

Children's home inspection – Full

Inspection date	09/11/2016
Unique reference number	1228090
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Meadows Care Ltd
Registered provider address	Egerton House, Wardle Road, Rochdale, OL12 9EN

Responsible individual	Niel Shelmerdine
Registered manager	Vacant
Inspector	Christy Wannop

Inspection date	09/11/2016
Previous inspection judgement	N/A
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home	Requires improvement
The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

1228090

Summary of findings

The children's home provision requires improvement because:

- Managerial turnover and instability in the first three months of operation have had an impact on children and the staff group. Responses to children's anxious and angry behaviour were not always in line with the organisation's ethos. Staff did not always implement proper procedures when children ran off from the home or complained. This is not the case now.
- The first manager left after three months, and a new manager was appointed in July. Previously worrying aspects have largely been addressed since the new manager began in July, and senior managerial support arrangements are now effective.
- Not all children receive their statutory entitlement to 25 hours of education a week. In the early days of the home's operation, support for education was not good enough. The home's routines still do not always help children to be ready for education. Staff are not always familiar with children's learning needs.
- Children on overnight stays with family members have not always been protected by a clear regime of staff checks and action when plans change.
- Bullying is a significant issue at the house affecting all children. Staff protect and work to prevent harm, but this is not reducing the problem.
- Records on the whole are not yet good enough. Staff recruitment records do not evidence a rigorous process. Training records are not a reliable record. Records after significant incidents do not always show the manager's actions or plan to improve practice.
- Ofsted received concerns about this service and looked at the issues raised as part of this planned inspection. We have regulated about staff supervision during contact, and bullying. Other concerns about a lack of staff care, unchecked behaviour, drugs misuse and poor-quality meal arrangements were not found.
- Changes and improvements are very new, within the last three months, and require further managerial input to embed consistency.

The children's home strengths

- The specialist in-house psychologist is providing really effective support directly to each child, to the staff team and to managers. They are helping to shape insightful staff care practice and develop staff skills to meet children's needs.
- Holistic psychological assessments are beginning to feed into direct work with children and the home's care planning systems. Creative direct work is already helping children to understand some of their significant issues. New systems to monitor and evidence children's progress look promising.
- Children get a warm welcome to the home. Four out of five admissions have been planned and the quality of matching has really improved over time.
- An energetic, imaginative and responsive staff team is forming some good relationships. Children say that they like being here and have staff who they like and trust and who know them.
- Effective external monitoring has picked up many of the issues identified here, and the organisation has supported the management tier effectively to improve the home already. Staff express confidence in the new manager, who also has the confidence of external professionals.
- This is clearly a service that is thinking imaginatively about meeting children's needs and is well placed to now improve further.

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
<p>8. The education standard</p> <p>In order to meet the education standard, with particular reference to the home's routines, structured activities and staff awareness of children's educational capabilities, the registered person must ensure that staff:</p> <p>(2)(a) (viii) help a child who is excluded from school, or who is of compulsory school age but not attending school, to access educational and training support throughout the period of exclusion or non-attendance and to return to school as soon as possible.</p>	09/12/2016
<p>12. The protection of children standard</p> <p>In order to meet the protection of children standard, with particular reference to reducing risks while children are away from the home and reducing bullying, the registered person must ensure that staff:</p> <p>(2)(a) (i) assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child</p> <p>(iii) have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm</p> <p>(iv) manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other.</p>	09/12/2016
<p>13. The leadership and management standard</p> <p>In order to meet the leadership and management standard, with particular reference to improving record keeping and manager review of safeguarding, bullying and behavioural incidents, disruptions and placement breakdowns, the registered person must:</p>	09/12/2016

(2) (c) ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child (e) ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child (h) use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home.	
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. This is with particular reference to ensuring accurate working chronologies and corresponding reference checks. (Regulation 32(1))	09/12/2016

Full report

Information about this children's home

This is a privately owned children's home. It is registered to provide accommodation and care for four children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. It is one of three operated by the registered person under a specific arrangement with the host local authority. It is able to offer a therapeutic service under the guidance of the organisation's clinical psychologist.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
27/04/2016	Registration	N/A

