

2544217

Registered provider: Absolute Childrens Services Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is owned by a private provider. It is registered to provide care for up to five children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The manager is suitably qualified and experienced. She registered with Ofsted in June 2021.

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 2 and 3 September 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 17 to 18 August 2021

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 and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 6 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
06/01/2020	Full	Requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Children's progress and experiences in the home are inadequate because safeguarding systems and behaviour management practice are poor. The leadership and management of the home has also been ineffective.

One child who has lived in the home for several months does not have an agreed care plan from the placing authority. The manager has requested this document. However, they have not escalated this as a concern to the authority. The lack of a care plan means that staff do not have a clear understanding of the expectations of the placing authority in relation to the child's care needs.

The standard of key-work sessions is poor. Children do not receive meaningful direct work that is targeted to their individual needs. This limits opportunities for children to understand and learn about issues that are relevant to them. Children have not consistently been provided with the specialist therapeutic input that is described in the home's statement of purpose, such as therapeutic key workers.

The home has benefited from some recent redecoration. Children were involved in choosing colour schemes. The physical environment is not maintained to a good standard. Bins in most rooms were full to overflowing, floors looked dirty and bathroom facilities were not clean. In children's bedrooms, there were dirty cups and plates, beds unmade and laundry on the floor. In a bedroom where a child had recently left, there was a broken bed with a beanbag propped underneath it. This does not ensure a homely or nurturing environment for the children.

Despite these shortfalls, children engage in activities in the home and community, which give them opportunities to create positive memories. The children are going on holiday soon and are looking forward to this. Children are building good relationships with staff and enjoy spending time with them.

Children have education provision relevant to their needs and have been making some progress in this area. There has been an improvement in communication between the home and schools. This helps to promote a consistent approach from professionals working with the children.

The home has worked well with the placing authority during the transition of two children out of the home. This transition was well planned and children were supported throughout. A party was held to allow the children to say goodbye to other children and staff and to celebrate their time at the home. This helps children to feel valued and enabled a positive ending to the children's time at the home.

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

An allegation made by a child about a staff member was poorly managed and was not in line with policies and procedures. Senior management undertook their own investigation, including interviewing staff and the child, prior to reporting to external professionals. The staff member remained on shift and completed additional shifts prior to any action being taken. These actions could have compromised any investigation into the allegations and prevented prompt review by the appropriate safeguarding agencies.

On one occasion, a child was restrained and then moved from their bedroom to an annex external to the home. This was to prevent the child from disturbing other children in the home when the child was emotionally dysregulated. As such, the restraint was not necessary or proportionate. During this incident, the child was moved down a flight of stairs, further increasing the risk of injury to the child. Staff debriefs and management oversight did not identify the potential for risk of harm by this inappropriate use of restraint.

Children who are vulnerable to self-harm or suicide are not consistently well protected. On one occasion, staff failed to properly monitor a child who had recently self-harmed. This lack of understanding of risk could have resulted in significant harm to the child.

Children's risk assessments are of poor quality and do not accurately reflect known risk factors. Although behaviour support plans do identify known behaviours such as physical aggression, self-harm and sexualised behaviour, this information is not captured within risk assessments. Risk management strategies are not recorded. Staff do not demonstrate that they properly understand children's vulnerabilities. This lack of awareness has the potential to result in harm to children.

One child in the home is permitted to play age-inappropriate games and watch DVDs that are also rated for an older age group. Children have access to Wi-Fi in their bedrooms but have not undertaken any form of learning around internet safety. Agreements for use of the internet and related risk assessments are not consistently followed by staff. Insufficient support and guidance about how to stay safe online mean that children could be placed at risk of harm.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The previous registered manager left with little notice. An interim manager was appointed and oversaw the home until the current manager took over in April 2021. Since April 2021, there has been a general improvement in the quality of management, but some significant weaknesses are still apparent.

There is a lack of robust management oversight of restraint practice in the home. Reports are not completed in a timely manner and debriefs with staff and children do not consistently occur. This prevents children from giving their views and does not provide staff with the opportunity to reflect on their practice.

Management monitoring and review systems do not support the manager to identify shortfalls and make improvements. Filing systems are disorganised, meaning that important documents are not accessible or cannot be easily located. Poor-quality record-keeping makes it difficult to have a clear picture of who was working in the home and when.

There has been a high turnover of staff, which has impacted on the stability of the home. There has been, at times, a reliance on agency workers to fill gaps in the rota. Required information confirming the suitability of agency workers is not consistently recorded or kept on file. Recruitment records for permanent staff are also poorly maintained, meaning that the home is not able to confidently demonstrate the suitability of some staff.

The majority of staff are not qualified to the expected level. Staff have not received specific training that would help them to understand and effectively manage the complex needs of children in the home. Not all staff have completed mandatory training, such as safeguarding training.

Not all staff understand or work in line with home's statement of purpose. This particularly relates to the therapeutic model of care that is described. Staff have not received training in some of the therapeutic techniques described and do not understand what these are. However, the therapist who works in the home is currently undertaking training with staff to support them to develop knowledge and skills in this area.

Requirements set at the previous inspection and assurance visit had not been addressed by the previous manager and have been reset.

The current manager has a clear understanding of the weaknesses of the home and has a credible plan to quickly improve the quality of care. External professionals and the staff team have noted the positive impact that the manager has had on the home. Staff feel more supported and are having regular supervision. Communication between the home and external agencies has also improved.

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
In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff— if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority's or a relevant person's performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 5 (c)) In particular, this relates to challenging the placing authority about the lack of a care plan for the child since arriving at the home.	1 September 2021
The quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children's home's aims and objectives 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— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose; protect and promote each child's welfare; treat each child with dignity and respect. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iii)) In particular, this relates to staff understanding and implementing the principles of care described in the statement of purpose.	1 September 2021

*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; 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 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)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(v)(vi)(vii)(b)(d)(e)) In particular, this relates to staff implementing and following risk assessments, behaviour support plans and child protection policies. Also, that staff ensure that the home is clean and well maintained.	14 October 21
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*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 the care provided in the home; 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)(h))	14 October 21
The registered person must co-operate with the child's placing authority in agreeing and signing the child's placement plan. (Regulation 17 (1) (2)) In particular, this relates to a child being placed at the home without a local authority placement plan and this being the case for the current duration of placement.	1 September 21
Restraint in relation to a child must be necessary and proportionate. (Regulation 20 (2)) This relates to the practice of moving a child through the home and down stairs to prevent disturbance to other children in the home.	20 August 21
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy which— is intended to safeguard children accommodated in the children's home from abuse or neglect;	1 September 21

and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect. The procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect must, in particular— provide for the prompt referral of an allegation about current or ongoing abuse or neglect in relation to a child to the placing authority and, if different, the local authority in whose area the home is located; describe the measures which may be necessary to protect children following an allegation of abuse or neglect; and describe how and to whom staff are to report, without delay, any concern about abuse or neglect of a child. (Regulation 34 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(e)(f)) In particular this, relates to a policy around management of allegations about staff and reporting to relevant external professionals without delay.	
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy ('the behaviour management policy') which sets out— the measures of control, discipline and restraint which may be used in relation to children in the home. 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; 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 within five days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record	1 September 21

confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35 (1)(b) (3)(a)(vii)(b)(i)(ii)(c))	
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* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

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: 2544217

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Absolute Childrens Services Ltd

Registered provider address: 98 Grove Street, Leek, Staffordshire ST13 8DU

Responsible individual: Derrell Crump

Registered manager: Taslima Shaikh

Inspector

Sarah Orriss, Social Care Inspector

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