

2666995

Registered provider: Assure Care Homes Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home provides care for up to two children with social and emotional difficulties. It is owned by a private organisation.

At the time of inspection, there were two children living at the home.

Inspection dates: 15 and 16 August 2023

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	inadequate
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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: 17 October 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
17/10/2022	Full	Good
12/04/2022	Full	Inadequate

Inspection judgements

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

Children are looked after by a team of dedicated, caring staff. However, since the last inspection, managers have not been able to recruit enough staff. Consequently, the number of permanent staff in the home has significantly reduced.

Currently, there is a reliance on temporary staff to support and care for the children safely. New staff have been recruited to the home, and four staff are due to start imminently.

The staffing situation at the home has been compounded by failings at a leadership level. There has been no manager registered with Ofsted since April 2022. There have been two managers since this time, and a change in responsible individual. This has meant that care practice for the children has, at times, been inconsistent, and staff are not always working with up-to-date guidance.

Despite these challenges, the children appear happy. They enjoy a wide range of activities. Both children are keen cycle repairers, and leaders have created opportunities for them to be able to enjoy this activity safely. The children have also been on holidays. These were carefully risk assessed, and the children enjoyed these experiences.

The children are making progress in terms of their health and education. Both children attend school regularly, and there is good communication with relevant education professionals to make sure that the right plans are in place. Changes of school placements are carefully considered.

Staff understand the children's health needs well. All appointments are attended with children having a good understanding of their own health needs.

The children's overall progress is harder to identify. Targets that are set for the children to work towards are not consistently reviewed and updated. This means that, at times, the staff and children are unaware of what the aims of the placement are.

The children are confident about how to complain. Complaints are rare, but when they have occurred, leaders and staff have been quick to respond. The children talk positively about their trust in this process.

Plans for when children move into the home are well considered. There is good communication between staff and the relevant external professionals to ensure that all information that is needed is collated. This enables the right decisions to be made.

The children's views are not consistently considered in the running of the home. Historically, there have been weekly one-to-one sessions, supplemented by regular children's meetings. These allowed children to describe how it felt to live at the home and to contribute to changes. As leadership and staffing have changed, this has resulted in a reduction in the one-to-one sessions and children's meetings. This has not enabled the children to contribute effectively to their day-to-day care. The new manager has met the children and has started to re-introduce these sessions and meetings.

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

Risks are well understood. Staff have a good understanding of local risks, and they shared this information well with the children. Detailed work with the children, including on topics such as road safety and stranger danger, has supported them to be able to take risks safely, such as having some unsupervised time.

However, guidance for staff has not been consistently updated, meaning that staff are not always working with up-to-date information. There have been periods when risk assessments and behaviour management strategies have not been updated for several months. These included a period after a child moved into the home, when the child displayed different behaviours. This lack of review meant that staff were unsure what strategy to adopt in some situations.

Staff manage the children's challenging behaviour well, and de-escalation techniques support the children to calm down when they are upset. However, there are some occasions when restraint reports are not signed off by managers, and the children are not spoken to following the incident. This does not always allow the children to reflect on what happened. In addition, some restraint reports lack detail. For example, often just the name of the restraint technique is used without sufficient explanation of what happened. Words such as 'heightened' and 'dysregulated' are used. These do not give sufficient detail and may stigmatise children.

The children do not go missing from the home. When incidents occur that require reporting to external safeguarding professionals, this is done immediately. There is good communication with other agencies and the police when actions need to be taken.

Recruitment procedures are generally robust, with comprehensive checks being undertaken prior to new staff starting. However, when there are issues raised through pre-employment checks, the rationale for decision-making is not always clearly recorded. For example, in one case, an issue was raised about an applicant's references. This was adequately assessed. However, there was no record of this.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

There have been significant gaps in leadership and management. These have resulted in staff not being adequately supported and key guidance on how best to care for children not being updated. The home does not have a manager who has had their suitability assessed by Ofsted. This has been the case since April 2022. The requirements set at the last inspection have not been responded to effectively, and two of them have been repeated at this inspection.

Children's progress is not always understood. Staff and leaders can refer to anecdotal successes. However, progress has not been recorded in a way that allows leaders to fully assess the achievements that children make.

Staff report that they have received some supervision sessions since the last inspection. However, records show significant gaps. New staff received supervision sessions in their initial month of working at the home, but for the following six months did not have any. There has also been no appraisal for staff to ensure that their performance is reviewed effectively. A lack of supervision and appraisal has meant that staff have not been supported when working through a challenging time at the home. There have been no opportunities for staff to reflect on the impact of the work, or space to identify any support that could be needed. There has only been one team meeting since the last inspection.

The changes of manager have led to inconsistent oversight and guidance of staff. In recent weeks, there is evidence of change. However, prior to this, there were several months when no monitoring took place. The lack of monitoring also extended to a lack of required reporting to Ofsted.

The current manager and director have high aspirations for the home and hope to be able to continue to develop the service that is being offered to the children. The new manager has worked hard in recent weeks with both staff and children. She has made an immediate positive impact.

There are positive plans to stabilise the management of the home moving forward. A new experienced responsible individual has been employed as well as a new director of 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, 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 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, there should be arrangements in place to ensure that the monitoring and reviewing systems are consistently implemented in the absence of the manager. This is a repeated requirement.	31 October 2023
The registered provider must appoint a person to manage the children's home if— there is no registered manager in respect of the home. (Regulation 27 (1)(a)) This is a repeated requirement.	31 October 2023
The registered person must ensure that all employees— 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)(b)(c))	31 October 2023

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. (Regulation 7 (1)(c))	31 October 2023
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 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 the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child; understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(d)(f))	31 October 2023
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; and and has signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and within 5 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)(b)(i)(ii)(c))	31 October 2023
The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children ("a quality of care review") at least once every 6 months. (Regulation 45 (1))	31 October 2023

Recommendations

- As set out in regulations 31-33, the registered person is responsible for maintaining good employment practice. They must ensure that the recruitment, supervision and performance management of staff safeguard children and minimise potential risks to them. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)
- The registered person should ensure that staff are familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Staff should record information about individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

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 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: 2666995

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Assure Care Homes Ltd

Registered provider address: Unit 4, Northbrook Industrial Estate, Hollybrook Road, Shirley, Southampton, Hampshire SO16 6PB

Responsible individual: Chukwukem Mafe

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Mark Newington, Social Care Inspector

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