

2667746

Registered provider: Birchwood Children's Services Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is owned by a private company and provides care for up to five children with specialist educational needs.

The home registered with Ofsted in May 2022.

The registered manager post has been vacant since January 2024.

There were five children living in the home at the time of this inspection.

Inspection dates: 2 and 3 July 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded, and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor, and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 31 May 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
31/05/2023	Full	Good
28/02/2023	Full	Requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Children's progress and experiences are poor and their safety is compromised by the serious shortfalls in safeguarding practices, management oversight and care planning. Since the last inspection, one child has moved out of the home due to staff being unable to keep them safe. This was a planned move to ensure that the child had a positive ending. Three children have since moved into the home.

Before this inspection, two whistle-blowing complaints had been made to Ofsted. The complaints included concerns about poor decision-making and ineffective care planning for children. These concerns were considered as part of this inspection.

Care planning for children is poor. The manager does not sufficiently consider children's individual needs and the impact of the children living together. One child said they did not like living in the home. The child said, 'It is dangerous, and I am scared of the other children.'

Children, staff and external professionals raised concerns about the high turnover of staff. This has resulted in children not receiving a consistent quality of care that meets their assessed needs and helps them to fulfil their potential. Children are not consistently cared for by people they know well or who understand their care needs and plans. This compromises children's ability to build stable and secure relationships with staff.

Children do not have clear plans for when they move into or out of the home. Children's care plans do not contain all relevant information. This does not ensure that staff have clear guidance to support children to make progress in key areas of their lives.

Two children are subject to court-ordered restrictions. Managers and staff were not aware of this for one child. The absence of this information means that staff do not know the restrictions that are in place to support the child and keep them safe. This has a negative impact on the child's daily care.

The home is looking tired and worn. Damage has been caused to furniture, outdoor equipment, doors and walls during serious incidents. Additionally, there is mould on children's bathroom ceilings. Furthermore, children are unable to access all areas of the home, as there are locks on communal areas including the kitchen. This does not provide a welcoming and homely feel for children living at the home.

Children's educational progress is variable. Some children are making progress in school. However, staff have struggled to support others to attend. This impacts on children's life chances and outcomes and limits their progress in education.

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

Leaders and the manager do not demonstrate a strong and proactive response to managing risk and reducing harm to children.

Managers and staff do not understand their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children and have failed to provide sufficient support to manage children's disabilities and meet their complex health need. This is a significant safeguarding concern and places children at risk of harm.

Recording in the home is poor and lacks accountability. Records of incidents are unclear or have been mislaid and fail to provide accurate details of incidents. For example, during the inspection, leaders and managers were unable to locate several reports regarding incidents of substance misuse, property damage and physical aggression.

Leaders and managers do not provide staff with clear strategies to help them to manage and reduce the risk of harm to children. For example, staff have not always carried out relevant safety and monitoring checks when a child returned to the home under the influence of substances. This places the child at risk of significant harm.

When children return to the home after being missing from home without permission, an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview is not provided. This does not ensure that managers carefully consider risks for all children and actions to mitigate the risks.

Leaders, managers and staff do not consistently manage children's behaviour effectively. There are occasions when they have ignored children's inappropriate behaviours and language. This does not help children to develop socially aware behaviour.

Not all staff are sufficiently trained in behaviour management, and they are unable to de-escalate incidents. Staff are unable to intervene quickly to prevent an escalation in incidents. This leaves children and staff at risk of harm.

Physical intervention has been used on several occasions. Some physical intervention records are inaccurate and unclear. Additionally, when one child said they were injured following a restraint, staff and managers did not take any action or seek medical advice.

Safer recruitment practice is poor. Not all staff have suitable checks in place before they start working in the home, including references and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. Gaps in employment are also not considered. The shortfalls in safer recruitment practice mean that unsuitable adults could be employed at the home, which places children at risk of harm.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The leadership and management arrangements are inconsistent, and this has impacted on children's overall progress and experiences. A new manager and responsible individual started working at the home in the week of this inspection. One child said they did not know the names of the managers.

Leaders and managers are not leading and managing the home in a manner that is consistent with the aims outlined in the statement of purpose. They do not ensure that staff understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping children safe. This has had an adverse impact on children's safety and overall experiences.

Management oversight is poor. Leaders and managers do not ensure that the quality of care provided to children is appropriately reviewed and evaluated. The oversight, review and evaluation of incidents are poor. There is no reflection or robust evaluation of safeguarding incidents to improve staff practice and children's safety.

Leaders and managers do not consistently review and update each child's risk assessment, behaviour management plans and care plans. This does not ensure that the care and support plans for each child remain relevant or that the strategies in place remain effective. Consequently, staff do not have clear and up-to-date guidance to help them to manage and reduce known risks for each child. This fails to keep children and staff safe and does not demonstrate strong leadership.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that staff have the necessary skills to support the children's individual complex needs. Not all staff have received training in supporting the specific needs of the children that they care for. For example, not all staff have had training in gang affiliation, missing from care, county lines, substance misuse and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, despite these being known risks for some children. As a result, the manager and staff do not always have the knowledge and skills to keep the children safe.

