

1263270

Registered provider: Priory Education Services Limited 06244880

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home was registered in August 2017 to provide care and accommodation for up to five children. It is owned by a large private care provider which also provides education.

Inspection dates: 20 to 21 November 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: Not applicable.

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:

- The home is registered for five children. There is the main house and an adjoining self-contained annexe. At the time of registration in August of this year, the declared purpose of the annexe was for it to be used for older children

who would benefit from a higher degree of independence. However, during this inspection it was found that a highly vulnerable and dependent child had been admitted. The main house is home to children who have very different needs, abilities and behaviours.

- Since being registered, there has been a lack of careful and considered decision making around the admission of children into the home. As a newly established children's home, there was a unique opportunity to really focus on how to achieve a healthy and positive mix of children. This has not happened, and as a result the well-being and safety of children has been compromised. In addition, one of the three children admitted to the home has moved out and consideration is being given to another child moving to another home within the company. This level of placement instability is unacceptable and requires improvement.
- While pre-admission assessments of children by the senior assessment team have been thorough in terms of meeting their individual needs, the impact of new children on existing children has not been assessed effectively. Documented impact risk assessments are inadequate. They are generic and do not have a focus on how a new child who has very different needs might affect a more highly vulnerable and complex existing child. Nor do they consider the possible complex psychological and emotional impact on the more independent child.
- A recent serious incident exposed serious risks to the safety of all three children and was a particularly negative experience for all children. Two children were physically restrained. One child was subjected to verbal abuse and an attack on her home. One child was discharged from the home and is now living in another of the company's homes.
- Following this incident, the senior management team met to decide what action to take. The action taken was more reactive than reflective in nature. For example, a six-foot fence was erected in between the main house and the annexe, and one young person was moved out. The inspector did not find evidence of an evaluation of staff practices leading up to the serious incident or lessons learned, nor a recognition of the inappropriate mix of children.
- During the three months that the home has operated, the registered manager has not been in day-to-day management for more than half of the period. Two interim managers have been in charge at different times. This level of disruption to the management of the home is unhelpful in terms of providing consistent oversight and direction for staff.

The children's home's strengths

- Notwithstanding the above concerns, staff are working extremely hard to help individual children settle in and feel at home. They have responded well to the very different needs of the children whom they are caring for and are helping them to achieve good progress in many areas of their lives. One child in particular has made progress that a parent and social worker both described as

'exceeding expectations'.

- Good staffing levels are provided. Children are building trusting relationships with staff and enjoy having individual care and support. Children are participating in education, which is a significant achievement.
- Staff have benefitted from lots of training during recent months. Much of this relates to a new care ethos that is positive and nurturing, and which recognises the importance of children feeling safe before they can experience a positive lifestyle in which they can thrive.

Recent inspection history

This is the children's home's first inspection.

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
6: The quality and purpose of care standard The quality and purpose of care standard requires the registered person to understand and apply the home's statement of purpose and to ensure that children are protected and their welfare promoted. (Regulation 6 (1)(2)(a)(b)(ii)) In particular, careful and considered assessment and decision making must take place in respect of the mix and compatibility of the group. Due regard must be given to the needs and vulnerabilities of existing children and what impact a new child may have on them. The statement of purpose must reflect the nature of the care provided by the home.	10/12/2017
11: The positive relationships standard The positive relationship standard is that children are helped to develop and to benefit from relationships based on mutual respect and trust, an understanding about acceptable behaviour and positive responses to other children. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c)) In particular, children's safety and well-being should not be compromised by placing them in situations within their home that exposes them to hurtful and frightening experiences.	10/12/2017
13: The leadership and management standard The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that ensures that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child and can demonstrate that the practice in the home is informed and improved by the use of monitoring and review systems that make continuous improvements to the quality of care provided. (Regulation 13 (1)(2)(c)(g)(iii)) In particular, management oversight should promote a reflective	10/12/2017

ethos, seeking to learn lessons from serious incidents.	
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Recommendations

- 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 and where they have fully considered the impact that the placement will have on the existing children. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, and paragraph 11.4)

Inspection judgements

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

The overall experience and progress of children and young people has been compromised by poor decision-making around children admitted to the home. This has led to a poor mix of children that has resulted in a serious incident and children having negative experiences. Within three months, one child has already moved from the home and consideration is being given to another child moving to a setting with children who have similar needs.

Leaders and managers who make up the assessment team made an early decision to admit a highly vulnerable child. This child's needs are significantly different to the needs of children most of the staff team have previously cared for. Despite this, staff have provided a very good level of care and have helped this child to make good progress. However, leaders and managers subsequently failed to take account of the impact of their decision to admit this child, and impact risk assessments have not fully considered how vulnerable this child is. Other children admitted have very different needs and abilities, more akin to how occupancy was originally envisaged. This is an area that requires improvement so that all children can enjoy consistently good experiences and placement stability.

