

1246521

Registered provider: Hillcrest Children's Services Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is run by a national private organisation and provides care to help children overcome the difficulties they have experienced and address any behavioural problems they may present with. It can accommodate up to 14 children across two houses, one for boys and girls between seven and 12 years old and the other for girls from 12 to 18 years. The home is set in a rural village location. Most children attend the organisation's school, located a short distance away.

There has been no registered manager in post since November 2018.

Inspection dates: 20 to 21 August 2019

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: 2 January 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
02/01/2019	Full	Good
21/03/2018	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
27/09/2017	Full	Outstanding

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
In meeting the quality standards, if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority's or a relevant person's performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 5 (c)) In particular, the registered person must lodge complaints promptly if it appears that the placing authority or the relevant person is failing to safeguard a child in their care.	20/09/2019
In order to meet the positive relationship standard the registered person must ensure: that staff are provided with supervision and support to enable them to understand and manage their own feelings and responses to the behaviour and emotions of children, and to help children to do the same. (Regulation 11 (2)(a)(x)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that staff are assisted to address the emotional impact of the work and to develop the skills and confidence to assist traumatised children to manage their turbulent feelings. The registered person should also give newly appointed staff formal supervision or recorded review of progress frequently enough to ensure that they are supported during their induction.	25/10/2019
In order to meet the protection of children standard the registered person must ensure: 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 (2)(b)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that missing children protocols are written so that they reflect the vulnerabilities of each child and give staff clear guidance about	25/10/2019

how to respond to incidents of a child absconding.	
In order to meet the protection of children standard the registered person must ensure: that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed, furnished and maintained so as to protect each child from avoidable hazards to the child's health. (Regulation 12 (2)(d))	25/10/2019
In order to meet the leadership and management standard the registered person is required to: enable, inspire and lead 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 requires the registered person to 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 and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(2)(a)(b)(c)(e)(h)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that staff are trained in and understand the therapeutic model that the statement of purpose says the home's practice is informed by; that staff employed in the home have the knowledge and experience to care for the complex needs of children living there; that changes in the workforce do not have a detrimental effect on children; and that monitoring processes are consistently used.	25/10/2019
The registered person must notify HMCI of any revisions to the statement of purpose and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (3)(b))	25/10/2019
The registered person must ensure that within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a child in the home, a record is made which includes the name of the child; details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of the measure; the date, time and location of the use of the measure; a description of the measure and its duration; details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use	25/10/2019

the measure; the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure and a description of any injury to the child or any other person, and any medical treatment administered, as a result of the measure.

The registered person must ensure that within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35(3)(a)(c))

In particular, the registered person must ensure that the nature of any sanction is recorded and its appropriateness and effectiveness evaluated, and that children's views are sought about the measure used as well as their reflections on their behaviour.

Recommendations

- Children should be able to access all shared areas of their home unless there are specific reasons why this would not meet a child's needs. Any decisions to limit a child's access and any modifications to the environment of the home, must only be made where this is intended to safeguard the child's welfare. All decisions should be informed by a rigorous assessment of that individual child's needs, be properly recorded and be kept under regular review. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.10)

In particular, if doors are locked to prevent a child from entering or exiting a room or the home, this should be recorded so that the reason for and duration of doing so are clear and are subject to monitoring by the registered person.

- The registered person should only accept placements for children where they are satisfied that the home can respond effectively to the child's assessed needs as recorded in the child's relevant plans and where they have fully considered the impact that the placement will have on the existing group of children. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.4)

In particular, an impact risk assessment should consider and record the potential effect on children who live in the home, and the actions that arise from this. The registered person should give a clear decision about the child's suitability for the home.

- Case records must be kept up to date, 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)

Inspection judgements

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

The furniture and fabric of both houses have suffered a considerable amount of damage, wear and tear. Several areas are now in need of repair or replacement. The manager is aware of this and provided evidence of the work she has commissioned to improve the home's appearance once children are back at school. One professional's comment does suggest that the houses are normally well cared for: 'It is really homely; they are quick to replace things and new pictures are being put up all the time.'

Inspectors saw staff making considerable efforts to build relationships by spending time with children doing activities they enjoyed, complimenting them for efforts they made, or planning the day ahead. Children showed affection to those staff they had evidently known for a long time; children almost always hugged the manager when she was among them. Interactions between staff and children were characterised by calmness, even when children's behaviour was presenting challenges.

The manager and staff are aware of those children whose behaviour is likely to become more challenging when the children spend extended time together, and they devise strategies to avoid this, such as arranging separate activities. However, this approach is not always successful.

The older children are closely involved in planning their daily lives and making longer-term decisions. Staff hold key-work sessions to discuss important issues with children, such as seeing family, activities, school and risky behaviours. These sessions appear to be beneficial for children as they talk positively about the matters that arise out of them. However, the only record of many sessions is the date and the topic heading. Weekly reports and work towards targets have also not been prioritised while the team has been under pressure.

Children enjoy pastimes, whether in a group going to a park, in the home cooking with staff, or in the community, including Beavers and horse riding. Some have successfully entered competitions in their chosen activity, increasing their self-esteem.

