

SC036304

Registered provider: Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

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/or 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 or reunited with their family.

Inspection dates: 18 to 19 May 2017

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

requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

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.

Date of last inspection: 22 February 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: Declined in effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home requires improvement to be good because:

- The home's risk assessments are not yet robust. They do not assess all potential risks to children living at the home. As a result, staff do not have comprehensive risk assessments that outline the strategies identified to keep all children safe.
- Poor recording of serious safeguarding matters hinders the monitoring and evaluation of the home's safeguarding practice.
- Continuity of care is hampered because some staff do not consistently work as a team and share information. This was evident in staff handovers and the home's daily log book.
- Staff duty rosters do not provide a clear picture of the actual rosters worked. This makes it difficult to establish who was working at the home on specific dates and times. This could potentially compromise any future safeguarding investigation or allegation against a member of staff.
- The children's guide has not been updated to ensure that it is providing children with accurate information about the support services available to them. Not all children had received a guide when they moved into the home. They were not provided with the relevant information about the home, such as who they should speak to if they are unhappy or worried.
- Staff have not respected children's privacy when carrying out room searches. The quality of room search records was very poor. Those sampled lacked detail, for example, whether the child was informed of the search and their views.
- Staff training and development is poorly monitored. There was no clear overview of staff's training and development needs. Furthermore, staff have not received recent training around drug and substance misuse. Consequently, some staff lack the knowledge, understanding and skills to identify and support children who are at risk of substance misuse.
- Monitoring systems are not wholly effective because they do not provide a thorough assessment of the care and protection provided in the home. Furthermore, they have not identified the shortfalls found at this inspection.

The children's home's strengths:

- Children benefit from being cared for by a stable and committed team that is skilled at nurturing positive relationships in the home.
- Children make progress from their starting points, particularly in their education and emotional health. This is as a result of consistent routines, successful behaviour management strategies, and collaborative working with schools and therapists.
- Children are well prepared and supported to move back to their families or

foster placements. Those who have moved on, value staff's continued contact and 'friendship'.

- Incidents of missing from care and associated risks, such as sexual exploitation, are managed well. Staff will follow children and actively look for them when they go missing. This shows children that staff care about them and want to keep them safe.
- Children's social development is promoted through having regular opportunities to do a range of activities that they choose and enjoy.
- Staff wholly support children to maintain contact with their family and friends and this is helping children to sustain attachments with important people.
- Home improvements are underway. There is a clear plan in place to continue with these improvements, which will enhance the home's physical environment and ensure that it presents as welcoming and homely.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
22/02/2017	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
01/06/2016	Full	Good
09/02/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
12/05/2015	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>The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that staff 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. (Regulation 12 (1) and (2)(a)(i))</p>	23/06/2017
<p>The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that helps children aspire to fulfil their potential, and promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure that—</p> <p>staff work as a team where appropriate; ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(2)(b)(c) and (h))</p>	23/06/2017
<p>The registered person must maintain in the home the records in Schedule 4. (Regulation 37 (2)(a))</p> <p>In particular, maintain a copy of the staff duty roster of persons working at the home, and an accurate record of the actual hours worked by staff.</p>	23/06/2017
<p>The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(e))</p> <p>In particular, notifying HMCI of all concerns, which the registered manager considers serious, including all child protection matters.</p>	23/06/2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that the home's children's guide is reviewed, updated and accessible to all children and young people living at the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 14, paragraph 3.5)
- Ensure that staff respect children's privacy by involving them, whenever possible, in room searches. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 16, paragraph 3.17)
- Ensure that any individual appointed to carry out visits to the home as an independent person must make a rigorous and impartial assessment of the home's arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children in the home's care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 65, paragraph 15.5)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Children benefit from being cared for by staff who know them well. As a result, children's care is personalised to their individual needs and interests. A child said, 'Staff talk to us and help us when we are upset. When I moved here, I used to be angry, now I have a blip but I am fine, thanks to this home.'

Children make progress from their starting points. All children are attending full-time education, and staff work with schools effectively to help overcome any issues or barriers to children's education, such as exclusions. A teacher said, '(child's name) is doing brilliant this term. He is responding well to the incentives that we have put in place.' The teacher also confirmed that there is regular communication between the school and home and that the home ensures that homework is completed on time. Staff have high aspirations for the children in their care and support them to achieve and progress.

Children's physical and emotional health is consistently promoted. Staff ensure that all health appointments are routinely arranged and attended by all children living at the home. Children's emotional well-being is promoted with the support of specialist workers, such as the children and adolescent mental health service and the therapeutic social work team. Both of these services have provided direct support to children, as well as consultation and guidance to the team. This support is helping children, and staff, to understand their feelings and manage difficult emotions in a safer way. Some children have been enabled to return to the care of their families due to the progress that they have made. However, improvements can be made in how staff plan for children to access sexual health services. It is not clear, from children's placement plans, how the home intends to support children who have sexual health needs.

Staff are skilled at nurturing positive relationships in the home. Children trust their carers and confide in them. Many children who have moved on from the home continue to visit and keep in contact with the manager and staff.

The home provides children with opportunities to try new activities and explore their interests and hobbies. Children have enjoyed trips to the beach and lakeside, as well as attending local clubs. This is supporting young people to make new friendships, forge links in their community and improve their confidence and self-esteem.

Children are wholly supported to keep in contact with their families. Staff welcome the children's parents and friends into the home and this level of commitment and support is highly valued. This was reflected in a parent's comments, 'Staff are fantastic. They have helped us loads. (Child's name) is more able to talk to me about things since he has lived here.'

How staff carry out and record room searches can improve to ensure that children's right to privacy is consistently respected. Some room searches have been carried out without the child's knowledge or involvement. Some records did not provide sufficient information, such as reasons for the room search, outcome of the search, or the child's views.

