

SC489212

Registered provider: MacIntyre Academies

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The children's home is run by a private organisation in partnership with the local authority. It provides placements for up to six children and young people on long-term placements and a further six on short breaks. All attend the academy on the same site.

The home was previously registered as a residential special school, becoming a children's home in July 2015.

Inspection dates: 3 to 4 May 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers requires improvement to be good

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 1 November 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: Good

Enforcement action since last inspection

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because

- Children and young people are making progress across a range of developmental areas. Collaborative work with the school’s occupational therapist and child and adolescent mental health services is having a valuable impact on improving independent living and self-care skills and on managing anxieties.
- Children and young people benefit from good links between the school and home, ensuring that attendance is excellent and staff in the home contribute to educational achievement.
- Staff have a sound knowledge of each child’s circumstances, their preferences and what methods work best for them. They are adept at interpreting their mood and behaviours to make well-timed interventions, particularly to head off potential incidents. Behaviour is regarded primarily as a means of communication, which is carefully considered to meet needs.
- Staff identify children and young people’s interests and arrange activities that promote them, so enhancing their experiences.
- As one professional commented, ‘This is a place that really understands autism.’

The children's home's areas for development

- Ensure that the home attracts and retains suitable permanent staff to provide consistent care to children and young people.
- Ensure that case records, including plans and risk assessments, are kept up to date, that authors are identified and that all documents are dated.
- Develop methods of capturing children’s and young people’s views, wishes and feelings, and demonstrate how these are used to inform case planning, practice and reviews of the quality of care.
- Record significant events and actions taken on case files. These include the process of moving in and out of the home, support for children’s contact with family, and progress towards targets.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
01/11/2016	Full	Good
13/04/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
09/12/2015	Full	Good

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet 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>In order to meet the leadership and management standard, the registered person is required to:</p> <p>lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach, set out in the home's statement of purpose. (Regulation 13 (2)(a)) In particular, ensure that key workers are appointed and carry out the role in the way described.</p> <p>ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child. (Regulation 13 (2)(c)) In particular, ensure that agency staff meet the requirements regarding mandatory qualifications and that the home's workforce plan details the process and timescales for supervision of practice for agency staff.</p> <p>ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child. (Regulation 13 (2)(d)) In particular, 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.</p> <p>ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child. (Regulation 13 (2)(e)) In particular, ensure that placement plans are reviewed, regularly updated and that records demonstrate that they are followed consistently.</p>	30/06/2017
<p>The registered person must notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (3)(b))</p>	31/05/2017
<p>The registered person must maintain case records for each child which are kept up to date. (Regulation 36 (1)(b))</p>	31/05/2017

Recommendations

- Children who cannot or choose not to verbalise, have the right to have their views, wishes and feelings heard and respected in the same way as other children. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 24, paragraph 4.24) This includes making a complaint that is dealt with in accordance with regulation 39 and recording the views, wishes and feelings of children, as far as they have been determined, that have been taken account of in drawing up placement plans.
- The registered person should work with the placing authority to ensure that each child's transition is planned and help each child to prepare for leaving both practically and emotionally. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 57, paragraph 11.9) This work should be adequately recorded.
- The registered person is responsible for maintaining good employment practice. They must ensure that recruitment, supervision and performance management of staff safeguards children and minimises potential risks to them. ('Guide to Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)
- All children's case records must be kept up to date, and signed and dated by the author of each entry. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62 paragraph 14.3)
- The registered person's review of the appropriateness and suitability of the location and premises of the home should include the identification of any risks and opportunities presented by the home's location and strategies for managing these. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 64, paragraph 15.1)
- The responsible person must take such general fire precautions as will ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety of any employees; and in relation to relevant persons who are not employees, take such general fire precautions as may reasonably be required in the circumstances of the case to ensure that the premises are safe. (The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 8(1) and (2)) In particular, they must undertake thorough assessments, ensure regular checks are made of emergency lighting, internal doors and other fire equipment, and that personal emergency evacuation plans refer to the bedroom the young person concerned sleeps in.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Parents and professionals were able to give many examples of progress that children and young people have made. These include an increasing ability to communicate verbally, greater interaction with adults and reduction in self-injurious behaviour. Some children who come for short breaks have been able to transfer newly acquired independence skills to their family home, including helping with dressing and using cutlery.