Staff support children's education, helping them engage in school, obtain good outcomes and plan their next steps, such as finding a suitable college place. One child said, 'Staff help me if homework is tricky.' The manager convenes 'team around the child' meetings involving other professionals, to take appropriate action when things are not going well.

Staff help children benefit from time with family and friends, ensuring that it is as positive as possible. This support includes travelling with children and finding ways to change arrangements if they are not working to the child's benefit or well-being. In some instances, there has been significant progress with children re-establishing their relationships.

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

Managers acknowledge that changes in staffing have unsettled some children, as has a few of the children moving out of the home. This has manifested itself in an increased frequency of incidents. One identified trend has been for children to put themselves at risk by climbing onto roofs, and onto balustrades over stairwells. The manager has taken various measures to prevent this, such as introducing covers for drainpipes and adding barriers on a shed roof. However, during the inspection, some children were able to get on top of a second shed that had not been made safe.

Due to staff changes, and some staff who lacked confidence or experience, some children's behaviour has deteriorated. The actions and decisions of other agencies have also led to some difficulties for children. The manager has raised concerns with a local authority. However, because the authority did not provide details of how to complain, the manager did not progress this matter any further.

Despite these issues, staff have been able to help other children make notable progress. This has included improved school attendance and attainment, increasing confidence to socialise and make friends, and a child being able to say what he wants rather than becoming aggressive.

Occasionally, staff lock doors to prevent children having access to particular rooms, or to prevent them leaving the house by a front door. These actions are for safeguarding reasons. They are implemented for limited periods, and other doors to the outside may remain open. However, there is no record that allows the manager to methodically review the practice. It is therefore not easy to identify patterns or what alternatives might have sufficed.

Allegations from children have been appropriately responded to by the manager. In addition, the manager has liaised with the local authority designated officer to create specific protocols for when children make allegations which are as a result of distress and not risk of harm.

Staff manage incidents of children going missing well, responding as appropriate to individual circumstances to promote children's safety. However, the missing protocols and risk assessments staff use are not individualised in the way that staff practice is. Individual risk assessments are in the process of being reviewed, and support is being given to staff by senior staff to improve the quality of the assessments. Lengthy sections of impact risk assessments that are used to identify the suitability of a child referred to the home are copied from one assessment to the next. There is insufficient analysis of potential issues between new and existing children at the home. The manager does not make a clear statement or evaluation that a child is, or is not, suitable to be with the other children in the home.

Staff have not routinely undertaken some health and safety checks, fire checks and evacuation drills at the required frequency. Any problems may not, therefore, have been detected at the earliest opportunity. During the inspection, a fire door to an office was found to be tied open by its handle, which would have stopped it closing had an alarm been raised.

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

The interim manager has been in post since November 2018 and has made an application to register with Ofsted. Several staff members have left in recent months, and this has had a significant impact on the running of the home and the care given to children.

Much of the management has been reactive, dealing with events as they have occurred. The manager has successfully minimised the impact of potential crises on children. A social worker illustrated this in saying that the loss of staff had had an impact, but she thought that a child's 'spike in behaviour would have been greater', and therefore had been well managed. There are, however, underlying weaknesses that senior managers are in the early stages of addressing. Plans are in place to provide additional training, and to develop the awareness staff have of good, integrated care planning and support to reflect on practice, particularly the use of measures of control.

Senior managers have decided not to accept more children into the home until the home has been through this process, and the desired standard of practice has been achieved.

Too few staff are currently trained in the home's therapeutic approach. The statement of purpose states that this approach informs the practice that underpins the care provided to children. Staff therefore approach things inconsistently, as in the nature of sanctions; some are restorative, but others have little relation to the behaviour concerned and do not focus on re-establishing relationships.

The quality of the recording of measures of control is variable, with some consequences not included in the sanctions log. Management monitoring of these measures is limited, with few of these issues identified so that lessons can be learned. Nevertheless, managers are aware of weaknesses in practice in this area and include responses to behaviour in development planning. Managers and staff speak to children when a child has experienced a physical intervention or sanction, and they help children to reflect on their behaviour. However, such conversations rarely include the child's views about the measure of control itself.

The manager has amended the home's statement of purpose to include the level of supervision provided for staff. However, she did not ensure that Ofsted was sent the revised statement, and supervision has not been provided regularly enough to ensure that staff have adequate support. This includes staff going through their induction.

Supervision is of good quality when it does happen, focusing on the needs of children and professional development, including annual performance review targets.

Key staff members have a thorough knowledge of individual children. One professional said, 'whoever you speak to is able to talk about what has happened', showing that the team swiftly shares information. Managers have an excellent understanding of children's progress and mark their achievements. If progress is not as expected, then appropriate action is taken.

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 differences 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 whom 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: 1246521

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Hillcrest Children's Services Ltd

Registered provider address: Turnpike Gate House, Alcester Heath, Alcester,
Warwickshire B49 5JG

Responsible individual: Rodrigo Ferreira

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Chris Peel, social care inspector

Amanda Maxwell, 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: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

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