

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	29/11/2016
Unique reference number	SC036804
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Gateshead Council
Registered provider address	Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear NE8 1HH

Responsible individual	Elaine Devaney
Registered manager	Post vacant
Inspector	Nick Murphy

Inspection date	29/11/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Outstanding
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Outstanding
The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the home contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help, protection and care.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding

SC036804

Summary of findings

The children's home's provision is outstanding because:

- The home's generous staffing ratio ensures that children receive the attention and support they need to keep them safe and help them to thrive. Staff have a deep understanding of each child's needs and use this to design an individualised programme of care, which promotes their development.
- Children relish the opportunity to spend time with their friends. They gain great pleasure from shared recreation, or playing by themselves with the close support of staff. Frequent activities within the community ensure that children do not feel socially isolated.
- Staff work closely with parents, and the range of other professionals in each child's life. This ensures that staff are consistent in helping children reach targets related to their education or health.
- Staff are zealous in promoting children's rights, and involving them in making choices whenever possible. This approach contributes to the home's outstanding ability to safeguard children.
- The premises are excellent. The building provides all the aids and adaptations necessary to meet the needs of children who have disabilities, while retaining a homely and domestic environment.
- The management of the home is extremely effective. It ensures that staff are supported in providing the highest quality of care to children. Managers are aware of where they can improve the service further and have plans in place to do this. No statutory requirements or recommendations have been made at this inspection.

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home provides short breaks for up to five children with physical disabilities and/or learning disabilities. It is operated by a local authority.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
29/03/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
29/09/2015	Full	Outstanding
11/12/2014	Interim	Improved effectiveness
10/06/2014	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
<p>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are</p>	<p>Outstanding</p>
<p>Children receive high levels of individualised support because staffing levels are well maintained. This means that the staff are able to give their full attention to each child in everyday tasks, such as eating meals and getting ready for school. It also ensures that there are sufficient numbers of staff to provide choice in activities and recreation. As well as in-house activities, such as arts and crafts, games and enjoying the garden, there is a variety of outings on offer. These include trips to the beach, museums, concerts and meals out. Such activities ensure that children are able to overcome any barriers which may limit their full participation in wider society and assist in helping children to develop their confidence and independence. For example, ordering and paying for a pub meal themselves rather than relying on staff to do it for them. A welcome recent development has been the conversion of an outbuilding into a comfortable space where children can cook, wash their clothes, and work on their hobbies.</p> <p>Children’s needs are well met because care plans are concise, clear and focused on their needs and are regularly reviewed as their needs change. The plans are drawn up by each child’s key worker using information from parents, school and health professionals. They set out each child’s daily routine and targets for the child to aim towards to promote their personal development. These targets are consistent with those of the child’s school and the parents’ aspirations for their child. As a result, children make excellent progress, which is well documented. Sample extracts from progress reports include, ‘[name] is helping out with domestic tasks and also at the Summer Fayre... [name] is cooperating with staff and has made progress in dressing and undressing the top half of her body... [name] is a lot more independent in the bath and gaining more confidence in speaking up about what she would like to do during her stays... [name] makes himself supper and his packed lunch for school... [name] continues to make progress using the toilet by herself... [name] made huge progress having her first bath, this was a massive decision for her and based on the trust she had in staff to support her and help her overcome her fear...’</p> <p>Children have excellent relationships with staff and this supports their development of their social skills. They love their company and can choose, as far as practicable, which member of staff they want to support them each evening. One child said, ‘Everyone here is lovely.’ Another commented, ‘Staff are just awesome.’ Staff are clearly committed to ensuring the welfare and happiness of the children, one social worker commenting, ‘Staff provide a high level of service and always go the extra mile.’ Another professional said, ‘It is a great resource, parents love it, they can clearly see how much their kids enjoy coming here and how much progress they</p>	

make.' Staff have a thorough understanding of each child's communication abilities and preferences. They undertake training in different forms of sign language and the use of picture symbols. This, coupled with the use of technology, such as electronic tablets, enables children to express themselves as effectively as possible.

In addition, children get on well with each other. Using information from school and parents about each child's friends and interests, staff plan the composition of the groups which stay every night very carefully. This means that children come and stay with others who are familiar to them, enhancing the quality of their experience. One child's social worker said, 'She is a bit overawed at school – this is perfect for her as she is in a smaller group, so can develop her social integration better.'

Children's complex health needs are met effectively by well-trained staff who work seamlessly with other agencies to meet their needs. Staff receive specialist training from health professionals when necessary, for example in gastronomic feeding, or moving and handling. This means that staff are able to carry out intimate personal care tasks confidently and with maximum regard for the child's comfort and dignity. One child said, 'Staff are great at managing my personal care, like helping me to bathe – they cope with it very well, and much better than how they do it at school.' This quality of care is supported by the sophistication of the home's aids and adaptations. Bathrooms are fully equipped with hoists and tracks, one bath being a jacuzzi with multi-coloured lighting effects. This soothes and relaxes children, particularly important for those who may feel anxious about being immersed in water. A child said, 'The home is a lifeline for me because it is fully adapted, it can be quite stressful at home getting in the bath, but not here.'

