

2724911

Registered provider: AP Care Homes Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This is a privately owned children's home. The home provides care for up to four children with social and emotional difficulties.

The home registered with Ofsted on 27 July 2023. The registered manager post has been vacant since 13 September 2023.

This is the home's first inspection since it was registered.

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 November 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **inadequate**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

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: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Three children have lived at the home since it was registered with Ofsted. Two children were living at the home at the time of this inspection.

Children's overall experiences and progress have been adversely affected by significant and serious shortfalls in safeguarding practice and in the leadership and management arrangements in the home.

Leaders fail to carefully consider children's needs before they move into the home, to identify if the staff team has the skills and experience to meet their needs. There is a lack of consideration of how the leaders and staff will meet the needs of children who are placed far away from home.

Children's health needs are not understood or met. Leaders and staff did not identify that one child was routinely missing meals. On one occasion, it is reported that a child did not eat for at least two days. Leaders and staff failed to seek professional advice in a timely manner, and when they did, they did not act on the advice given. This does not demonstrate that leaders and staff understand the importance of meeting children's health needs and taking action to keep children safe.

Staff support children to undertake education with a tutor who visits the home. However, records do not clearly demonstrate the progress made and the targets that children achieve. This is a missed opportunity to demonstrate children's progress from their starting points.

There are positive relationships between children and staff. However, staff do not always listen to children when they make complaints or raise serious concerns. Failing to listen to the children does not promote the development of positive and trusting relationships.

Staff support children to maintain relationships with family members. This means children can see people who are important to them.

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

Significant and serious shortfalls were identified in relation to safeguarding practice. Safeguarding practice is poor and does not keep children safe.

An investigation was undertaken by the former responsible individual after the director of the company took a child to their home. This investigation identified that professional boundaries had been blurred by the director. Despite this, it was reported that the director invited children to her home again three weeks later.

Although the children did not visit, this action does not demonstrate that high standards of safeguarding practice will always be adhered to.

Risks to children are not identified, understood or managed by the leaders and staff. Risk management strategies to manage risks to children are poor. Despite concerns about self-injurious behaviour and a risk of ligature use for one child, staff have not received relevant training in managing the use of ligatures or in supporting children's mental health. Furthermore, the child's bedroom has not been adequately risk assessed to identify and make safe any ligature points.

There have been incidents when children have gone missing from the home. Following one missing-from-care incident, a child alleged that they had been sexually assaulted. The recording of the incident is poor. Some action was taken by the former management team to share this information with the child's placing authority, but they did not notify Ofsted of this significant incident.

There is no demonstrated learning from safeguarding incidents. There is no reflection with staff or robust evaluation of safeguarding incidents to improve the safety and welfare of children or staff practice. The director and staff have not notified relevant people of serious incidents, including children's placing authorities and Ofsted. This prevents a robust multi-agency response to managing safeguarding incidents and keeping children safe.

One child is at risk due to their use of e-cigarettes. Despite the child's risk assessment stating that these items must be removed from their bedroom if found during room checks, leaders and staff reported that they do not remove these items. This does not demonstrate that leaders or staff understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping children safe. Further to this, there has been no direct work with the child to support their understanding of the danger of using e-cigarettes or to support a reduction in the use of nicotine products.

Staff lack professional curiosity. They have not explored the risks that the internet may pose to children. One child told staff that they had accessed unknown and potentially unsafe websites, including communicating with strangers via video messaging. There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate how this was addressed in a timely manner to keep the child safe.

Bullying incidents are poorly managed and there is an inadequate response to keeping children safe. There has been significant bullying in the home, with one child being removed due to threats to harm another. The threats were considered so serious that the child was moved to a hotel. It is not clear what has changed to now make the home safe.

Records of restraint incidents show that staff have used specific restraint techniques. However, training records do not show that staff have been trained in this method. The poor oversight of the training completed by staff does not help to identify shortfalls in staff training.

Safer recruitment processes are not followed. Two members of staff worked on shift at the home before their Disclosure and Barring Service checks were completed and their references verified. Other staff members started working in the home with insufficient checks on their suitability to work there. This poor and unsafe practice does not ensure that children are cared for by staff who have been suitably vetted.

CCTV was installed after the home was registered with Ofsted. This is not being used to safeguard children as set out in The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

There is no registered manager in post. The home is currently overseen by the director, who does not have the skills and experience to operate a home in line with children's homes regulations. An absence of effective leadership and management seriously compromises the welfare and safety of children.

There is no effective oversight of staff practice or of the quality of care provided to children. The previous registered manager and responsible individual have left the organisation.

There are no leaders or managers to implement, appropriate and safe strategies to protect the children living in the home. This means that staff have no guidance about how to manage children's behaviours and reduce the risks associated with these behaviours. Furthermore, staff do not receive effective supervision of their practice.

Weaknesses in practice have not been appropriately identified. Staff with no previous experience have overseen the day-to-day management of the home without sufficient support.

Shortfalls in staff practice are not responded to or addressed to ensure improvement in the care of children. For example, it was reported that a member of staff fell asleep twice at a time when they were supposed to be caring for children. Despite children sharing video recordings of this, there is a lack of evidence about how this was addressed to prevent this unsafe practice from continuing.

