

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 by a private company. It provides care and support for up to four children who may have social and emotional needs and/or learning disabilities.

The manager registered with Ofsted on 1 November 2018.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 November 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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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: 27 July 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Enforcement action since last inspection: Following an inadequate inspection judgement on 27 July 2021, two compliance notices were issued under regulations 12 and 13 on 5 August 2021. A monitoring visit was undertaken on 24 September 2021 and both notices had been met.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
27/07/2021	Full	Inadequate
01/05/2019	Full	Good
19/02/2019	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
26/04/2018	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

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

The children were spoken to and involved in the inspection.

Undoubtedly, the children's overall experiences and progress have improved since the last full inspection in July 2021. However, the serious shortfalls identified in safeguarding do not demonstrate that these improvements are sufficiently embedded in all areas of practice. Consequently, children's overall experience, welfare and progress require further development.

How the staff support and encourage children to attend all health appointments has improved. The manager and staff know the children's health and medical needs well and ensure that their physical and emotional needs are promoted. However, at times, they do not enable children to take responsibility for their own medication or health appointments when it is safe to do so. This does not help children to prepare for independence.

The children are cared for by a caring, nurturing staff team. The home is welcoming, homely and maintained to a high standard. As a result, the children feel valued and respected. A child said, 'This home is a belter, I would score it 10 out of 10.'

The children benefit from having the opportunity to visit the home before they move in. This supports them to find out about the staff and settle into their new home, which helps to minimise any fears and enhance their sense of security.

The staff encourage and support the children to keep in touch with their family and friends. The children enjoy having their parents, relatives and friends visit the home regularly. This helps them to maintain their identity and feel at home.

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

The manager and staff are not alert to all child protection concerns and procedures. For example, when a child alleged that they had been physically assaulted by an adult, they failed to follow the correct procedures. A rigorous investigation into these concerns was therefore prevented.

The manager and staff do not have a thorough understanding of the child protection roles and responsibilities that are assigned to them and other professionals. Consequently, child protection concerns are not always reported to the relevant professionals appropriately.

Additionally, the recording of child protection concerns is poor. For example, discrepancies were found in the date of an incident and the actions taken by the

manager and staff. Weaknesses in the recording of serious incidents undermine robust scrutiny of all safeguarding matters and practice.

The child protection policy does not provide the staff with clear guidance on how to respond to child protection concerns. The policy does not support staff to undertake their safeguarding duties effectively.

Despite this, children benefit from building positive relationships with the manager and staff, and these trusting relationships are helping to keep the children safe.

Incidents of children going missing from the home have reduced. When children are away from the home, the staff actively keep in touch with them. The staff always seek assurances that the children are safe when they are not in their care, which increases the children's safety. This positive practice is reflected in the comments made by the missing-from-home coordinator, who said, 'The staff have gone over and above on this occasion to ensure that [name of child] is safe. I have every confidence that [name of child] will be well supported and provided with the best and safest environment and an opportunity to thrive.'

The staff provide children with fair and consistent boundaries and routines. As a result, the children are living in a happy and peaceful home, and they feel safe. However, some shortfalls were identified in the manager's oversight and evaluation of behaviour management measures. Consequently, the staff continue to use ineffective measures to stop the children from smoking inside the home.

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

The home is led by a suitably qualified and experienced registered manager. Since the last full inspection, she has resigned from the manager position at another home within this company as she was registered to manage two homes. This has increased her presence at this home, which has clearly helped the children, staff, and the home's improvement journey.

Although the manager has introduced new monitoring systems, these are not yet fully embedded into all areas of her practice. This is particularly evident in her oversight and monitoring of safeguarding concerns and records.

The staff team is stable. All staff feel well supported by the manager. This is reflected in the strong teamworking that was observed during the inspection.

Staff training is a strength. The manager's system for monitoring the staff's learning and development is effective. As a result, the staff are well trained. Furthermore, all staff, including relief staff, receive regular supervision and six-monthly performance appraisals. Most staff are suitably qualified. However, there has been a delay in getting the relief staff enrolled on the relevant course.

Partnership working with parents, carers and professionals is a strength. An independent reviewing officer said, 'The manager attended the child's review, and a report was provided for the review. The staff always respond well when I call on the phone and they are very helpful.'

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 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; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and that the effectiveness of the home's child protection policies is monitored regularly. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(v)(vi)(e)) This relates to ensuring that the registered manager and staff recognise and appropriately report and record child protection concerns.	31 December 2021
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—	31 December 2021

use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(h))

This relates to ensuring that the registered manager's monitoring and evaluation of incidents, behaviour management measures and records are robust.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children are enabled and supported to take their own medication and make health appointments if they can do so safely. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 35, paragraph 7.16)
- The registered person should ensure that the consequences used to manage children's behaviour are scrutinised and evaluated. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.36)
- The registered person should ensure that the relief staff obtain the relevant qualification in regulation 32 (4) within the relevant timescale listed in regulation 32 (5). ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.12)

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: 1263120

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Apex Children's Services Limited

Registered provider address: Apex Children's Services, 6 Tower Quays, Tower Road, Birkenhead, Cheshire CH41 1BP

Responsible individual: Barry Henry

Registered manager: Jennifer Savage

Inspectors

Marina Tully, Social Care Inspector
Rose Maddocks, Social Care Inspector

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