

2608872

Registered provider: Northamptonshire Children's Trust Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is operated by a local authority children's trust. This is the home's first inspection. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to two children and/or young people with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The home's statement of purpose states that it specialises in providing emergency care placements of up to 16 weeks for children whose long-term placement has broken down, or in situations when a suitable long-term placement has not been identified.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 December 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Recent inspection history

Not previously inspected

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Children generally move into this home in very challenging circumstances, when they are extremely vulnerable. Staff are empathetic. They understand how to support and reassure children who are in crisis. The registered manager and staff demonstrate considerable resilience, often under enormous pressures. They have not given up on children whose needs are difficult to meet. However, the support provided to staff and managers by the wider organisation, maintenance teams and schools means that children have not always had good experiences or made good progress.

The function and objectives of the home are not clearly established. The current mixed function of emergency, short-term placements and longer-term placements for children with complex needs means that care planning is challenging for managers. The local authority placement team and social workers also lack clarity about the purpose and function of the home. This has recently led to children being placed together who have had a negative impact on each other.

There is no care plan in place for one child who has recently been admitted to the home. This means that staff have very little information about how to care for the child on a day-to-day basis.

Until recently, children have generally had positive experiences and outcomes, moving to appropriate long-term placements after their behaviour has been stabilised. However, despite the efforts of managers, alternative placements have not been found quickly enough when the home has not been able to meet the needs of some children. This has meant that some children have not had good experiences.

The home is not well presented. Some parts of the home have suffered damage. Damage is not repaired quickly enough, although it is acknowledged that some delays have been related to COVID-19 restrictions. There is not enough storage space for children's possessions. Although staff have added some homely touches, there is an institutional feel to the home, reflecting its former function.

Most children do not have a school placement when they come to the home. However, staff engage children in educational activities. The registered manager works closely with the local authority virtual school to get children back into formal education. Home tutors are provided as an interim measure, but this becomes challenging when there is more than one child living in the home because of the lack of space. Managers and staff worked creatively during the lockdown to ensure that children's education was not badly disrupted. Children who had school placements continued to attend and the home tutor service continued to operate.

Children enjoy a range of activities including trampolining, walks in the local area, horse riding and boxing. By encouraging children to make constructive use of their time, staff help children to develop healthy routines, grow in confidence and learn new skills.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Risk assessments for one child are not clear and do not provide complete information about known risks to the child. In one instance, a risk assessment was not properly followed, resulting in a delay in contacting police after a child went missing from the home.

Staff quickly form positive relationships with children. This helps children feel safe and secure. Staff try to help children form positive relationships with each other. In most cases, this results in positive outcomes. However, when it is identified that children have a negative impact on each other or present a risk to each other, action is not taken quickly enough to address issues or identify more appropriate placements.

Staff respond well to children's behaviour. They understand how to de-escalate difficult situations. As a result, they remain patient and composed. They use therapeutic techniques which usually help children to calm. Restraint is used appropriately and only when necessary. Sanctions are rarely given but when they are, children have the option to earn back what they have lost by doing restorative work. This approach has generally worked well.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The registered manager is experienced and appropriately qualified. He is currently undertaking a higher-level diploma than is usually required. This demonstrates his commitment to improving his own knowledge and providing a better service for children.

The home has an experienced and established staff team. Staff have not received the standard of training that they require to meet the complex needs of the children who live in this home. For example, staff have not had sufficient training in how to respond to harmful and self-harmful behaviours.

The home's dining room also serves as a staff bedroom. This is unsuitable for staff and means that they do not get a good night's sleep. Staff tiredness has the potential to have an impact on their work practice. This arrangement also damages staff morale.

Staff generally feel well supported by their colleagues and by their line managers. They are provided with the opportunity to raise any concerns they may have during supervision. However, staff do not feel valued or listened to by senior leaders in the

organisation. Staff say that delays in identifying alternative placements for children whose needs cannot be safely met has reduced their ability to deliver good-quality care.

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— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose; provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background; provide to children living in the home the physical necessities they need in order to live there comfortably. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(i)(iv)(vii)) This relates to ensuring clarity in the statement of purpose so that staff, managers and leaders have a good understanding of the function of the home. Also, to ensuring that staff have good information about children when they move in, and that children have enough space for their belongings.	28 February 2022
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;	28 February 2022

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)) This relates to the institutional feel of the building, damage that has been slow to be rectified, poor decor due to marks on the walls and the lack of storage space.	
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; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(iv)) This specifically refers to poor-quality risk assessments for children, staff not adhering to a child's risk assessment and children harming each other.	28 February 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—	28 February 2022

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.
(Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(c))

This relates to a lack of infrastructure around the home that would enable staff to better support children. Also, staff do not receive the required training to ensure that they are skilled to meet the specialist needs of the children.

Recommendation

- The design of the home should provide staff that sleep in the home overnight with appropriate accommodation and facilities to do so. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations, including the quality standards', page 17, paragraph 3.26)

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: 2608872

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Northamptonshire Children's Trust Limited

Registered provider address: One Angel Square, Angel Street, Northampton, Northamptonshire NN1 1ED

Responsible individual: Christina Skeel

Registered manager: Scott Beasley

Inspector

Joanne Vyas, Social Care Inspector

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