Staff do not receive regular supervision in line with the organisation's policy. This does not provide all staff with opportunities to reflect on their learning and development needs and practice.

Some professionals report poor communication from the manager and staff and say that they have not been informed of some significant incidents. This does not demonstrate an effective partnership working approach.

Leaders and the manager do not have effective monitoring and review systems in place. For example, there are no internal systems in place for the auditing of the home.

Leaders and managers have not taken sufficient action to meet some of the requirements raised at the last inspection. This does not demonstrate that leadership and management are effective.

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— 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. help each child to understand how to keep safe. 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 are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. 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)(i)(ii)(iii)(v)(vi)(b)) Specifically, the manager must ensure that all staff take sufficient action when there are concerns of substance misuse and that all risk management plans contain strategies for staff to follow to reduce the risk of harm to children.	30 August 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—	30 August 2024

helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and 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. 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. demonstrate that practice in the home is informed and improved by taking into account and acting on— 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)(f)(g)(h))	
*The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children’s home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended	30 August 2024

that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home's statement of purpose. that arrangements are in place to— ensure the effective induction of each child into the home. manage and review the placement of each child in the home; and plan for, and help, each child to prepare to leave the home or to move into adult care in a way that is consistent with arrangements agreed with the child's placing authority. that each child's relevant plans are followed. that the child's placing authority is contacted, and a review of that child's relevant plans is requested, if— the registered person considers that the child is at risk of harm or has concerns that the care provided for the child is inadequate to meet the child's needs. (Regulation 14 (1) (2)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iii)(c)(e)(i))	
*The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. 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. full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1) (3)(a)(b)(d)) Specifically, that all staff have up-to-date DBS checks, all references are present and any gaps in employment are explored. This requirement is restated from the last inspection.	30 August 2024
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.	30 August 2024

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. protect and promote each child's welfare. treat each child with dignity and respect. provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background. help each child to understand and manage the impact of any experience of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iii)(v)(c)) Specifically, leaders and managers must ensure that care is delivered in line with the home's aims and objectives as set out in the statement of purpose. Additionally, that the home is made homely, walls are painted where there are marks and attention is given to ceilings where there is mould.	
The education standard is that children make measurable progress towards achieving their educational potential and are helped to do so. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— help each child to achieve the child's education and training targets, as recorded in the child's relevant plans. support each child's learning and development, including helping the child to develop independent study skills and, where appropriate, helping the child to complete independent study.	30 August 2024

understand the barriers to learning that each child may face and take appropriate action to help the child to overcome any such barriers. promote opportunities for each child to learn informally. help each child to attend education or training in accordance with the expectations in the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 8 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(v)(x)) This particularly relates to children having clear plans in place around their educational needs and how staff will support them to attend education on a full-time basis.	
The registered person must compile in relation to the children's home a statement ("the statement of purpose") which covers the matters listed in Schedule 1. The registered person must provide a copy of the statement of purpose to HMCI and make a copy of it available upon request to— The registered person must— keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it; and notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (1) (3)(a)(b)) In particular, the home's statement of purpose must be kept up to date and contain accurate information.	30 August 2024
The registered person must ensure that— children can access all appropriate areas of the children's home's premises; and any limitation placed on a child's privacy or access to any area of the home's premises— is intended to safeguard each child accommodated in the home. is necessary and proportionate. is kept under review and, if necessary, revised; and	30 August 2024

allows children as much freedom as is possible when balanced against the need to protect them and keep them safe. (Regulation 21 (b)(c)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)) This specifically relates to the locks being removed from the gym and kitchen doors.	
The registered person must— ensure that each employee completes an appropriate induction. ensure that each permanent appointment of an employee is subject to the satisfactory completion of a period of probation; and provide each employee with a job description outlining the employee's responsibilities. 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)(b) (4)(a)(b)(c))	30 August 2024
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy ("the behaviour management policy") which sets out— how appropriate behaviour is to be promoted in the children's home; and The registered person must keep the behaviour management policy under review and, where appropriate, revise it. The registered person must ensure that— within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a child in the home, a record is made which includes— the name of the child. details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of the measure.	30 August 2024

the date, time and location of the use of the measure. a description of the measure and its duration. details of any methods used, or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure. the name of the person who used the measure ("the user"), and of any other person present when the measure was used. the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and a description of any injury to the child or any other person, and any medical treatment administered, as a result of the measure. 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 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 (1)(a) (2) (3)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(vii)(viii)(b)(i)(ii)(c)) Specifically, that all information in records of debriefs with staff is consistent with the information in the restraint record. Furthermore, when a child makes a complaint, that this is treated seriously and prompt action is taken to address it.	
The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which— include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child. are kept up to date; and are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b)(c))	30 August 2024

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendation

- When a child returns to the home after being missing from care or away from the home without permission, the responsible local authority must provide an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. Homes should take account of information provided by such interviews when assessing risks and putting arrangements in place to protect each child. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30)

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: 2667746

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Birchwood Children's Services Limited

Registered provider address: Regent House, Regent Street, Blackburn
BB1 6BH

Responsible individual: Rachael Hennessy

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Judith Birchall, Social Care Inspector

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