Both of the children who currently live in the home have trusted and secure relationships with the adults who care for them. Staff have got to know the children well and demonstrate a good understanding of their very different, complex needs. They are working effectively with children to achieve personal targets and make good progress. Mostly, these targets are task or routine driven, such as settling at night or assisting with laundry. It is important that staff also support children to develop a better understanding of the impact of their behaviour on others, for example to learn how to be more respectful to others and to explore how it would feel to be verbally abused or physically threatened. While these areas are touched upon in key-work sessions, more focus is needed to help children fully understand how important these expectations are, both within the home and society.

Children are benefitting from staff understanding why they behave in a certain way. This knowledge means that staff respond to both children in a positive and nurturing way.

For example, children who have limited verbal vocabulary and difficulty in processing information, particularly unfamiliar concepts or plans, are given excellent support. Through a combination of verbal communication and pictorial images, and over a period of time, children are supported to understand and feel safe. This has meant that a child has been able to move on from very limited routines and habits, which is enhancing the quality of life they are experiencing. Staff have benefited from a range of recent training opportunities, and this is shown in their practice. There is a need to identify more specialist training so that staff can help children to continue to make good progress.

Children are participating in a wide range of exciting activities, including swimming, climbing and trampolining. Within the home, children enjoy watching television, playing X-box games and having beauty sessions such as manicures. Meals are sociable occasions, with children and staff eating together. Many of the meals are home-cooked. There are opportunities to ensure that all meals are cooked using healthy ingredients rather than convenience products, but for some staff this may require some additional support and training.

Both children are attending the company's own school. They each have a bespoke educational programme, which is working well for them. This is good progress for both children who have had very disrupted education in the past. Good attention is also given to supporting children to regularly see and speak to their families. One parent said how pleased he is, and that when he visits he can see for himself how 'comfortable', 'settled' and 'happy' his child is.

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

The help and protection of children and young people has been compromised by poor decision making around the mix of children. This has meant that staff have at times been unable to keep children safe.

The quality of documented impact risk assessments is inadequate, and from the mix of children in the home there is no evidence that careful and considered attention has been given to this vital area of assessment prior to new children being admitted. Current children have diametrically different needs, staff are not able to let them spend any peer time together. Furthermore, the very different needs of the children has led staff to make ill-informed decisions and, as a consequence, this has put children at risk of harm and resulted in restrictive measures being put in place.

In their quest to provide one child with very positive care, staff have failed to always ensure that the rights and needs of other children are respected. In order to prevent a child accessing other children's bedrooms in a separate house, a decision was made to lock the bedroom doors. This decision led to a very serious incident that resulted in three physical restraints, a child potentially traumatised by the experience and one child moving out of the home. In addition, a six-foot fence to divide the main house from the annexe was erected. The continuing presence of this fence acts as a reminder of this incident and is a restrictive measure that should not be necessary.

Leaders and managers met to discuss the incident and agree action. There is no evidence of detailed reflection of the incident and what lessons could be learned to improve practices in the future. On a positive note, police were not called to this incident. On-call support provided assistance to staff on duty.

In the past three months, there have been no incidents of children going missing from home or sanctions. There has been one allegation made about staff conduct, and this is being investigated internally as it did not meet the local authority threshold for action by the designated officer.

Thorough and safe recruitment procedures are carried out when additional staff are needed. A sample of files were examined and these were satisfactory, containing appropriate checks and references. While references are verified, as required, evidence of this is recorded in different ways, which can be confusing.

Children's positive behaviour is encouraged and rewarded. Incentives are in place and work well. Staff are helping children to become increasingly safe in some areas of their lives. For example, they have helped one child to significantly reduce incidents of self-harm.

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

Leaders and managers have been ineffective in ensuring that the home is occupied by a suitable mix of children. Children are assessed by senior staff from the school and the home. For more than half of the three months that the home has been operating, the registered manager has not been in day-to-day control. Two interim managers have been in post at different times. This degree of management inconsistency is unacceptable and requires improvement.

The home is operating more like two separate homes. This is because children are not compatible with each other to the extent that they spend no time at all in each other's company. The erecting of a large fence further separates children, but leaders and managers felt this was necessary to keep children safe.

The staff team is working effectively together, and staff feel positive about the training they have received and their regular opportunities to meet as a team. All staff have either achieved at least a level 3 diploma in residential childcare or are well within their two years to achieve it. One member of staff who was outside of the two-year timescale has recently completed the qualification.

The quality of records is improving following guidance from the independent visitor. An independent visitor is visiting every month and providing useful oversight, but more attention needs to be given to visiting at times when children are at home. One of the two notifications recently sent to Ofsted did not provide enough information to fully understand the details about what was being notified, and the inspector gave advice to the interim manager about this at the time.

The physical environment is of a high standard and is being well maintained. The new fence dividing the annexe from the main house is unsightly and detracts from the overall domestic feel of the home. While there is some external lighting, this is not sufficient to provide a good level of visibility around the property.

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: 1263270

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Priory Education Services Limited 06244880

Registered provider address: Priory Group, 80 Hammersmith Road, London W14 8UD

Responsible individual: Clive Coombs

Registered manager: Patricia Smith

Inspector

Norma Welsby, social care inspector

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