

1263120

Registered provider: Apex Children's Services Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is owned and managed by a limited company. They can provide care and support for a maximum of four children or young people who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, and/or a learning disability.

Inspection dates: 17 to 18 January 2018

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: This is the first inspection after registration.

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Key findings from this inspection

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

- Record-keeping is not yet robust. This is because records including missing from care risk assessments and placement plans are not sufficiently detailed and are not updated quickly enough following changes in a young person's

circumstances. This means that some staff may not be fully aware of the changes to a young person's day-to-day care.

- The home does challenge the placing authority when there are concerns about a young person, for example being absent. However, they do not escalate this effectively when the placing authority's response is slow. This means that one young person has an out-of-date local authority placement plan.
- The registered manager carefully considers each new placement. This includes the possible impact upon the other young people living at the home. However, this is not reflected in the home's compatibility risk assessment.
- Some staff have yet to attend training on self-harm, mental health, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation.

The children's home's strengths:

- Young people enjoy positive relationships with the staff and say that they feel safe at this home.
- Young people live in a safe, nurturing and comfortable home. The home is decorated and furnished to a very high standard.
- The new staff team is working well together and is building a secure foundation on which the home can grow and develop.
- Contact with families is a strength. The parent of a young person acknowledged that all staff had been very welcoming to them and their child. As a result, the young person had a smooth transition into the home.
- Staff work well with other agencies and families. This resulted in two young people successfully moving back into their family home.
- Staff are strong advocates for young people's education. They work well with schools to overcome barriers to young people's learning.

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
The engaging with the wider system to ensure children's needs are met standard is, that 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 relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's plans. (Regulation 5(c)) In particular, that the concerns are escalated when little or no response is received.	09/03/2018
The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and are 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. (Regulation 12(1)(2)(i)) In particular, ensure that risk assessments, including missing from care and absent from care, are up to date and reflect the current concerns.	09/03/2018
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 to aspire to fulfil their full potential and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to – ensure that the staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child. (Regulation 13(1)(a)(b)(2)(c))	09/03/2018

In particular, ensure that all staff complete the necessary training to meet the needs of young people.	
The care-planning standard is that the registered person must ensure that children receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and have a positive experience arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure – that the child's placing authority is contacted, and a review of that child's relevant plans are requested, if the child is, or has been, persistently absent from the home without permission. (Regulation 14(1)(a)(b) (2)(e)(ii))	09/03/2018
The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which include the information and documents listed in schedule 3 in relation to each child; are kept up to date; and are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b)(c))	09/03/2018

Recommendations

- Records must be kept detailing incidents when children go missing from home (regulation 36 (schedule 3(14))). ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.31)
- The registered person must 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 upon the existing group of children. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.4)
In particular, ensure that the home's compatibility risk assessments are sufficiently detailed to outline the decision-making process.
- Staff should be familiar with the home's policies on record keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective, and clear recording. Information should always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. The home's records on each child represent a significant contribution to their life history. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4 and 14.5)

Inspection judgements

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

Young people enjoy trusting and meaningful relationships with the staff. Young people said that they can talk to the staff about anything. One young person confidently and robustly raised concerns about what had happened in school that day. She spoke about the impact this had upon her health and well-being. The registered manager listened intently and offered some solutions to the issues raised. The young person was reassured that the registered manager would be talking to the school about this.

Young people are provided with individualised care and support. Staff know the young people well and provide support on a day-to-day basis effectively. Staff confidently talk about each young person's specific needs. This includes talking with young people about their family history as well as any concerns and/or anxieties that they may have, and the action that staff are taking to reduce these.

Young people new to the home are welcomed warmly. Staff take the time to talk to them and to gather information about their likes, dislikes and interests. Staff use this information well as a platform for building a relationship with the young person. A young person explained how the staff had helped to get his bike repaired. He said that the staff wanted to ensure that it was 'roadworthy'. This young person has a keen interest in bikes and this is being encouraged by staff as a way to reduce his stress and anxiety. The young person said that riding his bike helps him to relax. This has been built into his care plan. As far as possible, all moves into the home are carried out in a planned and coordinated way.

Similarly, moves out of the home are planned well with the placing authority and parents. This means that when young people do return home, this is well thought out and successful. A key element of this is the staff's commitment to working with parents. This included agreeing types of activities that the young people participated in while at the home, which in turn could continue when they were back in their parents' care.

Education is a priority for staff. As a result, all young people are attending school or an educational provision. Staff have high, but reasonable aspirations for each young person. Staff work well with young people to help them to sustain their placement. They advocate appropriately for young people when they are experiencing difficulties at school. They also work in partnership with the virtual heads to ensure that young people who are living away from home are able to access the right education. The manager and staff are confident to make recommendations to local authorities about suitable educational placements. They are also prepared to challenge authorities if they feel that an establishment is not right for the young person.

Young people are increasing in confidence and self-esteem. They are confident to work with staff and to make decisions about their care. For example, one young person is refusing to engage with the child and adolescent mental health team. However, they are

happy for staff to talk to the service on their behalf. This means that staff can easily discuss the needs of the young person and look for additional support to reduce the young person's anxieties.

