

2667615

Registered provider: Mercia Children Services Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

A private company operates this home. It provides care for up to four children who experience social and emotional difficulties.

The manager registered with Ofsted in June 2023.

There is one young person living in the home.

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 January 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 13 December 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
13/12/2022	Full	Requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy living in a welcoming and well-maintained environment. Staff support children to personalise their bedrooms. Children also have access to a spacious garden, exercise equipment and a climbing wall in the garage.

Staff understand children's physical health needs. They ensure that children are quickly registered with local health services and are supported to attend all necessary appointments. When children experience particular barriers to engaging with health care, these worries are taken seriously, and staff work hard to help children overcome their anxieties. Staff support children to understand their own health needs and lead a healthier lifestyle.

Children's mental health is a priority. Staff regularly consult with an in-house clinician, whose input is used to inform the approach to care. Children receive therapeutically informed care, which improves their emotional well-being.

Children are making progress in relation to education, employment and training. One child has successfully completed a vocational course. Another child has been out of education for a long time and is now in full-time education. Staff communicate well with education colleagues. Staff listen to children's wishes and feelings to find approaches that encourage children's aspirations for learning.

Staff support children's relationships with people who are important to them. Complex family dynamics are understood, and staff take a flexible approach to supporting children's time with their family. Children also receive the emotional and practical guidance to develop positive peer relationships. This means children experience improved social relationships.

Children's experiences of moving out of the home are inconsistent. One child's move has been well planned, and they were successfully prepared for moving on. However, another child's move was not well planned. This does not provide the best start to a new placement.

The registered manager has made improvements to the quality of children's records. However, children's records contain language that is judgemental. Staff report opinions as fact. This is not in line with the provider's therapeutic approach.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Staff understand what each child needs for safety and protection. Leaders and managers continue to improve risk assessments. These documents provide staff with a useful guide about managing risks. Staff keep children safe.

Staff have physically held children to keep them safe from harm. Staff understand when it is necessary to hold a child. Staff are trained in physical interventions. They understand that physical interventions are the last resort. After an incident, the manager speaks with the child. This ensures that the child has an opportunity to talk about their feelings. Children feel supported and listened to.

Behaviour management has not been consistent. There have been instances when staff have not followed children's plans, in particular managing challenging incidents or conflict. This inconsistency of care has affected the quality of children's relationships with some staff.

Children understand the rules and boundaries and know what is expected of them. The registered manager has ensured that a clearer, fair system of consequences is in place. Staff celebrate and reward children's achievements.

The manager understands the risks associated with the location of the home. She uses local data to regularly review these risks and how they are managed. The home continues to be a safe place for children to live.

When an adult applies to work in this home, they are subject to thorough background checks. This ensures that children are only cared for by safe adults.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

There is a qualified and experienced manager leading this home. The manager has improved systems to quality assure the operation of the home. The manager understands the home's strengths and weaknesses, in particular the skills of her team and the needs of the children. This knowledge has led to significant improvements in children's quality of care.

Leaders and managers advocate on behalf of children with other professionals. Children's views, wishes and feelings are central to care planning.

Staff receive good-quality, regular supervision, which is child-focused and reflective. Supervision sessions that aim to address specific practice issues are not effective. They do not provide effective direction to staff. This is a missed opportunity to improve the quality of care children receive.

Staff complete regular, useful training, which improves the quality of care children receive.

Staff communicate well with other relevant professionals. One independent reviewing officer said, 'The team are always curious, understand their [children's] needs, wishes and feelings, and they [staff] ... think creatively about the functions behind their [children's] behaviour to find strategies to promote good outcomes.'

When children make complaints or allegations, leaders and managers complete effective investigations. Managers also share information about concerns with all

relevant professionals. However, children do not always receive feedback about the outcome of their worries. This means children may not feel that they have been listened to and taken seriously.

There continue to be some gaps and inconsistencies in the quality of written records. The manager has a clear plan in place to address these issues.

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 must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust; an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and positive responses to other children and adults. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— meet each child's behavioural and emotional needs, as set out in the child's relevant plans; help each child to develop socially aware behaviour; help each child to develop and practise skills to resolve conflicts positively and without harm to anyone; strive to gain each child's respect and trust; are provided with supervision and support to enable them to understand and manage their own feelings and responses to the behaviour and emotions of children, and to help children to do the same; de-escalate confrontations with or between children, or potentially violent behaviour by children; and that each child is encouraged to build and maintain positive relationships with others. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iv)(viii)(x)(xi)(b))	15 March 2024

In particular, the registered person must make sure that the language used in children's written records is helpful to the child, non-judgemental and factual. Also, the registered person must make sure that staff show children unconditional positive regard through appropriate, respectful language. When staff practice falls short of this standard, the registered person must ensure that supervision is used to effectively address identified issues. Such supervision sessions must be recorded in sufficient detail so as to be useful.	
The registered person must establish a procedure for considering complaints made by or on behalf of children. 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 (1) (3)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that children are made aware of the outcome of their complaint. This should include a written account of all actions taken, provided to the child within 14 days, as per the company's own policy.	15 March 2024

Recommendation

- The registered person should make sure that children receive support to move on from the home effectively. The home has an important role in supporting each child leaving the home in the period immediately before their departure. The registered person should work with the placing authority to ensure that each child's transition is well planned and help each child to prepare for leaving both practically and emotionally. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 57, paragraph 11.9)

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: 2667615

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Mercia Children Services Limited

Registered provider address: Windsor House, Bayshill Road, Cheltenham,
Gloucestershire GL50 3AT

Responsible individual: Michael Lloyd

Registered manager: Collette Gedman

Inspector

Nicola Shaw, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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