

1280412

Registered provider: Apex Children's Services Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This is a privately owned children's home. The provider states in the home's statement of purpose that it provides care for up to four children with social and emotional difficulties.

There is a registered manager in post. He registered with Ofsted in June 2020.

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 inspections on 12 April 2021.

We last visited this setting on 3 November 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 January 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **inadequate**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **inadequate**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded.

Date of last inspection: 27 January 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
27/01/2020	Full	Requires improvement to be good
04/01/2019	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

At the time of the inspection, four children were living at the home. One child is in the process of returning to their family, but was still in the care of the provider at the time of the inspection. The home is failing to provide effective care and support for the children.

There are serious shortfalls in safeguarding practice, care planning, the management of risks to children's safety, and the leadership and management of the home. These weaknesses are having a significant negative effect on children's safety, welfare, experiences and progress.

Not all areas in the home are being maintained to an acceptable standard of cleanliness. One child's bedroom requires the flooring to be replaced and another child's bedroom does not have curtains. The walls in some of the communal areas are dirty and damaged. Door casing in one room is cracked and flaking. Repairs, redecoration or cleaning is required to improve the quality of the home so that children are living in a suitably clean and welcoming environment.

Ineffective oversight of sanctions given to children means they are often not restorative in nature, fair or proportionate. The manager has failed to provide an evaluation of several of the measures used. This demonstrates poor review mechanisms and does not help children to learn about the consequences of their actions.

Education outcomes for children are variable. Two children have good attendance and have made progress. However, one child is waiting for a suitable placement and another child, who recently left the home, was not attending education at the time they left. This means that staff do not have a full understanding of all of the children's educational progress or any individual needs.

Although children have not made any complaints about the home, they said that they know how to complain. They were clear on who they could speak to if they have any concerns or worries.

Staff work closely with families and important people in children's lives. Due to the support provided by the staff team, some children's relationships with family members have improved. Staff supported a child to return home to family and worked collaboratively with key people and agencies to ensure that the child and family were fully supported throughout the transition.

Inspectors received positive feedback from social workers, an independent reviewing officer and a parent. They all stated that communication with staff was good, and that children continue to build positive relationships with staff.

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

Children are not adequately helped and protected because of the failings in safeguarding arrangements in the home. Safeguarding practice in the home is inadequate and does not promote the safety and welfare of children living there. Leaders, managers and staff do not have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in ensuring that children are safeguarded effectively, and failed to report safeguarding concerns when an incident occurred. This led to no action being taken to ensure that the safety and welfare of the child were promoted.

Allegations of abuse are not managed in line with safeguarding procedures. When a child reported that he had been assaulted by a staff member, the manager and staff failed to recognise this as a significant incident. Neither the manager nor the member of staff reported and recorded the incident in line with safeguarding and organisational procedures.

Inspectors found that staff failed to follow safeguarding policies and procedures and have not taken immediate action when a child has come home under the influence of a substance. During one incident, staff did not seek medical attention or complete appropriate welfare checks in the night. As a result, this significantly compromised the safety and welfare of a child.

Risk assessments do not contain all relevant information for staff to follow in the event of a child coming home under the influence of substances. Furthermore, the risk assessments for some children do not contain all relevant information. This is in relation to children's phone use at night. This caused confusion when speaking to staff, who were unclear about what action to take.

The manager and staff have not received training in managing the safety of children's online activity, despite this being a known risk for one child. This means that staff lack the knowledge and skills to help children effectively to stay safe online.

Controlled medication is not always given in line with a child's prescription or in line with the home's internal policy. This is in relation to the signing and witnessing of medication. A child told the inspector that he had to remind staff to give him his medication. This does not demonstrate good or caring practice nor promote the child's health.

Staff do not always take a strong and proactive approach in managing children's behaviour safely. There are occasions when staff have not taken swift action to prevent an escalation of incidents. Consequently, children are not safely supported.

Children are not always supported by a sufficient number of staff in the home. Inspectors saw evidence that, at times, there was only one member of staff caring for up to four children. Some of the staff who were providing the care alone are inexperienced and do not hold a relevant qualification as required by regulation. This

does not enable children to have individualised care from staff who have the skills to best meet their needs.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The registered manager has been in post since June 2020. He is experienced and suitably qualified. Staff feel well supported by him. The manager knows the children well and has taken his time to ensure that an appropriate match of children has taken place.

Management oversight and monitoring of the home are ineffective and do not identify areas of weakness. The management oversight and challenge of records is limited, with some serious incidents not having sufficient management oversight. As a result, shortfalls in staff practice and recording have continued and remain unchallenged. Managers have not identified several breaches that were apparent at this inspection. Errors were noted in records, which suggests that general oversight of records is extremely poor. Additionally, these breaches were not identified by any external monitoring of the home.

Managers have not always taken prompt action when incidents have occurred. For example, the manager's poor oversight resulted in his failure to identify several safeguarding concerns and report them to external professionals.

Leaders and managers have failed to ensure that there is adequate and robust risk management in place for a member of staff with a health need. There were occasions when she was left alone to manage incidents in the home, which compromised the member of staff's health and also her ability to take action if there were incidents. As a result, because a situation could not be well managed, a child required medical treatment. This compromised the safety of children and staff.

