

2513339

Registered provider: Central Bedfordshire Council

Assurance inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is run by a local authority. The home can provide care for up to five children, aged between 12 and 18, who have social and emotional difficulties.

The manager registered with Ofsted in May 2020.

Inspection date: 9 August 2023

Date of last inspection: 31 May 2023

Judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Information about this inspection

At this inspection, the inspector evaluated:

- the care of children
- the safety of children
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers.

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children, using the social care common inspection framework. This assurance 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'.

Findings from the inspection

We identified the following serious and widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance inspection:

- The manager has failed to report allegations about staff, and to take the necessary action to ensure a child's safety.
- There is a general lack of management oversight that has left children and staff unsupported following serious incidents.
- There is no management oversight of restraint incidents or support for children and staff following restraint incidents.
- The storage and maintenance of records are not secure or adequate.
- Fire prevention equipment is locked away in a cupboard and not quickly accessible.
- Managers have not addressed the previous shortfalls.

The care of children

One child was living at the home at the time of the inspection. Managers have not consistently delivered safe or effective care. There are a number of concerns that fail to demonstrate that children are safeguarded. In addition, repeated shortfalls show that capacity to improve the quality of care is limited.

The interactions between the child and staff are limited. The staff are not proactive in providing activities with in the home to improve the child's social experiences. The child has a good relationship with the responsible individual and their independent reviewing officer, who was visiting at the time of the inspection.

Although previous damage to the home has been repaired. There is no television cabinet. The cabinet has been ordered, and in the meantime, the child brings the television from their bedroom to lounge. This limits the child's opportunities to engage and socialise with staff.

The child's bedroom is decorated to reflect their personality and interests. There are pictures of the child engaging in activities, and pictures of the child's family on the walls. The child has a pet hamster in her bedroom, which is well cared for.

The child receives regular support from the child and adolescent mental health service, who visit weekly. They also support the child with a behaviour management plan that explores the child's emotional needs, and how to support these.

The safety of children

There are gaps in the child's plans and risk assessments. These documents fail to guide staff because they are not updated following significant incidents, including fire setting. The child's physical intervention plan fails to assess her emotional vulnerabilities. The child's behaviour management plan has not been reviewed since it was written three months ago.

Records of significant incidents have been destroyed when the children have accessed the office. It is unclear whether staff took actions to prevent this happening because there are no records of this. Therefore, it is not possible to review staff practice or management responses to these incidents. Overall, it is unclear if the child was safeguarded, during or after these incidents.

A record of a significant incidents states that staff intervened, guided a child, and released the child's grip on staff. This record is vague, and is not classified as a physical intervention, despite details indicating that it is.

Agency and permanent local authority staff are not trained in the same method of physical restraint. This has caused confusion about who can provide physical interventions required to keep the child safe. The staff and managers are unclear about which staff can use restraint. This fails to provide staff with clear guidance or ensure a consistent approach to safeguarding the child.

Despite an incident of the child setting fire to cardboard at the home, fire extinguishers are locked in a cupboard, and in the office. This is not in line with the home's fire-risk assessment because the fire extinguishers are not easily accessible. The decision to move the fire extinguishers, and failure to review the risk, places children and staff at increased risk of harm.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The registered manager has resigned from September 2023. The current management arrangements are ineffective. Leaders and managers do not have adequate oversight of the care provided. Managers have not taken action to meet all the requirements from previous inspections.

Leaders and managers failed to notify the local authority designated officer of serious allegations about staff practice within the required timescales. This failure to follow the home's safeguarding policy leaves children at risk of harm.

Children and staff are not supported following incidents of restraint. Debriefs are not consistently offered, meaning the child's welfare has not always been assured after incidents. The managers have not reviewed staff practice. An allegation made by the child during a restraint was not identified or reported until it was raised at this inspection.

The storage and maintenance of records is inadequate. On two occasions, records have been destroyed. Other records are missing and leaders and managers do not know where these records are. Therefore, important information is missing that may need to be relied on in the future.

Leaders and managers have failed to ensure that the child's plans and records are kept up to date in regard to managing risks. This fails to provide staff with the guidance that they need to keep the child safe.

The home is staffed using a combination of agency and permanent local authority staff. A shift comprises of three agency staff to one permanent staff. However, the agency staff do not receive regular supervision from managers. As a result, the majority of staff do not receive adequate supervision, to ensure they are able to keep the child safe.

Managers have established good multi-agency working. They attend regular multi-agency planning meetings about the child. These meetings include health, education and social care professionals, and the police. These demonstrate that managers advocate for the child, in relation to health, safety and providing intensive support for the child's mental health needs.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
31/05/2023	Full	Requires improvement to be good
13/02/2023	Full	Requires improvement to be good
08/12/2021	Full	Good
08/07/2019	Full	Good

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, The 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 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; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; 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. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(iii)(v)(vi)(vii)) In particular, ensure managers and staff have a good understanding of the home's safeguarding policy and manage allegations against staff; and must ensure that risk assessments and plans provide staff with an up-to-date understanding of children's needs, and presenting risks, to help staff reduce risks and keep children safe.	27 September 2023

*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 have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of 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; demonstrate that practice in the home is informed and improved by taking into account and acting on— feedback on the experiences of children, including complaints received; 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)(c)(f)(g)(ii)(h)) In particular ensure that systems are in place to support effective monitoring and oversight of the practice and quality of care; ensure that staff receive appropriate training and guidance to manage children’s behaviour safely; and ensure that records are accessible and accurate in reflecting children’s current needs and risks to help guide consistent, safe practice.	27 September 2023
The children’s views, wishes and feelings standard is that children receive care from staff who— develop positive relationships with them; and engage with them. (Regulation 7 (1)(a)(b)) In particular, ensure that staff engage with the child, and provide social activities that build positive relationships.	27 September 2023

If the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005(1) applies to the home— paragraph (1) does not apply; and the registered person must ensure that the requirements of that Order and any regulations made under it, except for article 23 (duties of employees), are complied with in respect of the home. (Regulation 25 (2)(a)(b)) In particular risk assess the arrangements for locking away fire extinguishers.	27 September 2023
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 are kept up to date. (Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b))	27 September 2023

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that no more than half the staff on duty at any one time, by day or night at the home are from an external agency. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.17)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff, including agency staff, receive supervisions which enable them to reflect and act upon how their own feelings and behaviour may be affected by the behaviour of the children they care for. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.15)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 2513339

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Central Bedfordshire Council

Registered provider address: Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, Central Bedfordshire SG17 5TQ

Responsible individual: Joy Piper

Registered manager: James Hardy

Inspector

Tom McGhee, Social Care Inspector

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