

1244108

Registered provider: Bay Tree House (Gravesend) Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This privately owned home provides care for up to three children. The home's statement of purpose states that it provides therapeutic care for children with learning needs, language and communication difficulties and/or autism spectrum disorder. Three children were living at the home at the time of the inspection.

The registered manager post has been vacant since 23 October 2023.

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 February 2024

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **inadequate**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded.

Date of last inspection: 10 January 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
10/01/2023	Full	Good
18/05/2021	Full	Good
12/06/2019	Full	Good
15/11/2018	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Children make some progress living in the home. However, any progress is significantly compromised due to widespread safeguarding failures and inconsistent leadership and management oversight. This has resulted in weak responses to changes in children's behaviour and poor practice from staff. The culture in the home has undermined the overall experiences and progress of children.

Children's care plans and targets are not regularly reviewed. This, combined with guidance not being easily accessible, means that staff cannot be confident that they are caring for children in line with the most recent information. Day-to-day targets set for children have not been reviewed and have been repeated for almost a year.

One child moved into and out of the home in under two weeks. The ending for the child was sudden and unplanned. They were taken into police protection due to leaders, managers and staff being unable to keep them safe. Furthermore, leaders refused to transport the child's personal possessions to them without a financial agreement in place. This does not demonstrate the child-focused or therapeutic approach detailed in the home's statement of purpose.

Another child, however, moved on from the home in a positive and planned way. The child was well supported to prepare for independent living with training in tasks such as budgeting, shopping and cooking. This work ensured that the child's move on to more-independent living was a success.

Children are supported to engage in education. They all attend school regularly and make some educational progress. Children are supported with their homework.

Children can express their wishes and feelings. Children have regular one-to-one sessions with an adult. These are combined with monthly well-being surveys and weekly house catch ups. These help children to contribute to some choices that are made in the home. However, children's wishes and feelings are not routinely linked to their daily targets or care plans. This means that children are not reaching their full potentials.

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

There are significant failures in how risk is managed. Most children do have risk management plans in place. However, some have not been updated for several months, meaning that staff are not consistently working with up-to-date information.

There have been several incidents where staff have responded poorly when a child has presented with behaviours that challenge. This includes staff and the manager,

who recently left the home, calling the police without using the de-escalation techniques that they have been trained in. Such instances have been in response to minor issues. Staff believe that there is a no-physical intervention policy. This has contributed to decisions to call the police to help staff manage children's behaviours. Consequently, the police have attended the home on several occasions after children have already calmed. This over-reliance on the police puts children at risk of being unnecessarily criminalised.

Unacceptable staff conduct towards children has not been identified or addressed. On one occasion, a member of staff was verbally aggressive and challenging to a child. This resulted in the child, who has learning disabilities, being distressed. Instead of supporting the child in their distress, the staff member video recorded the child. This incident was reviewed by both the previous manager and the independent visitor to the home. However, no action was taken to challenge this. The incident was not referred to external safeguarding professionals or notified to Ofsted. Furthermore, despite other staff members witnessing the incident, they did not intervene to safeguard and comfort the child, and they did not report it.

The response when children go missing from the home is extremely poor. One child went missing on nine occasions over a three-day period. This child is extremely vulnerable. The response was so poor that the police made the decision to take the child into police protection to keep them safe.

There is an insufficient number of staff that hold a relevant first-aid qualification. This has resulted in some shifts being staffed without an individual on site who is trained to administer first aid. This has compromised children's safety. Urgent action was taken during the inspection to address this.

Regular health and safety checks are carried out. However, the most recent fire risk assessment was not carried out by someone with the relevant training. Furthermore, weekly fire checks are not completed consistently. This means that fire safety in the home has not been adequately assessed. The responsible individual recognised this and started to address this during the inspection.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The home has been without a registered manager since October 2023. A replacement manager was appointed, and they applied to register with Ofsted. However, this manager left the home abruptly in January 2024.

The deputy manager has stepped into the role of interim manager while a more permanent solution is sought. The interim manager has already started to make some improvements in relation to some of the weaknesses identified. However, the inconsistencies in management arrangements and oversight of leaders have had a detrimental impact on children's experiences, progress and safety.

Leaders have not acted when serious concerns have been apparent. For example, after a child was taken into police protection, leaders and managers did not review

what happened. Consequently, no learning or actions were identified. Leaders failed to ensure that significant incidents were referred to safeguarding professionals or Ofsted.

Internal and external monitoring systems are poor and have failed to identify the serious shortfalls in how the home is operated.

Staff do not receive consistent levels of supervision. This means that staff do not receive appropriate levels of guidance and support to develop their practice. In addition, staff have not received annual appraisals to monitor and support their ongoing professional development.

Leaders have not ensured that safer recruitment practice is consistently followed. For instance, gaps in employment have not been followed up, and there is a lack of professional curiosity when references make no mention of an applicant's ability to safeguard children.

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, The 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
The registered person must ensure that— at all times, at least one person on duty at the home has a suitable first aid qualification. (Regulation 31 (2)(a))	1 March 2024
The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— 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; help each child to understand how to keep safe; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children; take effective action when there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(v)(vi)(b))	17 March 2024
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on—	17 March 2024

mutual respect and trust; an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and positive responses to other children and adults. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— meet each child’s behavioural and emotional needs, as set out in the child’s relevant plans; help each child to develop and practise skills to resolve conflicts positively and without harm to anyone; communicate to each child expectations about the child’s behaviour and ensure that the child understands those expectations in accordance with the child’s age and understanding; help each child to understand, in a way that is appropriate according to the child’s age and understanding, personal, sexual and social relationships, and how those relationships can be supportive or harmful; strive to gain each child’s respect and trust; understand how children’s previous experiences and present emotions can be communicated through behaviour and have the competence and skills to interpret these and develop positive relationships with children. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(i)(iv)(v)(vi)(viii)(ix))	
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. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—	17 March 2024

lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate; ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child; understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home; use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(c)(e)(f)(h))	
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation; an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious; there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there; there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(a)(b)(c)(e))	17 March 2024
The registered person must ensure that all employees— undertake appropriate continuing professional development; receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience; and have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. (Regulation 33 (4)(a)(b)(c))	17 March 2024

The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children’s home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b))	17 March 2024
If the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005(1) applies to the home— the registered person must ensure that the requirements of that Order and any regulations made under it, except for article 23 (duties of employees), are complied with in respect of the home. (Regulation 25 (2)(b))	17 March 2024

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that a comprehensive approach to recruiting new staff is followed by making sure that they are curious about any safeguarding concerns and by exploring any gaps in employment. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 60, paragraph 13.1)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, 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: 1244108

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Bay Tree House (Gravesend) Limited

Responsible individual: Michael Walker

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Mark Newington, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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