
21/10/2014	Full	Good

Inspection Judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
<p>Although permanent staff are significantly stretched by staff shortages in both houses, their efforts to ensure that young people still get a positive experience are successful. Staff know young people's needs and preferences extremely well, and so are usually able to give them experiences that both benefit and support them.</p> <p>In the short-breaks house, young people approach staff confidently, and staff in their turn respond with interest to young people. A social worker said, 'He has a very good relationship with them. They know him so well and meet his needs.' Young people in the long-stay house demonstrate the depth of their relationships with staff by their trusting and relaxed behaviour. Staff in their turn show pride and affection towards young people.</p> <p>Throughout holiday periods activities are usually well planned, but this is not always the case in term time. Sometimes, staffing shortfalls mean that staff are not able to plan activities and give young people activity options. Young people will be offered activities that they are known to enjoy, but they may not be given much choice on the day. A social worker commented that 'it would be good to see a planner of activities for each night', while a parent expressed that they wanted more variety of activities. This lack of pre-stay planning means that young people are not aware of what is happening next, and cannot choose from an appropriate schedule of options.</p> <p>However, generally there is very strong practice in relation to involving young people as much as possible and listening to their views. Young people influence both their own daily care and the way that the home is run. For example, in the short-break house, staff are adept at both meeting very different nutritional needs on different nights, and at the same time giving young people food choices. Some young people communicated that they found Halloween imagery disturbing, they were listened to and were protected from these. Young people's feedback is always sought after significant events, and they are involved in important decisions about the home such as recruitment and the children's guide. Complaints are also well dealt with. Staff are willing to learn from complaints, and work hard to improve matters so that such events do not happen again.</p> <p>Young people make progress, and particularly in the long-stay house young people's emotional health improves. Some young people are more willing to engage in social relationships and other young people are generally more confident in their presentation. All young people have specific targets to reach, and there is a recording structure around these to support staff using them. Overall, these are used appropriately by staff, and some young people are developing important independence skills through these targets. This will help them to live in the least</p>	

restrictive environment possible in adulthood.

Partner agencies comment that, 'Young people are cared for in line with their care plans.' This is the case across both houses in that young people are either absorbed in the activities detailed in their plans or using their recommended objects of reference.

Transitions into and out of this home are sensitively managed. Prior to young people moving in, staff gather all the information that they can about them, including observing the young person at school. The transition into the home is tailored to the preferred pace of the young person and their parent/carer.

Admissions are carefully chosen prior to being agreed. This results in very good matching of young people. Social workers who were initially anxious about how their young person would fare in a larger group now consider it a great benefit. One social worker commented, 'It has really helped him to mix with others.'

Professional colleagues are positive about staff skills in coping with anxious parents/carers. Where appropriate, the home effectively supports contact arrangements when young people are not living at home. This helps to maintain fragile family relationships into adulthood.

Staff are sensitive to the necessity for young people to be treated with dignity and respect. They have discussed as a team the best ways of delivering personal care while maintaining appropriate regard for the individual involved, and have followed this up with appropriate resources. This demonstrates the commitment throughout this home to delivering care sensitively and responsively.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
<p>Environmental risks to young people are thoroughly assessed and dealt with effectively. There are appropriate systems in place, and good management oversight of the findings. For example, each young person has their own fire evacuation plan and careful systems are in place to ensure that all staff, including night staff, are well-practised in emergency evacuations. Generally, the environment is homely and welcoming. It is being appropriately updated but the pace of this is slow, again because of staffing vacancies.</p> <p>Some young people's risk assessments have not been updated in a timely fashion. This means that risks and strategies to meet these may no longer be relevant or useful. For example, in one case, what to do when a young person's behaviour becomes challenging was outdated. These written assessments are particularly relevant for agency staff who rely on them to guide their care for young people. This shortfall does not effectively promote young people's welfare. The registered manager took immediate steps on inspection to start updating the risk assessments.</p>	

Both houses are adjacent to each other on a secure campus, and young people do not go outside without sufficient staffing. This vigilance means that young people do not go missing from this home. Professional colleagues have confidence in the home's approach to safeguarding, and are confident that their particular young person is well-protected from harm. In-house safeguarding training is well-gearred to improving staff knowledge and confidence in this area. This is reflected by staff understanding both the risks to young people and about processes to follow if concerned. For example, staff are familiar with the designated officer's role and have recently demonstrated some excellent, proactive safeguarding practice.

