

2593651

Registered provider: Pathway Care Solutions Group Limited

Assurance inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is owned and managed by a private provider. The home is registered to care for up to four children with social and emotional difficulties. There are currently three children living at the home.

There is no registered manager at this home. An acting manager is in post but is yet to apply to register with Ofsted.

Inspection date: 20 December 2023

Date of last inspection: 8 August 2023

Judgement at last inspection: 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 concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance inspection:

- The management arrangements for the home have been insufficient.
- In the absence of the acting manager, new and inexperienced staff members were caring for children without anyone in day-to-day charge of the home.
- Leaders and managers have failed in their duty to provide staff with sufficient guidance and support.
- For a few weeks, there has been no oversight of incident reports or the recording system for the care of children.
- Staff did not have the required training relating to restraint practice to keep children safe.
- Leaders have not taken steps to explore the reasons why several staff members have left the home.

It has been a very challenging time for children due to several staff members leaving and new staff joining the team. The children's relationships with trusted adults have been disrupted. Children feel a loss of confidence in staff because of these changes. The children shared their collective concerns and said, 'Staff don't know us.'

Educational progress for children is mixed. Some children's attendance and progress at school have improved, while another child is not supported to engage with their college course. Home tutor support has been arranged to help build the child's confidence to learn and work towards reintegration into college.

Staff ensure children's health needs are met. When children feel unwell, staff offer comfort and ensure that children have access to appropriate medical help. Staff also encourage children to consider the long-term effects of unhealthy life-style choices, such as smoking. However, this has not yet been effective in discouraging a child from doing so.

Staff support children to see their families and understand the emotional impact family time can have on the children's well-being. Staff's sensitivity around this area of the children's lives helps the children to have more positive and meaningful time with their family members.

Staff understand their responsibility to listen to the children's wishes and feelings. However, the challenge for children having to form new relationships on mass, does not give them confidence that everyone understands their voice and individual ways of communicating.

Staff know the content of children's risk assessments and understand the children's general risks. However, a collective lack of a deeper understanding of the children's needs, as well as their inexperience, limit the staff's ability to respond consistently and effectively. The children's feelings of not being understood by the adults who care for them reduce their sense of safety.

New staff have not been trained on how to hold children when this practice is needed to keep children safe. The staff's interpretation of what they should do if an incident occurs was inconsistent. This does not keep children safe.

There have been no missing-from-home incidents since the last inspection. Most staff know the actions they must take to help children return home safely should a missing-from-home incident occur, but there are some gaps in staff's knowledge. For example, one staff member was unaware of the information cards to use if a child was to abscond when out with staff.

Staff have access to the on-call system to speak to a manager when they are concerned for a child's safety. On one occasion, this enabled staff to seek help for a child who was experiencing emotional upset.

Leaders and managers did not have oversight of incident reports and the recording system used by staff while the acting manager was away from the home. This could have resulted in unsafe practice being overlooked.

There is currently no registered manager at the home, and an acting manager has stepped in to cover the day-to-day management arrangements. However, there has been insufficient senior management oversight during the acting manager's short period of absence. This has resulted in a difficult period for those living and working in the home. Several staff have left the home, and several new staff have come to work here. The new staff have not experienced appropriate support, training and guidance. This has affected relationships in the home and their ability to oversee children's care.

The acting manager role is overstretched. When the acting manager was away from work, leaders failed to arrange adequate management oversight of the home. The team, consisting of mainly new and inexperienced staff members supported by some agency workers, was caring for children without anyone being present and in day-to-day charge of the home.

Lengthy delays in senior managers completing formal investigations about staff practice concerns have left staff feeling disheartened and uncertain about their role.

Leaders and managers have not taken appropriate steps to explore why several staff have left. This does not provide assurance that concerns are addressed.

Some staff have not had practice-related supervision for several months. New members of staff have not received supervision since they started working at the

home; some expressed a lack of clarity about the purpose of supervision. This does not help staff to be effective in their roles.

There are extensive gaps in the staff's learning and development. This impacts on their ability to safeguard children and follow the home's procedures. For example, staff know they should report a concern but do not fully understand the whistle-blowing procedure.

The acting manager, who has returned to work now, has strong and trusting relationships with the children and is pivotal to ensuring that the home operates effectively. The children hold the acting manager in high regard. The acting manager is determined to provide children with the best possible care.

Most areas of the home are well decorated and homely, with the exception of the space outside of the children's bedrooms. More could be done to improve the environment to ensure that children have a comforting experience when leaving their bedrooms. The recommendation from the last inspection about this area of improvement remains unmet.

The requirement about staff following relevant safety checks when children settle at night has been met. Staff are clear about their responsibilities.

New staff have been recruited, and work continues to rebuild the team. Staff expressed that there is a positive team culture. A number of vacancies still remain, and leaders and managers have yet to achieve stability within the team.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
08/08/2023	Full	Good
24/08/2022	Full	Good
23/11/2021	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, 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— 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 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)(iii)(v)(vi)(b)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that: they are reassured all members of staff understand the whistle-blowing procedure; and a risk assessment provides direction to the team about the risk management strategies they must use for staff who do not have restraint practice training.	4 February 2024
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	4 February 2024

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 work as a team where appropriate; 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; ensure that the home’s workforce provides continuity of care to each child. demonstrate that practice in the home is informed and improved by taking into account and acting on— research and developments in relation to the ways in which the needs of children are best met; and feedback on the experiences of children, including complaints received. 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)(b)(c)(d)(e)(g)(i)(ii)(h))	
The registered person must ensure that all employees— undertake appropriate continuing professional development; receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience; and have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. (Regulation 33 (4)(a)(b)(c))	4 February 2024

Recommendation

- The registered person should make sure that the children's home provides a nurturing and supportive environment that meets the needs of their children. They will, in most cases, be homely, domestic environments. In particular, the space outside of the children's bedrooms should be decorated to a high standard, with additional personalisation. This will ensure that high standards exist throughout the home. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 15, paragraph 3.9)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 2593651

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Pathway Care Solutions Group Limited

Registered provider address: Atria, Spa Road, Bolton BL1 4AG

Responsible individual: Donna Carlin

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Aaron Mcloughlin, Social Care Inspector

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