

2565231

Registered provider: Mulberry House

Assurance inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is registered to provide care and accommodation for three children who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The registered manager has been in post since March 2022.

Inspection date: 20 July 2022

Date of last inspection: 2 and 3 November 2021

Judgement at last inspection: Good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Information about this inspection

At these inspections, the inspectors 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 concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance inspection:

- The care planning for children is not always robust.
- The risk management of children requires strengthening.
- Some staff do not have the skills and knowledge to consistently meet children's needs.
- The management and oversight of some key documents have not been effective to ensure they are up to date and accurate.
- Not all children feel safe living in the home.

The care of children

Ofsted inspected this home on 20 July 2022. This assurance inspection took place in response to a serious allegation made by one child living at the home. At the time of this inspection, there were three children living at the home. During this inspection, the inspector identified serious concerns in relation to the safety of children. In response, Ofsted has issued a compliance notice under regulation 12 (the protection of children standard).

On 9 July 2022, a child made a serious allegation about another child living in the home. Staff reported the incident to the police and the children's placing authorities.

In response to the allegation, one child has spent periods of time staying at the provider's caravan. This arrangement has not been well considered. In addition, on the day of the inspection, senior managers informed the child that he would be moving immediately to a new home. This was incorrect. The lack of planning does not support children to have a positive experience when leaving the home.

Staff have not sufficiently supported the children following this allegation. Regular key-working sessions have not taken place to explore with children their views and feelings following the incident. As a result, children have not been supported to understand what is happening or provided with adequate emotional support.

Children appear to enjoy positive relationships with staff. Staff keep children meaningfully occupied with activities, and children are involved in community-based clubs such as football and police cadets. Children are in full-time education, with good attendance and are making progress.

The safety of children

Safeguarding arrangements in the home are not always effective. Despite the police expressing concerns regarding the children continuing to live together, all three

children remained at the home until 12 July 2022. During this time, the registered manager reinstated waking night staff at the home. Night staff have completed hourly checks on the children; however, it was unclear from records how children were monitored in between these times. The registered manager activated a sensor alarm on the bedroom landing to monitor children throughout the night. However, this sensor was checked on inspection and was not working. This leaves children at risk of further harm from one another.

The registered manager failed to put in place a risk assessment to support the staff to safely care for the child at the caravan park. This has the potential to place other children at risk of harm and leaves staff without direction. Children's risk assessments do not reflect the recent allegation; as a result, they are inaccurate and do not provide staff with updated strategies to keep children safe. In addition, staff were not following all children's risk assessments.

Some staff do not have the skills or knowledge to consistently meet the children's needs. Some areas of the risk assessments advise staff to use interventions that they have not been trained in. In addition, only one member of staff has completed training in sexualised behaviour.

On 17 July 2022, the child who reported the allegation self-harmed while on free time. This child informed staff that she self-harmed as she did not feel safe at home with the other child. Staff returned her to the home, despite the other child being present. This raises concerns around staff decision-making and their ability to take effective action when there is a serious concern around a child's welfare. On inspection, this child told the inspector that she does not feel safe at the home.

Despite the shortfalls identified following this specific incident, the inspector found that previous safeguarding concerns have been dealt with appropriately by the registered manager.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

On 11 July 2022, the registered manager served notice to the child that the allegation was made against. This was due to the serious safeguarding risk and the concerns of the emotional impact on the other two children. At the time of the inspection, the registered manager was not aware that immediate notice had been served. As a result, she failed to sufficiently escalate and challenge the child's placing authority to identify an alternative placement quickly. In addition, the placing authority for the child that made the disclosure has not visited the home to assure themselves that the child is safe. Whilst the registered manager acknowledge this shortfall, she had not addressed this with the child's social worker.

The registered manager's monitoring and oversight of some aspects of the home is not sufficient. She has not ensured that risk assessments and care plans are up to date and accurate. The registered manager has not ensured that the current care arrangements for children are clearly documented. As a result, there have been shortfalls in care planning for children since the allegation.

The registered manager has a good understanding of the concerns surrounding the ongoing placement of one child. She has tried to be amenable and show compassion to all the children, in what is a very challenging situation. The registered manager told the inspector that the child should have been moved quickly to avoid upset and uncertainty for everyone. However, she has felt disempowered and unsupported by senior managers in this situation.

The registered manager has ensured that the home has remained safely staffed. Staff are committed and motivated and have picked up additional shifts to ensure that they are available to the children. This dedication from the staff team has avoided the need for agency staff. The staff appear to work well with one another and have supported each other during this difficult period. There are, however, some gaps in staff supervision, which includes the registered manager's supervision.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
03/11/2021	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, 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— seek to involve each child's placing authority effectively in the child's care, in accordance with the child's relevant plans; seek to secure the input and services required to meet each child's needs; 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 (a)(b)(c)(d)) This specially relates to the registered manager liaising effectively with children's placing authorities to ensure that they are actively involved with children's care planning.	17 September 2022
The children's views, wishes and feelings standard is that children receive care from staff who— take their views, wishes and feelings into account in relation to matters affecting the children's care and welfare and their lives. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that staff— ascertain and consider each child's views, wishes and feelings, and balance these against what they judge to be in the child's best interests when making decisions about the child's care and welfare. (Regulation 7 (1)(c) (2)(a)(i))	17 September 2022

The specifically relates to the registered manager ensuring that children's wishes are sought and considered.	
* 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; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and 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)(ii)(iii)(iv)(vi)) This specifically relates to the registered manager ensuring that risk assessment are robust, up to date and contain effective strategies that staff follow. In addition, staff must support children to understand risks.	4 September 2022
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—	4 September 2022

ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of 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)(h)) This specifically relates to ensuring that staff complete relevant training to have the skills to meet the needs of children in their care. This also relates to ensuring that there are effective monitoring tools in place.	
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children’s home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— manage and review the placement of each child in the home; and plan for, and help, each child to prepare to leave the home or to move into adult care in a way that is consistent with arrangements agreed with the child’s placing authority. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(ii)(iii)) This specifically relates to ensuring discharges are planned and sensitively managed and children are supported with this process.	17 September 2022
The registered person must ensure that all employees— receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33 (4)(b)) This specifically relates to ensuring that all staff receive regular supervision.	17 September 2022

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 2565231

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Unity Residential Care Services Limited

Registered provider address: 2, Lymevale Court, Lyme Drive, Parklands, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 6NW

Responsible individual: Hilary Jones

Registered manager: Claire Lumsden

Inspector

Debbie Holder, Social Care Inspector

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