Permanent and agency staff recruitment processes are satisfactory. Some important work is underway in relation to agency workers' checks and previous history. This will help to improve clarity and save administrative time. Appropriate checks are completed and verified, interviews are detailed and identity checks are recorded. This helps to keep young people protected from unsuitable staff members joining the unit.

There is a clear culture of respect for young people. This is demonstrated by the attention paid to meeting their needs, and by the pride shown in for example, dressing young people to look their best. This respectful approach means that staff dislike the idea of using physical restraint on young people, and this is confirmed by the very low rates of restraint throughout the home. Restraint is only used when absolutely necessary and is well-recorded. Sanctions too are sparingly used, and tend to appropriately consist of short periods of time out. The vast majority of situations are effectively managed by positive reinforcement or distraction.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement
<p>The recruitment issues and staffing shortfalls in this home are having an adverse effect, particularly on the permanent staff group. These shortfalls are due to a variety of reasons including local recruitment options, and wider organisational considerations. Resolving them is not within the registered manager's gift, but senior managers are very aware of the shortfalls and are actively seeking ways to further minimise their negative impact. Within these limitations, the home is effectively and efficiently managed by a permanent, very experienced and suitably qualified manager.</p> <p>The statement of purpose has been successfully revised, and the home's conditions amended accordingly. The home has not fully met one of the requirements from the last inspection, nor all of its recommendations. As a result, the areas of concern will be repeated.</p> <p>The registered manager has a strong, permanent staff team, a large number of agency staff, and some key vacancies which are proving hard to fill. The home has also had issues with retaining staff and staff sickness. This means that there is a</p>	

risk of lack of staff continuity for young people. The registered manager is very aware of this, and strives to convert suitable agency staff to permanent staff, as well as using the same group of agency staff very regularly. These strategies have had some success, with some agency staff working in the home for up to two years. In addition, some agency staff have left agency work, and have successfully become permanent care staff and team leaders. This means that young people can benefit from familiar staff who know them well. However, these strategies are not always successful, and young people may be cared for by unfamiliar staff who do not know them well and for example which targets they are aiming to reach.

Management time is stretched very thinly in this home. For example, because of staffing shortfalls the registered manager sometimes has to cover shifts, sleep in and cover handovers. This has an adverse effect on her ability to complete all her management monitoring such as file audits. A further major effect of this is the adverse impact on supervision and appraisal. There have been no appraisals completed in the last year. Some have been booked, but operational priorities have always had to take precedence. In addition, formal staff supervision has been minimal. Again, the registered manager has sought to offset these shortfalls by offering good in-house training sessions, and supporting house team meetings. Staff are highly positive about the support that they receive from her saying, 'You can always speak to her about anything.' However, the lack of regular benchmarking sessions to consider each staff members' (including agency staff) strengths and weaknesses means that there is insufficient overview of the quality of the workforce. This means that there are very limited opportunities to put in extra supports such as targeted briefings and training where necessary.

The registered manager is very visible around the home and knows the young people well. She has produced a comprehensive Regulation 45 report and a development plan. Both demonstrate her thorough understanding of the home, and its strengths and weaknesses in delivering good-quality care. The registered manager has taken robust action where necessary over safeguarding issues and staffing issues. Local authority partners comment favourably on her effective relationships with them and with parents. However, when it is in a young person's interests she has successfully challenged decisions made by partner agencies.

External monitoring of the service is thorough, detailed and robust. The independent visitor has a clear commitment to assessing all aspects of service delivery, and this greatly assists the management team in their understanding of the home.

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of 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 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 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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