Achievements are celebrated, including having them written or drawn on a whiteboard for children and young people to see.

Handover reports from the school provide some evidence of children's progress, although of varying quality. Staff gave accounts of improvements that children have made, and photobooks illustrate children 'trying something new'. However, this information is not collated, and there are no systematic methods to record progress over time unless children receive a service from the school's occupational therapist. Reports written for statutory reviews describe the current situation for the child, including recent developments, but provide a 'snapshot' rather than an overview from the point of admission.

Children assessed as being able to benefit from the occupational therapist service have tailored programmes for such matters as feeding and dressing. Progress made includes children making toast and helping to pull up underwear and trousers. Group work includes messy play and football, for which group and individual aims are identified.

Documentation that details the 'critical communication' of children is very helpful in identifying how a particular child communicates. The documentation focuses on what behaviour is likely to mean. Staff discuss what they notice about children's interactions, such as a young person 'making a soft touch of hands' when he has calmed after a period of heightened emotions. This means that staff respond appropriately and consistently, leading to children being motivated to interact more and thus the improvement in communication that parents and professionals have observed.

Despite this understanding, and individual staff member's own knowledge, the home does not consistently capture children's views, wishes and feelings, for example responses to activities or their enjoyment of meals.

Staff provide activities that are varied and tailored to children's known interests, including swimming trips, going to a café and attending a local youth club. Children are given options, and often this might be to do nothing – a choice that is respected, although staff will encourage them to participate in something later.

Staff have made considerable efforts to enhance the visual appeal of the environment. Children and young people have been involved in choosing pictures and characters to depict in murals and have helped paint some. There are some striking photographs

mounted on canvases that indicate to children their importance to the home.

Some damage is evident to the fabric of the home, such as holes in plasterboard. This is one of a number of construction issues that managers are working hard to rectify, both day to day and in the longer term.

Staff work well with colleagues in the school, with liaison over homework and reading resulting in increasing opportunities for consolidating learning and improving literacy. Attendance is excellent.

The home promotes contact with families, including maintaining links with siblings and wider family by sending them artwork produced by children. Case files do not record contact, whether direct or indirect. Parents spoken to appreciate the support offered; one said that staff 'go above and beyond' to help, despite the impact of the 'fast turnover'.

The recently appointed worker with responsibility for transition provides further help to families. She has contributed to a smooth process for children currently being admitted. Two young people have moved on from the home after the principal gave notice on placements. Although these led to swift moves, staff have maintained contact where possible, and enabled young people to say their 'goodbyes' in retrospect. During the inspection, staff attended an important event for one of the young people, even though it was some distance away. None of this work has been recorded; indeed, staff do not routinely record any work that takes place away from the home.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

The principal has instituted a process for staff to notify managers of concerns that they have regarding children and young people. Staff know that anything that causes them unease, however minor, can be raised immediately with senior staff. Records show that managers follow each of these up and appropriate actions are taken. Professionals spoken to believe that managers and staff deal with safeguarding issues well. One social worker said that responses are 'thorough and quick – really on the ball'.

The designated officer of the local authority has delivered training for staff, and reported that the home has liaised with her appropriately. Managers have followed any advice and guidance given and updated the officer when actions have been taken.

Staff know the steps to take if children go missing and how to respond when they return. However, protocols for individual children are generic, giving no information about specific risk factors.

The quality of risk assessments varies; for example, some that cover the internet and electronic devices explain issues and reasons for measures to be taken, while others are perfunctory, leaving readers with questions, such as why a young person requires supervision using email but not a video clip site.

Information about how to complain is on display, and forms for children to use are readily available if they wish to do so. However, most children do not have the ability to

read or to write. As noted at the last inspection, the complaints policy reads as guidance for adults and does not address those made by children, or how staff should respond to either. Staff have no guidance as to how to identify when children who are not verbal demonstrate through behaviour that they have complaints or how to process them.

Placement plans cover essential areas to inform staff as to the strategies and methods employed to care for children. Some had not been reviewed in a timely fashion, and it was not clear how the views of children, as far as they can be ascertained, were used to contribute to them. There is a process for staff to sign when they have read documentation, but few had done so. There is no opportunity for others involved in the child's life, such as parents or social worker, to indicate that they agreed with plans or assessments.

