

2503143

Registered provider: Solace Care Partners Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This is a privately run children's home. The statement of purpose states that the home provides care for up to four children who have social and/or emotional difficulties. The provider runs another children's home, which is located next door.

The home's manager resigned from his position in August 2021. The registered manager from the adjacent provision has applied to register with Ofsted as manager for this home. She intends to become the registered manager for both homes. The application is currently being assessed by the regulator.

There were four children living in the home at the time of this inspection.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this setting on 25 January 2021 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 13 to 14 September 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: not previously inspected

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

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

The quality of care can sometimes be affected by poor routines and a lack of constructive activity. Only one of the four children living in the home is currently enrolled in education provision, and another child plans to commence an educational placement in October 2021. The remaining children lack planned activities, leaving them feeling bored and lacking in direction.

Despite the absence of routines, children learn to build trusting relationships with staff, and one child commented, 'The staff here are really cool, they look after us.' A child attributed her journey, from a severe mental health crisis to becoming free of prescribed medication, to the help and support of a key worker.

Children recognise their progress in being able to handle feelings of frustration and learning how to process their concerns in a more positive manner. One child commented, 'They have helped me. I would be in a secure unit without them.'

The home environment requires improvement. For example, there is a broken trampoline in the garden. This presents a risk to children's safety. More positively, the home recently purchased a music-mixing system and exercise bike which children enjoy.

Children learn valuable independence skills. Staff prioritise the importance of developing new skills and learning to manage on a tight financial budget. One child spoke fondly about assembling bedroom furniture with a member of staff. These opportunities enable children to develop essential life skills.

Children enjoy safe and well-managed time with their family and friends. A child spoke with appreciation of a staff member driving him a long distance to meet with his family. This support has enabled the child to rebuild important relationships.

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

Staff do not ensure that risk assessments are updated regularly. For example, one child's risk assessment fails to reflect an increased risk of child criminal exploitation. This poor recording leaves staff and professionals unaware of the key elements of risk for individual children.

Staff practice, when children go missing from the home, requires improvement. Staff do not monitor the provision of independent return home interviews or evaluate the level of missing-from-home behaviour effectively. This means that managers and staff are missing an opportunity to evaluate an important area of risk.

Staff think of creative means of supporting children. For example, one child uses a coloured lighting system in their bedroom to indicate her current mood and feelings to staff.

The use of physical intervention is appropriate and rare. When restraint has been used, staff reflect well and reassess their techniques, to try and reduce the risk of repetition.

Children are helped to access specialist services. One child spoke with pride about successfully engaging with a drug reduction service recently. This bespoke help enables children to understand risk and to improve their health.

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

The interim manager is an experienced practitioner who has brought some stability to the home. She is eager to follow up the requirements and recommendations of this inspection and improve the quality of care offered to children. Despite the brief period since her arrival, she received positive feedback from children and staff during this inspection.

The interim manager is supported by a deputy manager and two senior workers. The deputy manager was promoted to the position in July 2021 after having worked in the home since February 2021. He aims to complete the management qualification by March 2022 and is excited by the new ideas and approach adopted by the interim manager.

Staffing levels require improvement. This inspection found one staff member supporting the care of four children. Two staff members reported sick on the morning of the inspection, and the home was unable to obtain additional support from an agency. Despite there being no impact on the care offered to children, this staffing ratio falls outside of the home's statement of purpose and is potentially unsafe.

Managers have not addressed the requirement and recommendation from the last visit to the home. This has led to shortfalls in the representation of the voice of children in care plans and in the provision of independent return to care interviews for children who go missing from the home. Therefore the requirement and recommendation are repeated for this inspection.

Management monitoring and admission practice require improvement. The home's register of arrivals and departures lacks an evaluation of each placement and the individual outcomes for children. In addition, managers failed to identify clear evidence of child criminal exploitation before admitting a child. This meant that the impact on other children in the home was not appropriately assessed, and children were potentially placed at risk.

Ofsted does not receive notifications of serious events in a timely fashion. This limits the oversight of the home by the regulator.

Staff report that, despite morale in the home remaining positive, they are frustrated by the lack of routines and attribute children's use of cannabis to this. Managers are trying to address this concern through seeking help from specialist services.

Staff value the opportunity of engaging in training and furthering their development. At present, the quality of performance appraisal practice is limited by a failure to obtain the feedback of key professionals and children.

The home lacks a workforce development plan. This limits the evaluation of staff training needs and development. In addition, one staff member is outside of the timescale for completion of the national qualification; this limits her individual development.

