

2625941

Registered provider: Huntercombe Young People Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is owned and managed by a private company. The home changed ownership in March 2021.

In March 2022, the company applied to vary its conditions of registration to only provide care for up to nine children with learning disabilities or social and/or emotional difficulties.

There is no registered manager in post. The responsible individual currently manages the home with support from other managers.

Inspection dates: 25 and 26 May 2022

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: 22 February 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Enforcement action since last inspection:

Ofsted carried out a full inspection on 22 and 23 February 2022 and judged the home to be inadequate. Serious and widespread failures were identified in relation

to the safety and protection of children and the leadership and management of the home. Ofsted issued three compliance notices under regulations 12, 13 and 32.

A monitoring visit was carried out on 4 April 2022 to monitor the action taken by the provider in response to the compliance notices. The inspector found that, since the previous inspection, the provider had taken some action to improve the service. However, some of the steps in the compliance notices had not been met and two notices, under regulations 13 and 32, were reissued in part.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
22/02/2022	Full	Inadequate

Inspection judgements

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

Children's overall experience and progress have improved since the last full inspection in February 2022 and the subsequent monitoring visit in April 2022. This is because the provider has taken action to improve the service. Some requirements have been reissued because there has been no opportunity to meet them. These relate to regulations 14, 32, 33 and 39. The two compliance notices issued at the monitoring visit under regulations 13 and 32 have been met.

Children now live in a more homely environment. Broken windows have been repaired and, unless it would pose a risk to a child, doors are now unlocked throughout the home. This allows children greater freedom and more opportunities to socialise with their peers.

There is significant work being undertaken to improve the living conditions for all of the children. Children's apartments are being redecorated and the children have chosen the colour schemes as well as new bedding, curtains and soft furnishings. Kitchens have been replaced, and bathrooms and furniture are in the process of being replaced. Soft play and sensory rooms are being created. This will bring about a consistent standard of living conditions for all the children, which is more homely and comfortable and meets their various needs.

Children's views are now being sought in a variety of ways, such as through meetings, forums and key-work sessions, all of which take place regularly. Children are encouraged and supported to interact. They feel able to express their views, which are listened to and acted on by staff. Key-work sessions show that staff are responsive to children's questions and feelings and that they try to help children to understand why things happen. This provides children with a better understanding and helps to reassure them. However, not all records are dated. This makes it difficult to understand why some discussions took place and what happened afterwards.

The home's chef has helped the children to reinvent the menu, and he takes great care and pride in providing nutritious and tasty meals. Children are provided with photographs of the daily options and this enables all children to choose what they would like.

Activities are plentiful and varied and captured in photographs that evidence the children's engagement and enjoyment. Children have their own individualised weekly activity plans, which are based on their likes and wishes. There are also daily group activities for all the children to participate in if they would like to. The enthusiasm from staff helps engage the children.

Since the last full inspection, one more child is receiving an education, and this is significant progress for him. For another child who has not been in education for a considerable time, staff are attending his weekly reviews. Staff and managers have escalated their concerns about the delay in his plan to return home.

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

There remains a reliance on the use of agency staff. Often, more than half of staff on shift are agency staff. Leaders and managers have, however, ensured that the same agency staff are used so that the children have familiar faces caring for them. In addition, agency staff are being trained in restraint and are therefore better able to respond safely to incidents requiring physical intervention. Newly recruited agency staff must now have experience of working in a children's home and the relevant qualification for their temporary role. This will help ensure that agency staff have the necessary skills and knowledge to work in this home.

Children's files are well organised, and documents are informative. There are photographs of the child throughout and care plans are written as if by the child. This brings the child to life. Risk assessments are clear, comprehensive and individualised. However, risk assessments are not always updated following a significant incident. As a result, a risk may be incorrectly rated and the guidance for staff no longer appropriate.

While physical restraints are fully recorded, there is sometimes a delay in management oversight and debriefs for the staff involved. In one case, it was three weeks before the relevant agencies were informed of an unsafe hold. This means the staff involved continued to work in the home during this time and could have carried out further unsafe holds, potentially causing harm to children.

