

1269072

Registered provider: Utopia Children's Services Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home provides care for three children up to the age of 18 with social and emotional difficulties.

There is an interim manager in post who has applied for registration with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 October 2022

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	inadequate
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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: 10 August 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
10/08/2021	Full	Good
09/12/2019	Full	Good
25/02/2019	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
26/06/2018	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

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

Since the last inspection, the same three children have at the home. Staff continue to build good relationships with the children. Children are positive about their experiences, with one child telling the inspector that the staff are like family. This helps the children to feel a sense of belonging.

The staff have frequent conversations with children to discuss incidents that arise. However, these discussions do not consider children's views, feelings and responses to what has happened. The language used by staff in the records often negatively reflects on children's behaviour.

Feedback from social workers and children's parents is positive. They say that they are kept up to date through phone calls, reports and emails. Family members are welcomed into the home and staff travel with children to see loved ones and support time spent together. As a result, children maintain positive relationships with people who are important to them.

The children's educational needs are being met well. Children's attendance at school is good and they are making progress. Teachers say that they have regular communication with the staff. When children face difficulties at school, staff seek external support and alternative provisions.

The record-keeping in the home requires improvement. Children's records do not always include all the necessary information to help staff provide the right care and support. For example, although children receive some support to develop independence skills, this is done in an ad hoc way and is not supported by a clear care plan. Furthermore, the home does not have all the relevant children's records from the local authority. This means that staff are not able to consistently measure children's progress and achievements or determine what further support they need. The new manager has recognised this and is taking action to address this shortfall.

Staff encourage children to participate in a range of activities. For example, children have swimming lessons and go to police cadets and the local gym. In addition, one child has a part-time job and spends independent time socialising out of the home with friends. These experiences provide children with opportunities for fun and enjoyment and help them to build their self-esteem and learn new skills.

Children are registered with local health services and are supported to attend routine appointments. In addition, children are supported to engage in activity-based therapy sessions and life-story work. This practice ensures that children are receiving suitable support to improve their physical and emotional well-being.

Children's prescribed medication is stored in an unlocked fridge and one child's medication is repackaged by staff into a different storage container. This practice does not follow the company's own policy and procedure.

Some children's bedrooms need redecorating. The new manager has identified this and there are plans for this work to be carried out. Since the last inspection, the communal areas have benefited from redecoration and children have helped to decorate and pick items for the refurbished kitchen. This makes the home welcoming and homely.

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

Risk management plans for children are poor. The written documents do not accurately identify all known risks for individual children and do not contain clear strategies for responding to all known risks. For example, one child's risk assessment fails to assess the risk of them spending time unsupervised in the community, despite staff being concerned about the child's peer relationships. In addition, another child's risk assessment states that they do not have access to a mobile phone when that is not the case. The failure to provide staff with specific strategies and all necessary information does not promote children's safety and reduce risk effectively.

Incidents of children going missing from the home are rare. However, when incidents do occur, staff do not always respond in line with strategies detailed in children's individual plans. For example, on one occasion when a child was missing from home, the staff did not carry out a search for the child in the timescales set out in their plan. The internal monitoring of this incident failed to identify and address this shortfall in staff practice. Furthermore, when the child returned home, staff did not adequately explore their reasons for going missing, what happened while they were away from the home and if they needed any additional support.

Since the last inspection, there has only been one use of restraint. Following the incident, the child was given the opportunity to discuss their views. However, the manager's evaluation of staff practice failed to consider whether the restraint was proportionate and effective. This is a missed opportunity to learn from incidents of restraint and reflect on staff practice and leaves children vulnerable.

Children's positive behaviours are recognised and rewarded by staff. Some children have individualised reward charts that provide the opportunity to earn extra pocket money. More recently, staff have introduced a system whereby children and staff record kind messages to one another to capture and cherish positive thoughts.

Recruitment of staff is safe and robust. All staff who are recruited to work in the home are subject to all necessary employment checks. This helps to ensure that staff who work at the home are safe to do so.

Staff carry out regular health and safety checks. This ensures that children live in a physically safe environment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Since the last inspection, there has been a change in the day-to-day management of the home. A new manager has been appointed to cover the absence of the registered manager. The interim manager has applied for registration with Ofsted. The manager acknowledged the shortfalls identified during this inspection and provided reassurances that improvements will be made.

The manager has not ensured that safeguarding arrangements in the home are robust. The manager has acted appropriately following an allegation made by a child concerning staff. However, there has been a failure to ensure that agreed actions following the investigation have been implemented. Furthermore, the manager has not provided the child with an update following the investigation. This approach to safeguarding fails to protect children and staff.