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home	Requires improvement
<p>This is the first time that any of the five children cared for since the home opened have lived in a children's home. Children's relationships with staff are positive, but with each other are sometimes very difficult. The experience for some is not always happy or stable. Staff are aware of dominant and bullying behaviour and attempt a balance of group and individual activities to reduce unhappiness. One young person, who has been bullied, says it is 'good to be around people more' in a children's home. One has some ambivalence about whether they feel fully liked, cared for or safe. Others say they 'like everything about this house'.</p> <p>No child is currently receiving 25 hours of good registered alternative provision, either because of school refusal, or exclusion. Staff do not know basic information about the most recent child's literacy levels after a month in the home. A greater challenge should have been made to the placing authority earlier for one child, where non-school attendance has been longstanding since May. The new manager has taken action and hopes for a steady progression now to build on the very recent three hours' tuition a week to full-time education and training. A concerted effort is underway to engage and strengthen the way in which the home works with education providers for all children. A school professional said that the new manager 'has been great, really on the ball' and is 'firm and fair' with children resisting education.</p> <p>Management's clear approach is not consistently evident in the day-to-day care of children. The routine of the home does not always support children to be ready for school, or to care for their belongings. For example, children are not always up and dressed during school hours when they are not at school. Young people do not always want, or get enough, staff help to care for their possessions or keep their rooms and bathrooms looking nice.</p> <p>The house is large, with plenty of space for communal or quieter activities. Children's rooms are not well personalised, but active plans are underway regarding this. Food is good. Cooking is a keen interest of some staff, and some children are currently involved in a 'come dine with me' competition. Children develop their independence skills and learn to budget, shop and cook for themselves.</p> <p>Assessment, care planning and direct work is a developing strength. The organisation's psychologist consults with parents, carers and social workers to produce a holistic assessment of the child's needs. This is now in the early stages of informing direct work and integration with the home's internal care plan. New</p>	

visual 'star' assessment systems are likely to be useful tools to evidence progress and areas for future work. Children's very regular, planned sessions with different staff to talk about and do activities relate well to the important issues in their lives. Staff have a range of resources, including just talking and thinking, to help to do this creatively. Children's complaints are increasingly well managed, with feedback to children and a clear judgement from the organisation about their issues. There are plenty of opportunities for staff to gather children's views, about their care and the running of the home, in this way. Children's suggestions have been: a kitchen radio; the garden to be levelled for better play; and specific activities, including a boys' camping trip. They suggested, and have now got, segregated boys' and girls' bathrooms.

Arrangements for children's health and medication are satisfactory. Some children are very resistant to routine health checks, but staff talk, persuade and encourage children to lead healthy lives, reduce smoking, including occasional cannabis use, and eat well. They are alert to the individual signs of anxiety now, and keep children safe if they are likely to self-harm. The therapist's weekly sessions with staff and children help staff to understand the impact that children's histories have on their emotional health and well-being and translate understanding into supportive, sensitive strategies for care. Links with external children's mental-health services are good. One child described staff sympathy: 'Whenever I'm sad they come to me.'

Even though children come from the local area, some of their important people are some distance away, and staff help them enjoy happy excursions together. Staff support children to maintain positive relationships with the important people in their lives, parents, brothers and sisters, previous foster or adoptive carers.

Staff say that the young people are all 'on track' now, but that they take a lot of persuasion. One child said that the home was 'brilliant'. Another described how different they were now, as they 'used to get into trouble all the time'. They said that staff had helped them to sort themselves out.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
Children have not always been safe when having agreed unsupervised overnight stays away from the home with approved family members. The regime and record of checks by staff have not been good enough. They have not taken rigorous action when plans have been changed by children to ensure that all responsible adults were aware. Managers liaised with the placing authority to prevent further risk, but there has been no subsequent fact-finding or managerial review of staff	

action two weeks after this event. Risk assessments are not always clear about the extra arrangements agreed with social workers, and some confusion in names could lead staff to make mistakes, for example naming a prohibited adult instead of a family member.

Bullying is a significant issue for children in the home. A recent incident was very serious, and staff directed children to protect themselves and call their placing authority. Staff and managers described close attention to the individuals involved, and gave a supportive response after the event, but children's records do not show this action well enough, and there was no record of managerial review a week after the incident. It is not clear how the manager has evaluated and learned lessons from these two events.

Staff recruitment records do not always evidence a rigorous process. For example, conflicting information between employment history and references is not always picked up.

