

1275569

Registered provider: The Mulberry Bush Organisation Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home provides an integrated combination of residential therapeutic care, treatment and education for children of primary school age with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The home is made up of 5 separate houses, providing care for children for either 38 or 52 weeks a year; they attend the school on the same site.

At the time of the inspection, 25 children were living at the home.

The manager registered with Ofsted on 18 June 2018.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 3 to 5 February 2026

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 28 January 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: Good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
28/01/2025	Full	Good
04/07/2023	Full	Good
20/12/2022	Full	Requires improvement to be good
21/04/2021	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Since the last inspection, several children have moved into the home, and staff are helping them to settle. Most children are making positive progress and benefiting from the increased stability in their lives. For some children, the progress has been more limited. Staff are well attuned to noticing the subtle improvements in children's progress and recognise the importance of acknowledging them.

All staff are committed to providing a positive and stable environment for children. Some children who have arrived more recently have more complex support needs; at times, the staff team has found it difficult to fully respond to these. Nevertheless, the willingness of staff to invest their time, support and team efforts into helping children to settle is well recognised and highly valued by external professionals.

Children benefit from a highly relational approach by staff, where significant emphasis is placed on transparency of communication and talking about feelings and emotions. For many children, this is a transformational experience, helping the children to better understand their feelings and the impact that these have on themselves and others.

All children access the onsite school, and teachers work alongside care staff, therapists and other professionals to provide a wrap-around approach that incorporates all elements of children's day-to-day care. Many of the children have experienced challenges in previous educational environments, and some have also faced multiple rejections and trauma in their past. Staff who work in care and therapy provide essential stability for the children, helping them to repair their faith in the ability of adults to meet their needs and provide the help that they require. As a result of this integrative approach, there is an increased understanding of children's individual needs and what is required to help them to settle.

Children confidently express their wishes and feelings, and when things don't go to plan, they know how to complain. Senior leaders are directly involved in investigating these matters. In one example, the responsible individual responded with sensitivity and transparency in relation to one child's experience of verbal abuse from another child.

When specialist help has been needed, these services have been commissioned without delay, and external professionals work well alongside existing professionals within the school. This additional provision has helped staff to more fully understand the care needs of some of the children and has led to the development of fresh ideas and approaches for how these could be met.

Children benefit from a positive admissions process, in which care and attention are given to understanding children's past experiences. A gradual transition helps children to move into the home in a careful and organised manner. This enables children to start to develop some relationships before their move.

Family partnership workers have a pivotal role in maintaining important links for children with their families and preferred adults. They also provide important support when children are not in school, such as during half-term and holidays.

The physical environment is kept safe and well maintained. Each child's bedroom reflects their personalities and interests. Photos of children are displayed in each of the homes, helping to create a sense of belonging for the children.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Safeguarding concerns have been well managed, and effective action is always taken to prioritise children's safety. Those responsible for safeguarding maintain strong oversight and monitoring of all safeguarding matters and this supports children to become increasingly safe.

An initial assessment is undertaken on all children following their admission; this helps to determine the support that individual children may need and the associated timescales. All children have access to therapeutic support in accordance with their individual plans.

Children can identify trusted adults and know that they will be listened to and heard. Throughout their day, children benefit from various opportunities to share their feelings and emotions; this supports the children to become increasingly aware of their inner feelings. Staff take part in these reflections, sharing their own feelings and emotions in a very transparent and honest manner, meaning that children know that it is acceptable to share their feelings, even if these are uncomfortable.

Staff work with the children to encourage them to develop better ways of managing their feelings and emotions. A social worker said, 'Staff know the children well and demonstrate a strong understanding of their individual needs, histories and emotional presentations. This enables children to feel safe, listened to and supported, particularly during periods of emotional distress.'

Therapeutic meetings for individual children are well established and provide a comprehensive appraisal of the various aspects of children's lives. Staff and family partnership workers maintain contact with children's external networks and are able to represent their views at these meetings. Consequently, this sustains children's existing networks, promoting consistency and collaboration between all the adults involved in the children's lives.