In addition, following a concern being raised about the potential sexual exploitation of a child, a child protection enquiry took place. The manager has no record of the outcome of this enquiry and no record of a professionals' meeting that took place regarding the concerns. Furthermore, despite an immediate safety plan being put in place, staff did not ensure that all the actions identified to improve safety for the child were adhered to or carried out. Managers failed to recognise poor staff practice in adhering to the plan. This practice does not ensure that children are receiving the support to help keep them safe.

Since the last inspection, staff have received further training. This includes mandatory training and training specific to the children's presenting needs. Despite this, they have not always met children's safety needs well. For example, they do not carry out regular phone checks, despite being aware that one child is at risk of sharing inappropriate images. This lack of professional curiosity does not demonstrate that staff have the skills to respond to children's needs.

The staff team is stable and consistent. Managers have ensured that the staff have regular supervision. However, staff have not received their annual appraisal. This is a missed opportunity to reflect on staff practice and development needs.

Managers have not ensured that they have a workforce development plan and the new manager was unaware that one was needed. As a result, future plans for staff's learning and development are not set out clearly.

There is a regular independent visitor to the home. The visitor does not seek feedback effectively from parents to help inform their views on whether children are safeguarded and their welfare promoted. As a result, the external monitoring systems do not sufficiently help to improve the quality of care provided to children.

The monitoring systems of the home have not been effective in identifying and responding to shortfalls in practice. Furthermore, managers have not taken action to address all the requirements made at the last inspection. These are therefore repeated. This fails to demonstrate that managers have a clear overview of the home and understanding of their responsibilities to bring about improvement.

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 positive relationships 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 and adults. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— help each child to develop socially aware behaviour; 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. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(ii)(v)) This relates to ensuring direct work with children helps to explore their behaviour and seeks their views on how to manage their feelings and responses to incidents.	2 November 2022
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. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i))	2 November 2022

This relates to ensuring that children's risks are accurately reflected in their written documentation, and that risk assessments clearly advise staff about how to respond to risk. This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.	
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— understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; 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)(v)(b)) In particular, managers must ensure that recommendations arising from investigations and safety plans are actioned by staff. Furthermore, the provider must ensure that children understand the steps managers take to investigate and respond to concerns that children raise against care staff and the outcome of these steps.	2 November 2022
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— ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child;	2 November 2022

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; and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(c)(f)(h)) This specifically relates to the provider ensuring that staff have the skills to meet the needs of the children. Additionally, the manager must review and evaluate the quality of care and implement monitoring systems to bring about improvement.	
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children’s home. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)) This specifically relates to the registered provider ensuring that children have agreed and clear plans which support and inform effective care. This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.	2 November 2022
The registered person must make arrangements for the handling, recording, safekeeping, safe administration and disposal of medicines received into the children’s home. In particular the registered person must ensure that— medicines kept in the home are stored in a secure place so as to prevent any child from having unsupervised access to them. (Regulation 23 (1) (2)(a)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that medication is stored safely.	2 November 2022
The registered person must ensure that all employees— have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. (Regulation 33 (4)(c))	2 November 2022

This specifically relates to the registered provider ensuring that all staff working in the home receive practice-related appraisals.	
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 effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and within 48 hours of the use of the measure, the registered person, or a person who is authorised by the registered person to do so ("the authorised person")— has spoken to the user about the measure. (Regulation 35 (3)(a)(vii)(b)(i)) This specifically relates to the registered provider ensuring that after physical intervention is used the effectiveness of the measure is assessed.	2 November 2022
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; and are kept up to date. (Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b)) This specifically relates to ensuring that children's plans are up to date and all the relevant information and plans from the local authority are available. This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.	2 November 2022
The registered person must ensure that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month. When the independent person is carrying out a visit, the registered person must help the independent person— if they consent, to interview in private such of the children, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as	2 November 2022

the independent person requires. (Regulation 44 (1) (2)(a))

This specifically relates to the registered provider ensuring that the independent visitor seeks feedback from parents.

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that the workforce plan includes information about staff training, timescales for induction and detail of how poor performance is managed or improved. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.8)

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: 1269072

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Utopia Children's Services Ltd

Registered provider address: Unit 9, Wheatstone Court, Waterwells Business Park, Davy Way, Gloucester GL2 2AQ

Responsible individual: Tracy Poole

Registered manager: Carleen Dobson

Inspector

Sophie Hills, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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