

2548571

Registered provider: Worcestershire Children First

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home was previously owned by the local authority. It was re-registered in October 2019 when the local authority moved to be a wholly owned limited company. It is registered for up to four children with learning disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder.

The manager registered with Ofsted in October 2019 and holds the level 5 diploma in leadership and management.

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 visited this setting on 22 September 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. Widespread and/or serious concerns were identified.

We last visited this setting on 19 November 2020 to carry out a monitoring visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 3 to 4 August 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	Inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	Inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Inadequate
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There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: A compliance notice under regulation 32, in relation to fitness of workers, was issued at the assurance visit in September 2020 and deemed to have been met at the monitoring visit in November 2020.

Recent inspection history

Not previously inspected.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

This is the home's first full inspection since it was re-registered in October 2019. Four children currently live in the home.

Leaders and managers have failed to ensure that there is sufficient staff to safely meet the needs of the children. This has significantly contributed to the shortfalls identified during the inspection and the subsequent inadequate judgement.

Although children do have some positive experiences of living in this home, these are overshadowed by times when they do not feel safe. For example, on one occasion, staff needed to lock some of the children in a room with them for several hours to keep them safe when another child was experiencing difficulties. Staff described children as being frightened by this experience and physically shaking. In addition, staff informed the inspectors that locking children in rooms with staff for their safety is not an isolated occurrence. This is not an environment where children can feel safe and thrive.

There have been times when staff have been unable to prevent children from physically hurting each other. For example, on one occasion two children were hit by a child when there was not enough staff on duty to support all of the children. This too has undermined children's safety, welfare and experiences at the home.

The interior of the home has sustained ongoing damage during incidents and managers do not ensure that this damage is promptly repaired. As a result, the home environment is not welcoming, homely or well maintained throughout and this does not help children to feel valued. One child's bedroom table has holes in it and staff told inspectors that it had been like this for 'around a month'. Plaster has been chipped off walls and many areas need redecoration. There have been improvements made to the garden area since the last inspection. It now benefits from balance beams for children to play on and chickens for the children to help care for.

Feedback from children's families was mixed. Although one family member told inspectors that they are happy with the progress their child is making, they are concerned about their child feeling scared of another child at the home. Another parent told inspectors that they felt pressured to have their child for extended periods of time due to staff shortages.

One child is due to move on from the home. Despite the registered manager's best efforts, there is still no agreed plan for the child. This is causing the child distress as he knows he is leaving the home but does not know where he is moving to.

Notwithstanding the serious shortfalls identified, children make progress in school. They have good rates of attendance and are also supported by staff to develop some independence skills. Children have also enjoyed going on holiday and taking part in activities that include going out on their bikes. Children are also looking forward to a party event where they are going to be putting on a show for parents and staff. Although there are staff shortages that impact negatively on children's safety and experiences, the staff who care for the children try their best, in very difficult circumstances. This is reflected in the positive relationships that children and staff share.

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

The shortage of staff to care for children compromises children's and staff's safety. For example, when a child was very distressed, all the staff in the home went to support him. This meant that another child who requires one-to-one support to help support his medical needs was left without this necessary support to keep him safe and well. On other occasions, a child has not had two staff to support him in the community as specified in the child's risk assessment. Furthermore, during times when staffing has been too low, staff have used a mobile phone to help monitor the welfare of a child and a staff member when they have been out in the community. This is not an agreed strategy and does not keep anyone satisfactorily safe.

Risks to and from children are not fully understood and managed appropriately. For example, one child has had a bar fitted across his bedroom window to prevent him breaking the window by repeatedly opening it. Managers told inspectors that this measure was designed to help keep the child safe. It has not been considered in his individual risk assessment or as part of the fire risk assessment, nor has it been agreed with the child's social worker. The registered manager made a decision to remove this bar during the inspection.

There have been times when children have needed to be restrained to help keep everyone safe. This has included children being restrained on the floor. Records do not consistently show who has held the child, how long for and if the child has been offered medical attention. This is despite in one incident a child telling staff that they had been injured and being sick while he was restrained on the floor. The registered manager has not recorded that she has spoken to staff about this incident and has not noted any learning that may have taken place. In addition, children are not always spoken to about what happened by someone who was not part of the incident. Poor recording of restraint incidents means that it is difficult to tell if the measures used are safe and proportionate.