Management oversight and monitoring and review systems are weak. Leaders and managers do not monitor and review care practices or effectively review children's records and documents. Furthermore, children's records are not up to date.

Staff are not sufficiently trained for their roles. Staff have not had training in supporting the specific needs of the children in their care, including autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and global developmental delay.

The home's statement of purpose is not kept under review and does not detail the current experience and qualifications of staff.

The register for children moving in and out of the home is not maintained as required. Therefore, there is no clear record of the children who live or have lived at the home.

Due to the significant and widespread concerns identified at this inspection, a notice suspending the registration of the home was issued with immediate effect. Ofsted will continue to monitor the home.

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; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; 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; that the premises used for the purposes of the home are located so that children are effectively safeguarded;	2 January 2024

that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed, furnished and maintained so as to protect each child from avoidable hazards to the child's health. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(b)(c)(d)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that children's risks are clearly identified and assessed. Also, that staff are provided with clear guidance and strategies to support them to reduce risks and take action to keep children safe. The registered person must ensure that risks in the home environment, such as ligature points, are clearly identified and assessed and action is taken to reduce any risks identified.	
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— 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; 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—	2 January 2024

feedback on the experiences of children, including complaints received; and 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)(c)(e)(e)(f)(g)(ii)(h)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that staff receive training to enable them to meet children’s specific needs. The registered provider must ensure that children’s complaints are acted on. The registered person must have effective oversight of the quality of care provided to children so that they can identify and address areas of concern.	
The health and well-being standard is that— the health and well-being needs of children are met; children receive advice, services and support in relation to their health and well-being; and children are helped to lead healthy lifestyles. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff help each child to— achieve the health and well-being outcomes that are recorded in the child’s relevant plans; understand the child’s health and well-being needs and the options that are available in relation to the child’s health and well-being, in a way that is appropriate to the child’s age and understanding. (Regulation 10 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(i)(ii)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that staff understand and have sufficient oversight of children’s specific health needs. When advice is given in relation to meeting children’s needs, the registered provider must ensure that this advice is implemented.	2 January 2024

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 and practise skills to resolve conflicts positively and without harm to anyone; communicate to each child expectations about the child’s behaviour and ensure that the child understands those expectations in accordance with the child’s age and understanding; help each child to understand, in a way that is appropriate according to the child’s age and understanding, personal, sexual and social relationships, and how those relationships can be supportive or harmful; help each child to develop the understanding and skills to recognise or withdraw from a damaging, exploitative or harmful relationship; strive to gain each child’s respect and trust; understand how children’s previous experiences and present emotions can be communicated through behaviour and have the competence and skills to interpret these and develop positive relationships with children; 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;	2 January 2024
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de-escalate confrontations with or between children, or potentially violent behaviour by children; understand and communicate to children that bullying is unacceptable; and have the skills to recognise incidents or indications of bullying and how to deal with them; and that each child is encouraged to build and maintain positive relationships with others. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(i)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(viii)(ix)(x)(xi)(xii)(xiii)(b))	
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 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)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that safer recruitment checks are completed for all staff before they start working at the home. This includes having verified references and Disclosure and Barring Service checks.	2 January 2024

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 arrangements are in place to— ensure the effective induction of each child into the home; that each child’s relevant plans are followed. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(i)(c)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that children have a positive experience of arriving at and moving on from the home. The registered person must ensure that relevant plans, including health plans, care plans and education, health and care plans are followed.	2 January 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; 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— protect and promote each child’s welfare; provide personalised care that meets each child’s needs, as recorded in the child’s relevant plans, taking account of the child’s background.	2 January 2024

(Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(ii)(iv)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that the care provided to children is personalised and meets children's individual needs and vulnerabilities.	
The registered person may only use devices for the monitoring or surveillance of children if— the monitoring or surveillance is for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child concerned, or other children. (Regulation 24 (1)(a)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that CCTV is only used for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.	2 January 2024
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. (Regulation 16 (1)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that details of staff qualifications and experience are included in the statement of purpose.	2 January 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 measures of control, discipline and restraint which may be used in relation to children in the home. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that staff are trained in the use of restraint techniques and that they use only those measures which they are trained to use safely.	2 January 2024
Schedule 4 sets out the other information that the registered person must keep in relation to a children's home. The registered person must— maintain in the home the records in Schedule 4;	2 January 2024

ensure that the records are kept up to date; and retain the records for at least 15 years from the date of the last entry. (Regulation 37 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c)) In particular, the registered person must maintain a register of children.	
After consultation with the fire and rescue authority, the registered person must— ensure, by means of fire drills and practices at suitable intervals, that persons working at the home and, so far as reasonably practicable, children are aware of the procedure to be followed in case of fire. (Regulation 25 (1)(d)) The registered person must ensure that staff undertake fire drills at the agreed times and that they include the children.	2 January 2024
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious; there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there; there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(b)(c)(e))	2 January 2024

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: 2724911

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: AP Care Homes Limited

Registered provider address: 307 Hale Road, Hale Barns, Altrincham WA15 8SS

Responsible individual: Post vacant

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Catherine Fargin, Social Care Regulatory Inspection Manager
Emma Thornton, Social Care Compliance Inspector

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