Personal emergency evacuation plans do not specify the room that a child sleeps in – which could be crucial for agency staff to know if unfamiliar with the home.

The deputy manager monitors medication well and has responded promptly to issues, such as requesting a change from tablets to a liquid form of the same medicine. The home's supplier was undertaking an audit at the time of the inspection and the deputy manager is liaising with them over administration procedures. He has also introduced a helpful process for monitoring medical appointments and their outcomes.

There is excellent liaison with the local child and adolescent mental health service, with a consultant regularly visiting the home. This has led to staff employing effective strategies to assist children, such as managing anxiety.

Observations made during the inspection evidenced positive relationships between children and staff. Staff members readily gave praise and encouragement, and they managed situations that could have escalated to become serious incidents. Most staff demonstrate a detailed knowledge of those they are caring for, including children's preferences, the targets they are working towards and what strategies work best.

Not all agency staff have received training in the home's method of behaviour management. Only those who have undertaken the course should be involved in restraints, but it was not clear to staff that this was the case. They are also unsure about the difference between consequences and sanctions, particularly 'time out'. The home's behaviour management policy states that sanctions may be used in particular circumstances, whereas the organisation's policy describes them as 'ineffective, misunderstood and unethical'.

Managers make efforts to ensure that staff employed on a temporary basis are suitable for working with children. This includes turning agency staff away who do not have adequate documentation, or no longer using those whose practice has not been to the standard required. However, when recruiting staff directly, records show that the home has not routinely obtained a full employment history or obtained verification, where possible, of the reasons that candidates have left previous employment involving work with children or vulnerable adults.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The principal has a clear vision to improve the experiences of children and young people and to help them to make progress. Managers have taken steps to achieve this, but they and the staff team have been unable to meet their aspirations due to a relatively high staff turnover and continuing shortage of permanent workers. In addition, significant personnel are either on long-term sick leave or not in post, including the home's manager.

There has been a reliance on agency workers, which has resulted in some shifts having a majority of temporary staff. Nevertheless, an examination of rosters suggests that there were sufficient staff on duty to meet the needs of children present.

The principal has not been able to ensure that all agency workers employed have the level of mandatory training required by regulation. Although managers oversee the practice of agency staff during shifts, these workers do not receive formal supervision.

Agency workers commented that they are included as members of the team, and make a very positive contribution to the life of the home. The home uses the same staff whenever possible, to ensure continuity of care, and this has reduced the impact on children and young people.

Staff turnover has led to frequent changes in key workers and some not being allocated. This has resulted in documentation, particularly the home's health plans, on many case files not being regularly reviewed and updated. Files often have different versions of the same plan or assessment, and this is not helped by some documents being undated or the author unidentified. This makes it difficult for new workers to know which are the current documents that they should be working to and therefore on consistency of approach.

The location assessment comments on advantages of the home being situated where it is but does not clearly identify all potential risks. For example, it provides a link to local crime statistics on the internet but does not extract relevant information. The assessment does not address how the home could ameliorate the risks.

Managers last reviewed the fire assessment eight months ago; it refers to people having responsibilities who are no longer in post, and responsibility for monitoring fire precautions is therefore unclear. Checks have not been completed for at least four months, which could compromise the safety of children should a fault be undetected.

The principal has reviewed the statement of purpose, which provides an understanding of the aims of the home, its ethos and methods of working, even if staffing issues mean that it is not fully achieving them. It was not forwarded to Ofsted, as is required by regulation, until the inspection. This was the case at the interim inspection held a year ago. The regulation 45 review was late being produced but demonstrated that managers are aware of the home's strengths and weaknesses. It identifies pertinent actions to improve.

A database of significant incidents has recently been devised, which allows managers to

monitor significant events and identify any patterns across the home or for individual children and adapt practice as a result.

Despite the difficulties with staffing, permanent and temporary workers spoken to during the inspection said that they feel well supported by managers. They are motivated to provide as good a service to children and young people as possible, sometimes using their own time to achieve this, for example when escorting children to medical appointments.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and 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.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, 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'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC489212

Provision sub-type: Residential special school

Registered provider: MacIntyre Academies

Registered provider address: MacIntyre Care, 602 South Seventh Street, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK9 2JA

Responsible individual: Angela O'Rourke

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector(s)

Chris Peel, social care inspector

Melissa McMillan, social care inspector

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