The quality and extent of the staff's consultation with children is exceptional. This is due in part to the one-to-one staffing levels, so that children are able to do what they want to do and not be constrained by the preferences of the wider group. In addition, meetings take place every time a new group of children arrive. These meetings enable children to make choices about meals, activities and what else might be going on in the home. At the time of the inspection, there was much excitement about Christmas, children eagerly anticipating forthcoming events such as concerts and parties. In addition, there is a more formal forum, and one meeting of this took place during the inspection. This is properly chaired (by one of the children) and minuted by a local authority participation officer, so it is independent of the home's staff and manager. The meeting was conducted in a very orderly fashion, each child allowing others to speak and respecting their views. Decisions and recommendations were then given to the manager to consider. This is an excellent illustration of how the staff empower children and enables them to feel included and valued. Another example is that children take part in the process for recruiting staff. One child said, 'When we interviewed people for the last job, one of them didn't come over to me as child-friendly, and they weren't appointed.'

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
<p>The home is a very safe place. Children have a clear sense of this, a group of them agreeing that, 'Yes, we feel safe here, very safe.' The actual premises are free from hazards and enable children to play with each other or on their own in complete safety. The high staffing levels ensure that children are watched over, discreetly if necessary, at all times. This is important for those children whose conditions or disabilities present particular risks to their safety. A social worker said, 'The home is well staffed, which engenders a feeling of safety and security.' Children sometimes prefer to spend time in their bedrooms, listening to music or watching DVDs. In these circumstances, staff are able to monitor them via electronic listening devices, so that they can be immediately aware if a child is becoming distressed, and go to them to provide comfort and reassurance.</p> <p>Staff undertake risk assessments on each child, initially from information gleaned when a child is first being considered for short breaks. These are reviewed and updated on a regular basis, and used by staff as daily working tools to ensure that risks are adequately controlled. Risk assessments for items of specialist equipment are carried out by other professionals. For example, one child uses a safe-space bed, which has been fully assessed as safe and appropriate by an occupational therapist.</p> <p>The close oversight that staff are able to provide ensures that children do not go missing. This does not, however, restrict children's liberty or place limits on their opportunities to go out and about in the community with staff. Children have access to the internet and social media, but the technology and staff supervision ensure that they are protected from online threats.</p> <p>The rules of the home are simple, namely that everyone (staff and children) should respect each other. This message is reinforced at every opportunity, and this, coupled with the quality of relationships within the home, results in a happy, settled, relaxed atmosphere. Sometimes, children become distressed or upset, and this can show itself in challenging behaviour. Staff are skilled in managing this. They use their knowledge of each child to draw up bespoke behaviour management plans. These set out what might trigger a child to become upset and what works for that child in reducing their anxiety and distress. The effectiveness of this approach is evidenced by the extremely low incidence of physical restraints – only two since the last full inspection over a year ago. Similarly, sanctions are rarely used, staff reinforcing good behaviour through the use of praise and</p>	

incentives, and ignoring or diverting inappropriate behaviour.

Staff are highly aware of what makes children who have disabilities particularly vulnerable. They are vigilant in looking for any physical signs, or changes in behaviour, which may indicate a concern about a particular child. In these situations they are prompt in making referrals to the appropriate agencies and taking part in multi-agency meetings to address the issue.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding
<p>The manager is highly experienced and suitably qualified, and is currently applying for registration. She has been recently appointed from her post at another home operated by the local authority. Even in the short time she has been here, she has demonstrated highly effective organisational skills and strong advocacy for the rights and welfare of children. The staff team is also experienced, and is passionate about making children's experiences as happy and rewarding as possible. They have a deep knowledge of the children's needs and are able to recognise the progress they make. One said, 'One of my key children initially came here with prompt cards from school to help him through the stages of taking a shower. We started him off with these but now he doesn't need them, he is so independent, taking everything he needs into the shower and needing no support. He is also doing this at home, which is great.' Another member of staff said, 'I feel humbled and privileged to work with these children and see the difference we can make to their lives.'</p> <p>The strides that children make in their development is thoroughly recorded by staff. They have the responsibility for adding this information on their key children to monitoring records, such as that maintained by the manager and set out in a report at intervals. This enables managers and staff to have an overview of each child's plan and review their individual targets. It also helps staff to identify where progress could be better and provide additional support if necessary. This information is shared with parents and other professionals, for example in case reviews. As a result, concerted and systematic action can be taken by everyone working or living with the child to bring about positive change.</p> <p>Staff are extremely well supported. A wide range of training is scheduled through a highly effective system, which ensures that staff receive refreshers at the right intervals. It is noteworthy that the children themselves understand the importance of staff training, one saying, 'Staff are trained to high standards, so they understand properly about our needs.' Staff also benefit from regular supervision</p>	

by managers. Each session is detailed and well recorded, and ensures that the work of each member of staff is focused on the needs of children and how to support them more effectively.

Managers and staff are motivated in seeking information which will increase their knowledge and skills. They research topics such as autism, so that their understanding of this condition enables them to provide a better service. Another current area of research is the complexities of the legislation around mental capacity assessment. This is intended to improve the manager's understanding to make more secure judgements in balancing the need to promote children's right to self-determination with keeping them safe.

The manager has an excellent understanding of where the home needs to make improvements. Any incidents are analysed and discussed within the staff team and actions agreed. For example, a recent minor error in administering medication to a child has resulted in changes to the home's policy and procedure. The staff identified as responsible for medication on any one day are given protected time and space, free from distractions or interruptions, to organise stocks and doses. This makes the process safer for children. Additionally, staff themselves are keen to identify where they could improve practice. They are currently working on making more systematic photographic records of children's achievements, for example in cooking, to make 'life story' books of each child's time here. This will provide children with happy memories and enhance their sense of identity and self-esteem.

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 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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