Staff did not always manage risk safely in the early days of the home. Some did not always respond in a fully protective, careful way when children were angry, sad, or threatening self-harm. When children ran off, or went missing, staff did not always follow or go looking for them. Implementation and recording of physical intervention has been an issue, and staff have not always acted in line with their training in physical intervention and have not always recorded honestly. The registered person has identified these weaknesses and addressed them. Practice is now fully correct, and in some cases really positive follow-up work has been done, particularly around risks when missing from care.

Allegations against staff and child-protection concerns are managed according to Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures. The manager seeks early advice about thresholds from the organisation's safeguarding lead officer and also from the designated officer within the host authority. Staff are trained and clear about their responsibilities. New managers are increasingly taking action when they identify that staff practice is not good enough.

Children are fairly often absent without authority. Staff do act as good parents in looking for them, talking to them and sharing information about why they go missing. Formal training is planned. A social worker reports constructive communication and joint work about risks relating to sexual exploitation, and the service acts swiftly when such concerns arise. Children are pushing boundaries but the staff do manage this. Girls do try to dominate the boys and also some staff. Senior staff and managers are actively promoting consistency, and children say that staff are fair. Children are smoking cannabis, but staff check rooms and call for medical help when needed. They work with children about drugs. Children get the external help that they need for specialist organisations to help them understand the risks. Staff also do direct work that helps them see the connections from risks to their own situations.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement
<p>The home has had a difficult period since its registration in April and the first two children moved in in May. The placing authority acknowledged this in July. The first registered manager and deputy left in June: the appointments had not proved suitable. The new manager began work in July, and a new deputy after that. The manager is currently in the registration process. She is an experienced residential manager and holds an appropriate qualification in childcare and management.</p> <p>The service has moved quickly to reach full occupancy. The managers are now using matching documents to do this well, and all bar one placement has been planned, with opportunities for visits to and by the child before they moved in. Systems to track children's progress have also begun, and look likely to give the registered person a clear picture of how children develop from their starting points. One child's placement broke down in an emergency. Staff and managers have reflected on this, but there has not been a managerial evaluation to inform future planning or as part of the six-monthly review of the quality of care.</p> <p>Staff turnover has been high, at over one third since registration, and there has been a complete change in senior management at the home in six months. Over 30 staff have worked in the home, as new staff destined for other new homes develop their skills on induction here. The registered person hopes that this situation has now stabilised, and staff certainly do now have full confidence in the new manager and report supportive, professional, good-quality management. Sufficient staff levels, including one-to-one staff where required by the placing authority, meet children's needs day and night.</p> <p>Training at induction is well organised, and children's emerging needs trigger plans for further training, for example in self-harm and in helping children who may go missing. Several staff have different, often advanced, qualifications, such as in teaching or post-graduate education. The organisation has not yet established the equivalency of these qualifications. Staff without a level 3 qualification are beginning this as they finish their probationary periods; currently four of the 13 staff hold this relevant qualification. Supervision is improving in quality and frequency. Staff described the senior management team as having a willingness to support staff and clear direction from the manager.</p> <p>The new senior management team, consisting of new manager, therapist and new service manager, meet regularly to plan and review care. The formal report of the review of the quality of care does not yet reflect the quality of this wider range of</p>	

quality processes supporting the improvement since the home's registration. Lessons learned are not yet clear in managerial review after safeguarding issues or after significant incidents for children. There is a focus on describing systems, rather than outcomes. The cycle of review, action and improvement is not yet tested through a full round, but it meets regulation.

Effective external monitoring by two different independent visitors has been crucial in assisting the registered person to identify and respond to the early turbulence at the home. This critical challenge continues to inform the development plan for the home and actions to improve. This delivers a clear focus on the safety and well-being of children.

Records are not always well ordered. The home is in the middle of a transfer from paper and 'word', to electronic systems. Not all staff are recording correctly. For example, some staff have recorded children's missing incidents under the category of behavioural records, so it is not easy to track a history. It is not always very clear from safeguarding records whether issues are concluded or ongoing. Staff training records are not a reliable record of the training they have had. The registered person is aware of this and is working on it.

Since the new manager began in July and senior managerial support arrangements were subsequently strengthened, there has been progress at the home. Changes are very new, within the last three months, but are taking shape. This is a home that is at a clear, firm position to make the step to an improved service. It remains for consistent good practice to be secured under a permanent, long-term registered manager.

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 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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