The management monitoring report, completed under regulation 45, does not contain any feedback from children, which is a deficit. This limits the oversight of the home and the effectiveness of plans and planning.

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 education standard is that children make measurable progress towards achieving their educational potential and are helped to do so. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— help each child to achieve the child's education and training targets, as recorded in the child's relevant plans; support each child's learning and development, including helping the child to develop independent study skills and, where appropriate, helping the child to complete independent study; promote opportunities for each child to learn informally. (Regulation 8 (2)(a)(i)(ii)(v)) This is with reference to ensuring that the home offers children constructive and educational activity when they are not in school or receiving tuition at home.	1 November 2021
The registered person must maintain records ('case records') for each child which— are kept up to date. (Regulation 36 (1)(b)) This particularly refers to case recordings accurately reflecting the child's time in the home and to ensuring that care plans and risk assessments are regularly updated.	1 November 2021
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust.	1 November 2021

In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— encourage each child to take responsibility for the child's behaviour, in accordance with the child's age and understanding. (Regulation 11 (1)(a), (2)(a)(iii)) Specifically, the home should ensure that children contribute to the development of their own risk management and behaviour support plans. This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.	
The quality and purpose of care standard requires the registered person to— ensure that staff— provide to children living in the home the physical necessities they need in order to live there comfortably. (Regulation 6 (2)(b)(vii)) In particular, managers must ensure that the garden is appropriately maintained and all risks removed.	1 November 2021
The leadership and management standard requires the registered person to— 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. (Regulation 13 (2)(f)) This is with particular reference to ensuring that all of the outcomes for children leaving the home are recorded and evaluated and that staff training needs and progress are recorded.	1 November 2021
For the purposes of paragraph (3)(b), an individual who works in the home in a care role has the appropriate qualification if, by the relevant date, the individual has attained—	1 November 2021

the Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare (England) ("the Level 3 Diploma"); or

a qualification which the registered person considers to be equivalent to the Level 3 Diploma.

The relevant date is—

in the case of an individual who starts working in a care role in a home after 1st April 2014, the date which falls 2 years after the date on which the individual started working in a care role in a home; or

in the case of an individual who was working in a care role in a home on 1st April 2014, 1st April 2016.

The registered person may defer the relevant date if the individual—

does not work, or has not worked, in a care role in a home for a prolonged period; or

works, or has worked, in a care role in a home on a part-time basis.

(Regulation 32 (4)(a)(b) (5)(a)(b) (6)(a)(b))

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that when a child returns to the home after being missing from care or away from the home without permission, the responsible local authority provides an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. Homes should take account of information provided by such interviews when assessing risks and putting arrangements in place to protect each child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30)
- The registered person should ensure that contingency plans are prepared in the event of a shortfall in staffing levels. If it is likely that there might only be one member of staff on duty at any time, the manager should make a formal assessment of the implications for children's care, including any likely risks. The assessment should be recorded and available for inspection by Ofsted and placing authorities. ('Guide to children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.18)

- The registered person should ensure that records are kept detailing all individual incidents when children go missing from the home (regulation 36 (schedule 3 (14))). This information should be shared with the placing authority and, where appropriate, with the child's parents. Evaluation of missing incidents should be undertaken to identify any gaps in training, skills or knowledge for staff or to record and retain evidence of what worked well. This evaluation should inform the review of the quality of care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.31)
- The registered person should ensure that performance appraisals consider the views of other professionals who have worked with the staff member over the year and the views of the young people in the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.5).
- The registered person should have a system in place so that all serious events are notified within 24 hours to the appropriate people. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards', page 63, paragraph 14.13).
- The registered person should have a workforce plan which can fulfil the workforce related requirements of regulation 16, schedule 1 (paragraphs 19 and 20). The plan should be updated to include any new training and qualifications completed by staff while working at the home. In particular, the training matrix must be kept up to date. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.8)
- The registered person should oversee the welfare of the children in their care through observation and engagement with each child. In particular, feedback from children must be evidenced in the management monitoring report. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.23)
- The registered person should ensure that the home accepts placements for children when they are satisfied that the home can respond effectively to the child's assessed needs. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations, including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.4)

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: 2503143

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Solace Care Partners Limited

Registered provider address: Unit 2A, 420 Eastern Avenue, Ilford IG2 6NQ

Responsible individual: Umer Ahmed

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Barnaby Dowell, Social Care Inspector

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