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

Young people live in a safe environment. They feel safe and are able to talk to members of staff if they are worried or upset. Staff are alert to the fact that some young people go missing. They are proactive in preventing this. For example, staff identified that a young person was likely to go missing one evening. Staff spoke to the young person and realised it was because they wanted to go to a family member's house. This was because a new album by their favourite band was open to download in the early hours of the morning. Staff spoke to the young person and agreed to adapt the home's wi-fi to allow the download of the album. As a result, they did not go missing. The episodes of young people being missing are reducing.

However, one young person has not stayed overnight in the home since 29 November 2017, as she is staying with family members. This was following an altercation with another young person at the home. Staff have endeavoured to address this issue, but for one young person this remains unresolved and hence their reluctance to return to stay overnight at the home. Staff do have some contact with the young person on a daily basis and the young person's placement plan does state that she should be encouraged to have contact with her family. However, it is not specific about agreement about overnight stays.

The registered manager has tried several times to clarify this situation, via email and telephone calls to social workers and team managers. To date, he has not had a response in writing from the authority and several of his emails to the local authority remain unanswered. This leaves the young person in a potentially vulnerable position. This is exacerbated, as it is unclear from the home's records as to when staff see her or that staff have confirmed that she is actually in a particular family member's home.

Records of missing from care and/or absent from care are difficult to follow. This is because information is kept in a variety of documents in varying levels of detail. This does not provide an accurate chronology of the events, or the action taken by staff to protect young people from harm. In contrast, a representative from Catch22 said that the home is 'spot on' in reporting young people missing. Staff take positive action to locate young people quickly. They ensure that professionals are updated as to where young people have been located. Staff are able to relay verbally the strategies and safeguards in place to protect each young person from harm. However, this information is not always reflected in the young person's risk assessments. Missing from care risk assessments are generic and are not always specific to each individual young person.

Physical interventions are not used at the home. Staff promote acceptable behaviour based on positive relationships with young people. They provide young people with clear and unambiguous expectations for behaviour, for example, drawing a line under certain

behaviours for young people new to the home. The registered manager said, 'This provides them [Young people] with a clean slate in which to start over.' However, young people are made fully aware of the consequences should this behaviour reoccur.

Young people live in a warm, welcoming and homely environment. The home is decorated and furnished to a very high standard. Young people said that they were able to choose their own bedroom and that they have had discussions with staff about the colour schemes for their individual rooms. Repairs at the home, including any damage by the young people, are carried out swiftly, so that this does not become problematic.

Staff recruitment and vetting are robust. Visitors to the home are required to sign in and out of the home and are appropriately supervised. This helps to keep young people safe.

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

A qualified and experienced registered manager leads the home. An experienced deputy and committed staff team support him. This is the home's first inspection since registration in September 2017. The staff team works well together and are building a firm foundation on which the home can grow and develop.

Most staff have completed their initial training. However, there are some gaps concerning staff's training in mental health, self-harm, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. Immediate action was taken by the registered manager to ensure that all staff plan to undertake the necessary training in a timely way. Staff said that the recent face-to-face training on attention deficit hyperactive disorder was 'really good'. This was because it enabled the staff to understand the impact that medication has upon young people and what can happen if a young person fails to take it. Regular professional supervision enables staff to discuss their professional development and allows the opportunity for them to reflect on their practice.

Record-keeping is not yet robust. This is because records, such as placement plans, healthcare plans and risk assessments, are not updated to reflect the current position in order to ensure that they contain accurate information that is not conflicting. Some, such as healthcare plans, are not sufficiently detailed regarding existing or emerging medical conditions and the support required by the young people. The impact of this is reduced, as staff are able to relay verbally what support is provided on a daily basis. The home's compatibility risk assessment for when young people move into the home is not robust. The registered manager can verbally relay the actions he takes to ensure that placements are suitable. However, his written records do not support his decision-making processes and lack transparency.

This is compounded because the home does not have the most up-to-date placement plan for some young people. This information has been requested on several occasions. The registered manager has not yet escalated his concerns to senior managers within the placing authority. The responsible individual took immediate action following this inspection.

Monitoring by the independent person is sound. However, their reports have not identified all of the issues found at this inspection. The registered manager is in the process of completing his bi-annual monitoring report. He has identified the shortfalls in record-keeping and is in discussion with the deputy and staff as to how to improve this. This includes the possibility of revising some of the documentation that they currently use. The registered manager is in the process of updating the home's development plan for the forthcoming year.

The statement of purpose is current. It clearly reflects the care and support provided to all young people. This is shared with placing authorities, parents and carers so that they have realistic expectations of what the home can do. In addition, young people receive an informative young person's guide when they arrive.

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: 1263120

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Apex Children's Services Limited

Registered provider address: Unit 6 Tower Quays, Tower Road, Birkenhead,
Merseyside CH41 1BP

Responsible individual: Andrew Mannix

Registered manager: Barry Henry

Inspector

Chris Scully, social care inspector

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