The children's guide does not provide accurate information regarding the independent support services available to children, in particular children's rights service. Staff have not ensured that every child who moves into the home receives this guide.

Consequently, a child was unsure of how to make a complaint or raise a concern. Additionally, the home produces the guide in one format and this does not reflect the different ages and level of understanding of the children living at the home.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Some areas of safeguarding practice require improvement to ensure consistency across the team. In particular, how risk is identified, assessed and recorded, including how staff intend to manage risk. Some risk management plans omitted significant detail, for example, safeguarding concerns regarding a parent and how staff would supervise contact in the home to ensure that all children are safe. Although there was evidence of staff providing appropriate supervision during this contact, this had not been co-ordinated in any meaningful way to ensure consistent practice. Similarly, risk management plans did not identify strategies for supporting children with sexual health needs, or children who are deemed at risk of child sexual exploitation.

Poor recording of serious safeguarding concerns and the actions taken is hindering effective monitoring and evaluation of the home's safeguarding practice. The home had no detailed record of two child protection referrals that concerned two children living in the home. This is clearly a recording shortfall and not a practice issue; the matters had been duly reported to the children's social workers.

Drug misuse is a current concern for a child living at the home. However, staff have not had recent training on drugs and substance misuse to ensure that they have up-to-date

knowledge and the skills to recognise the signs of drug misuse.

Staff duty rosters do not support good safeguarding practice. The rosters sampled did not reflect the actual dates or hours that staff had worked. Changes in the rosters had not been updated to provide an accurate picture of who was working at the home on specific dates. Additionally, the times that individuals had worked each day were not recorded. Although this has not affected young people's safety so far, it could potentially undermine an investigation in the event of an allegation being made against a member of the team in the future.

Although areas of safeguarding practice require improvement to be good, some elements of help and protection are strong. Staff are proactive when children do not return home; for example, staff go out and actively look for children. When children are missing, staff alert all relevant professionals to ensure that rapid action is taken to locate them and minimise potential harm. In the majority of cases, an independent person undertakes missing from home return interviews. This provides children with the opportunity to talk about any issues concerning their missing behaviour and helps to prevent further incidents. In the past, there have been communication issues between the home and the independent person, such as the worker not informing staff when interviews have been conducted outside of the home. Additionally, on one occasion, the independent person did not inform staff of a serious disclosure that a child had made during a return interview. The registered manager has taken steps to address this with the independent person and communication has since improved.

Staff are alert to the signs of child sexual exploitation and manage this risk well. Staff escalate serious safeguarding concerns, such as child sexual exploitation, to multi-agency strategy meetings. This ensures a co-ordinated joint response to serious safeguarding matters.

Staff are skilled at developing positive relationships with children. These effective relationships are supporting children to trust and confide in staff, which, in turn, enhances staff's knowledge and understanding of children's vulnerabilities and experiences. In the main, staff's direct work sessions are helping children to understand risk and keep themselves safe.

Physical intervention and restraints have decreased and this is down to staff helping children to deal with difficult emotions in a safer way. Restraint records have improved; these records now detail all of the information required by law.

The administration of medication has improved. Staff ensure that all medicines, including controlled drugs, are safely stored. The records demonstrate that medication is safely administered to children and effective auditing of these records minimises the potential for errors. This is ensuring that children's medical needs are appropriately met and that safe administration procedures are in place.

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

A suitably qualified and experienced registered manager runs the home with the

support of a deputy manager. The team is sufficiently staffed and stable, which supports children to develop positive relationships with a consistent staff team. Improvements can be made, however, in team working. In particular, how the team shares information during handovers to ensure continuity in care and safeguarding practice.

Children benefit from living in a home that is led by a dedicated manager who undoubtedly has their welfare at heart. Children's needs are clearly prioritised. This was demonstrated in an independent reviewing officer's (IRO) comments, 'I am the IRO for a number of children in this children's home. I believe that I have a close working relationship with the manager, who will update me outside of care planning reviews of any worries or concerns. The staff group appear to have a good understanding of the children's historical concerns and day-to-day care needs.'

Staff feel supported and happy in their work. They receive monthly professional supervision, which provides them with opportunities to reflect on their practice and share any areas of concern. However, annual appraisals do not provide staff with sufficient detail on how they can continue to develop. For example, the areas of development section, in those sampled, were blank. Additionally, the manager did not have an effective system in place for monitoring staff's training, which would enable her to identify and bridge any gaps in staff's knowledge.

The manager and staff work effectively with other stakeholders and play an active role in care planning. Teachers and parents confirmed good communication between them and the home. Communication with Ofsted, however, continues to require improvement. The manager has not informed its regulator of all serious safeguarding matters as required. This requirement has, therefore, been repeated.

The home's statement of purpose clearly sets out the home's aims and objectives and is kept under review and updated accordingly. However, the children's guide had not been updated and this document needs to improve.

Service monitoring is not yet effective. The shortfalls found at this inspection had not been identified by the manager's monitoring systems, including shortfalls in the recording of serious safeguarding concerns, and staff training; the home was also displaying an out-of-date registration certificate. Likewise, the independent visitor, who monitors the home monthly, does not provide a rigorous assessment of the arrangements in place to care for and safeguard children. Furthermore, his reports did not highlight the shortfalls found at this inspection. Monitoring systems require improvement to ensure that leaders have a thorough understanding of the home's strengths and weaknesses and take decisive action to improve the home continually.

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: SC036304

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: People Directorate, 9th Floor, Merton House, Stanley Road, Bootle, Merseyside L20 3JA

Responsible individual: Dwayne Johnson

Registered manager: Sally-Ann Edwards

Inspector

Marina Tully, social care inspector

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