There has been one complaint from a child, which was acted on swiftly and robustly by leaders and managers. However, the child was not informed of the outcome and therefore is likely to feel he hasn't been taken seriously.

Managers and leaders advocate on behalf of the children. They have repeatedly challenged one child's placing authority and medical professionals to ensure that the child's needs are met. A medication review was requested for a child, which resulted in a change to the child's epilepsy medication to help reduce his seizures.

Daily body check sheets are confusing and do not always correspond with the body map sheet. Furthermore, times of checks are not always provided and not all staff sign their entries, which means there is no accountability. There is also no management oversight of these checks and records. As a result, managers are not fully aware of children's injuries and, therefore, are unable to respond to any concerns or to identify any patterns.

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

Mandatory training is being undertaken by all staff, as is additional training that is relevant to staff roles, such as supervision and appraisal. Permanent staff feel safer because agency staff are familiar and better trained. All staff are happier and more confident in their role. A number of observations carried out during the inspection showed that children were smiling, laughing and engaging well with staff. The parents of one child said, 'Staff cope so well with [name of child]. Nothing phases them; they are very professional.'

Staff supervision now takes place regularly for both permanent and agency staff. These sessions also encourage staff to demonstrate their understanding of safeguarding. Concerns raised by staff are listened to and acted on, as are suggestions to improve the care of the children. However, the quality of supervision is not consistent, as not all staff are given the opportunity to reflect on or evidence their practice.

In between supervisions, discussions take place when a practice issue is identified, and actions are carried out with support plans in place for the staff member if required. Staff are frequently praised in a variety of ways and forums. This helps staff feel appreciated and shows all staff that good practice is recognised by leaders and managers.

Additional ways of communicating information to the staff have been introduced. However, there are still gaps. For example, whole-staff team meetings are not well attended, and leaders and managers have no way of knowing which staff have read the minutes of these meetings. Smaller meetings, such as those for a child's core care team, are better attended and directly benefit the child by enabling a more informed and consistent approach.

A system is in place to ensure that shortfalls identified during external monitoring are acted on. Issues are shared with the staff team, and this helps staff to feel better informed and part of the home's development process.

Leaders and managers have introduced some internal monitoring tools and are in the process of developing others. However, they are not consistently effective as they have failed to help managers to identify the shortfalls raised. These monitoring tools also do not show the progress children are making. Furthermore, the language used is not suitable for a children's home and this is not respectful of the children who live in this home.

Communication with professionals and family members has greatly improved. Weekly reports are appreciated, as is the staff's attendance at meetings and the joint working that takes place. One education professional said, 'The staff are working much better with the school and this is having a positive impact upon [name of child].'

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 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— use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(h)) In particular, these systems must be relevant to the children's home and use language that will be helpful to the child.	28 August 2022
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that impact risk assessments are completed for each child prior to their admission and consider any training needs for the staff team.	28 August 2022
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	28 August 2022

that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). The requirements are that— the individual is of integrity and good character; the individual has the appropriate experience, qualification and skills for the work that the individual is to perform; the individual is mentally and physically fit for the purposes of the work that the individual is to perform; and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1) (2)(a)(b) (3)(a)(b)(c)(d))	
The registered person must— ensure that each employee completes an appropriate induction. 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 (1)(a) (4)(a)(b))	28 August 2022
The registered person must ensure that— 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. (Regulation 35 (3)(b)(i))	28 August 2022
The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which— are kept up to date; and	28 August 2022

are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36 (1)(b)(c))	
The registered person must ensure that a record is made of any complaint, the action taken in response, and the outcome of any investigation. (Regulation 39 (3))	28 August 2022

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that staff supervision enables staff to reflect on and explore their practice. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.15)

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: 2625941

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Huntercombe Young People Ltd

Registered provider address: Morton House, Morton Road, Darlington DL1 4PT

Responsible individual: Gemma Wilkinson

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Emma Ridley, Social Care Inspector

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