There has been a high number of physical interventions since the last inspection, and leaders and managers are committed to reducing the number of these interventions. Changes to end the use of the most restrictive physical interventions have been well intended but have led to an increase in the use of less restrictive physical interventions. As a result of this, managers are now considering an alternative approach to behaviour management and have recently consulted with an external organisation, as a first step to try to change the culture of practice.

There have been changes to safer recruitment processes since the last inspection; this means that the vetting and oversight of new staff have improved, minimising the risks of unsafe adults working with children.

Recently, there has been an increasing concern about children leaving the school site without permission; responses to these incidents have been appropriate. Additional support has been provided, although the impact of this has yet to be determined. Redeploying staff to respond to these incidents means that some children may lose access temporarily to their preferred adults, placing a strain on usually well-established routines.

Some children use the outside play equipment in an unplanned manner, meaning that extra staff are sometimes used from other homes to respond to these incidents, and other children lose the freedom to play outside unconditionally. Staff try to carefully balance the dynamics between the children and make use of other areas across the site when appropriate. Despite this, some children are frustrated that they cannot always play outside, due to things that may be happening with other children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managements are open and transparent. They demonstrate a good understanding of the home's strengths and areas for development. They remain firmly committed to the systemic way of working, embedded across all elements of the school, and can demonstrate how this has a positive impact on children's lives and the progress that they make. Positive action has been taken regarding the previous requirement and recommendations.

Managers have a strong sense of commitment towards children and have shown a willingness to provide care to an increasingly complex cohort of children. At times, this has been challenging for the wider staff team and managers recognise that this has tested their skills and knowledge. Effective team work between staff has been an essential part of enabling them to work through these challenges, responding to children's needs and managing their own feelings and emotions.

Staff generally feel well supported and value the culture of togetherness that has been built between them. Staff value the wide range of opportunities that they have to reflect on their practice, either individually or as a group. Care staff work closely with therapy and treatment teams to ensure that children receive the care that they need.

The staff team has developed particularly effective working relationships with professionals and other organisations. This has supported positive external scrutiny and enables good working relationships with external adults who provide help and support to the children. One social worker said, 'Staff are highly skilled and well-prepared to respond to complex behaviours with patience, professionalism and therapeutic insight. The school's extensive training programme, rooted in trauma-informed practice, ensures that staff are confident and consistent in their approach.'

New staff benefit from a positive induction and, following successful completion of this, they can then undertake a degree level qualification accredited through a local university.

A wide range of additional bespoke training is available for all staff, and they work alongside professionally qualified practitioners, such as psychotherapists and speech and language therapists; this joint approach enables staff to continually develop their practice and skills.

While regulatory notifications have been mostly completed appropriately, they are not always timely. In addition to this, when decisions have been made to not complete a regulatory notification, these are not well recorded and therefore it is difficult to determine the threshold for notifiable events. Despite this, underlying safeguarding actions are clear and well recorded.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered person should be mindful of making changes to the staffing arrangements in response to meeting children's behavioural needs, particularly the potential impact this may have on other children's sense of stability, emotional well-being and ability to engage in play outside of their home. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.12)
- The registered person should ensure that staff seek to minimise the impact that children's emotional and behavioural needs have on each other and continue to support children to develop their self-understanding and empathy towards others. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.11)
- The registered person should have a system in place so that all serious events are notified, within 24 hours, to the appropriate people. Those responsible for completing regulatory notifications should consider the frequency of incidents and judge whether their cumulative effect makes notification appropriate. Following a notifiable event, the management team should provide relevant future updates to Ofsted reflecting the outcomes of any actions taken. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 63, paragraph 14.13)

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: 1275569

Provision sub-type: Residential special school

Registered provider: The Mulberry Bush Organisation Ltd

Responsible individual: Lee Wright

Registered manager: Claire McCarthy

Inspectors

Ashley Edwards, Social Care Regulatory Inspector
Tracy Beard, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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