Not all staff have been supervised in line with the home's statement of purpose. Supervision notes were found to be factually inaccurate, and it is not clear if staff have had the opportunities to read and check information within the records. For example, during the inspection, inspectors identified changes made to staff supervision records by the manager. This was after their supervision had taken place. This limits staff development and opportunity to learn from their practice.

The quality of recording of induction was poor. Gaps were identified where staff have not signed to say that they have read all the internal safeguarding policies and procedures. As a result, staff do not have adequate knowledge to report safeguarding concerns. This leaves children at risk of harm.

Managers do not ensure that rotas reflect the members of staff working in the home. There is no clear record of who has worked or is working in the home. Additionally, there has been an inconsistent staff team in place. As a result, children do not receive continuity of care.

Inaccurate and poor information is submitted in safeguarding notifications. As a result, this restricts the regulator having effective oversight. Significant concerns were only highlighted at the time of the inspection. This does not ensure that children are cared for safely by adults working with them.

Safer recruitment practices for new staff working at the home are not sufficiently robust. Leaders and managers have not always demonstrated that all appropriate checks have been completed prior to staff working at the home. For example, the qualifications of some staff were only checked after they had started working in the home. This does not ensure that the integrity of all staff has been thoroughly checked to keep children safe.

Ofsted is of the view that there are serious shortfalls in safeguarding practice and the management of risks to children's safety. Three compliance notices have been served under regulation 12, the protection of children standard, regulation 13, the leadership and management standard and regulation 23, medication. These notices will be monitored.

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 quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children; use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed and furnished so as to— meet the needs of each child. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c)(i))	30 March 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; help each child to understand how to keep safe; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other;	27 February 2022

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 are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies; 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; that the premises used for the purposes of the home are located so that children are effectively safeguarded; that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed, furnished and maintained so as to protect each child from avoidable hazards to the child's health; and that the effectiveness of the home's child protection policies is monitored regularly. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(vii)(b)(c)(d)(e))	
*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— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate; ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child;	27 February 2022

ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child; 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)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(h))	
*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; medicine which is prescribed for a child is administered as prescribed to the child for whom it is prescribed and to no other child; and a record is kept of the administration of medicine to each child. Paragraph (2) does not apply to medicine which— is stored by the child for whom it is provided in such a way that other persons are prevented from using it; and may be safely self-administered by that child. (Regulation 23 (1)(2)(a)(b)(c)(3)(a)(b))	27 February 2022
The registered person must— ensure that each employee completes an appropriate induction; ensure that each permanent appointment of an employee is subject to the satisfactory completion of a period of probation; and	30 March 2022

provide each employee with a job description outlining the employee's responsibilities. For the purposes of this regulation, "the appropriate person" is the registered person, an officer of HMCI, an officer of the local authority in whose area the home is located or a police officer. The registered person must ensure that all employees— undertake appropriate continuing professional development; receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience; and have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. (Regulation 33 (1)(a)(b)(c) (3) (4)(a)(b))	
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 name of the child; details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of the measure; the date, time and location of the use of the measure; a description of the measure and its duration; details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure; the name of the person who used the measure ("the user"), and of any other person present when the measure was used; the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and a description of any injury to the child or any other person, and any medical treatment administered, as a result of the measure;	30 March 2022

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; and has signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35 (3)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(vii)(viii)(b)(i)(ii)(c))	
Schedule 4 sets out the other information that the registered person must keep in relation to a children’s home. The registered person must— maintain in the home the records in Schedule 4; ensure that the records are kept up to date; and retain the records for at least 15 years from the date of the last entry. (Regulation 37 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c))	30 March 2022
If there is a referral of a person working in the home pursuant to section 35 (Regulated activity providers: duty to refer) of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006(1), the registered person must without delay notify— HMCI; the placing authority; and each other relevant person. The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation; an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious;	30 March 2022

there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there;

a child protection enquiry involving a child—

is instigated; or

concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or

there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious.

A notification made under this regulation—

must include details of—

the matter;

the other persons, bodies or organisations (if any) who or which have been notified; and

any actions taken by the registered person as a result of the matter;

must be made or confirmed in writing.

(Regulation 40 (3)(a)(b)(c) (4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)
(5)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(b))

Specifically, the registered manager must ensure that all notifications contain a full and accurate account of serious incidents and what action is required in relation to reporting to external professionals.

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that managers and staff are aware of the local offer setting out the support available for children with special education needs or disabilities. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations, including the quality standards', page 26, paragraph 5.4)
- The registered person should ensure that managers and staff encourage children to see the home's records as 'living documents' supporting them to view and contribute to the record in a way that reflects their voice on a regular basis.

(‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations, including the quality standards’, page 58, paragraph 11.19)

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: 1280412

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Apex Children's Services Limited

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

Responsible individual: Barry Henry

Registered manager: Adam Ruse

Inspectors

Judith Birchall, Social Care Inspector

Jessica Higginson, Social Care Inspector

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