Risk assessments and behaviour management plans do not clearly set out why and how children should be held, and how the techniques used have been agreed and are kept under review. This poor practice does not safeguard children.

There have been times when children have made allegations about staff. These appear to have been shared with other professionals promptly. However, on one

occasion, a child was found to have a bruise after being held by staff. The registered manager could not find a clear record of this incident to understand how this had happened and what, if any, action had been taken to safeguard the child.

Records do not show that agency staff have been safely recruited. For example, there are no records of references being taken up or clarification being sought about the reasons why these staff have left roles involving vulnerable adults or children. The registered manager is unable to demonstrate that she knows that the people who work in the home are safe to do so. This is despite the home previously being served a compliance notice to help the organisation to improve practice in this area.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The registered manager wants the best for the children in her care but has not had sufficient staff nor effective monitoring systems in place to ensure this outcome. Shortfalls in regard to the registered manager's monitoring of the services have been highlighted at a previous inspection and have not been addressed. The deputy manager role remains vacant. This, coupled with other staff shortages, means the registered manager does not have sufficient time and space to undertake all of her management responsibilities. This is detrimental to the care of children.

Evidence was provided to inspectors that showed staff training to be out of date. Despite the manager saying there was more up-to-date information, this was not provided. As a result, it is unclear if staff have the necessary skills to keep children safe. Furthermore, one member of staff has not obtained their equivalent level 3 qualification in residential childcare within the necessary timescale. Another member of staff is yet to enrol, and the allocated time in which he has to complete the qualification expires in a month's time.

The registered manager could not find all of the requested staff rotas during the inspection. Furthermore, ones that were shared were difficult to understand. As a result, it is not always clear who has worked in the home and when.

More positively, staff said that they feel supported by the registered manager and by each other. Staff demonstrated that they understood the needs of the children well and have tried their best in difficult circumstances. Nevertheless, insufficient staff and support for the manager has compromised standards of care to children. A new member of staff spoke about benefiting from a good induction into the home.

The registered manager has now ensured that the quality of care report includes the views of children and information about children's plans. Therefore, the requirement raised at the last inspection about this has been met.

As a result of this inspection, three compliance notices have been raised, and a notice restricting the number of children who can live at the home has been issued. Ofsted will continue to monitor the organisation's ability to meet these.

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)) In particular, ensure that improvements are made to the home environment, repairs are carried out promptly and broken furniture is removed.	19 September 2021
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust; and an understanding about acceptable behaviour. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— de-escalate confrontations with or between children, or potentially violent behaviour by children. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(xi))	19 September 2021

In particular, ensure that there is enough staff and staff are trained to effectively manage children's behaviour towards each other and others to reduce the risk of injury and damage.	
*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; 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. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(b)) In particular, ensure that risk assessments and behaviour management plans set out clear strategies of how to keep children safe. This includes measures of restraint that have been agreed by relevant parties.	19 September 2021
*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— 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; use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c)(d)(h))	19 September 2021

In particular, review training records and ensure that all staff have completed the required training. In addition, ensure that sufficient staff work at the home to meet each child's needs and that the registered manager receives adequate time and support to lead the home effectively.	
*The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The registered person may only— employ an individual to work at the children's home; or if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). The requirements are that— full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1) (3)(d)) This particularly refers to the safe recruitment of agency staff.	19 September 2021
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The registered person may only— employ an individual to work at the children's home; or if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). The requirements are that— the individual has the appropriate experience, qualification and skills for the work that the individual is to perform.	31 December 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— 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. (Regulation 32 (4)(a)(b)) In particular, ensure that staff who have not completed the level 3 qualification in the required timescale are supported to do so as soon as practicable.	
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 date, time and location of the use of the measure; a description of the measure and its duration; 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 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 five 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)(iii)(iv)(vi)(vii)(b)(i)(c)) This particularly refers to ensuring that restraint records meet regulation.	19 September 2021

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)) This particularly refers to ensuring that staff rosters are accessible and can be understood by others.	19 September 2021
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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: 2548571

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Worcestershire Children First

Registered provider address: County Hall, Spetchley Road, Worcester WR5 2NP

Responsible individual: Justine Bishop

Registered manager: Nina Kersho

Inspectors

Louise Battersby, Social Care Inspector
Natasha Skinner, Social Care Inspector

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