

2795987

Registered provider: The Hills Children's Homes Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The children's home is owned and run by a private organisation. The home is registered to care for up to four children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

The home is currently being led by a manager who is not yet registered.

There were two children living in the home at the time of the inspection. Both children were spoken to by the inspector.

The inspector was aware during this inspection of a current and ongoing investigation being led by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the setting in response to the incident were considered (where appropriate) alongside other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform the inspector's judgements.

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 December 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	Requires improvement to be good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: not previously inspected

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The home is newly registered with Ofsted, and this was the home's first inspection. Two young children have recently moved into the home. The home reflects the children's characters and interests. The staff encourage the children to play and be creative. The home is bright and well furnished and feels like a family home. Children's bedrooms are personalised with pictures on the walls and decorations that staff have helped them to choose.

Children are encouraged to engage in a range of activities. Staff support the children to do this together but also individually. This allows children to be independent as well as share positive time together. Staff provide good support for children's physical health. Children access local parks and go for walks. They enjoy using their bikes and scooters with the careful supervision of staff.

The children's mental health and well-being need specialist intervention. This has been identified by the manager, who is ensuring that the therapeutic input the children need is being prioritised in discussions with professionals. Staff have registered children with the relevant health services.

Both children's progress with education has been affected by their experiences. Staff have supported one child with starting a new school by working closely with them to increase the child's attendance. This is being done at the right pace for the child. The other child's needs have been identified through an assessment, and an appropriate provision is being identified. Both children are engaged in learning-based activities by the staff. However, there is a lack of planners for the children around education.

Staff use a playful and caring approach to the children. Children receive good support when they feel upset or worried. Children's behaviours are sensitively supported by the staff. Staff talk to children in a way that they understand. This means that the children are beginning to trust staff to keep them safer when processing their emotions. Staff are consistent when putting boundaries in place. This brings stability to the children's well-being and helps with their worries around attachments.

Staff encourage the children to share their thoughts and feelings about the home. Focused discussions are planned with the children to help them learn new things or talk about things that worry them. Meetings about the home take place each week with the children. However, the manager recognises that this is not always effective with both children present and has changed their approach to ensure that children feel they can have their say.

The children are helped to spend time with their families. The plan for family time is led by the children's wishes and feelings. Their choices are respected and advocated

for on their behalf by the manager. There is not enough information in children's care plans about how time with family can impact them. This means that staff do not have all the information they need to support children when they struggle to process their experiences.

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

The manager and the staff understand the children's experiences and vulnerabilities. Staff understand that past experiences can affect children's behaviours and how they communicate. Children have individual risk management and safety plans. However, these plans do not always contain all the information required. Staff's knowledge and the outcomes of some incidents are not yet fully embedded in documents. This is not having an effect on children. However, new staff would not have all the information they need to support children to be safe.

Staff have not yet received the training required to support children's behaviours as set out in the home's statement of purpose. The manager has addressed this shortfall and has a plan in place to ensure that staff receive the training from a qualified professional. Staff were observed to be providing care and support that aligned with the model of care preferred by the organisation.

Children are not going missing from the home. When children feel frustrated and want to leave the home, staff follow and support them rather than restrict them. Children are being helped to learn about the local area by accessing the community. The manager and staff have introduced the children to local police officers, and staff have received training from the police's missing-from-care team.

The management of any allegations made by children is good. The manager has ensured that incidents of this type are shared with the appropriate professionals. There is thorough and transparent oversight of incidents through to conclusion. This includes ensuring the child's involvement in the conclusion and progress of the allegation. Some information has not been transferred to the child's relevant risk management plan. Children are supported to understand how they can make a complaint and who they can speak to outside of the home.

There have been incidents of holding children in the home. These incidents have been well managed and have been reviewed and reflected on by the manager. The manager has ensured that staff who need to hold children are trained. In addition, the manager has identified that the model used by the staff is less suited to younger children. The manager is transitioning the staff team to a new model through planned training. This is a positive step in reducing the risk of injuries when children need to be held.

Staff require additional training in how medication is administered, and records are kept. There has been no effect on children. However, medication is not being counted, and children's individual items were not correctly labelled.

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

Since the home's recent registration, there have been early and significant changes to the leadership of the home and organisation. This has affected the initial development and stability of the management and staff team. Senior leaders took necessary and effective action in appointing a new manager. The manager is passionate about their role and the care of the children. Staff speak highly of the manager, and they identify as a team that is developing, improving and reaching stability.

As a result of the changes and shortfalls being identified, staff's probation periods have been extended. This is a positive action by the manager and one that will ensure that staff have the right skills and knowledge before being confirmed in post. It does mean that the team is not yet settled. Several new staff have been recruited and were waiting to start, pending the required checks. However, in the interim, there has been a need to employ agency staff. This has a negative effect on the consistency of relationships provided to the children. Some staff have worked above and beyond their expected patterns to cover shifts.

Some training courses for staff that had been provided as part of their induction were not of the required standard. The manager has identified this and has a training and development plan in place for current and new staff. This means that those staff are not yet delivering the specific support reflected in the home's statement of purpose or in children's care plans. Some training that is specific to the children's needs has not yet been identified.

Support and development discussions with staff are planned and carried out regularly. Staff feel supported and positive about the manager's approach and the direction they are taking with the development of the home. Team meetings are regular and thorough. However, the opinions and feedback of the staff team are not captured in records. Despite staff feel they can share their thoughts and experiences with managers in meetings and informally.

The manager does know the strengths and weaknesses in the home. They have good oversight of progress and have plans in place that track targets and actions for improvement. However, there are shortfalls in the updating of children's care plans to ensure that staff, especially those new to the home, have accurate information on children's needs.

Records in the home are regularly read and reviewed by the manager. However, there is not yet the required level of reflection and learning being recorded. Some of the oversight to incidents of children being held lacks assurance from the manager that practice is proportionate and necessary. The manager does not identify if there is a need to change practice in how children are supported.

Professionals speak positively about the manager and staff. A social worker said, 'Communication is excellent, more than in other homes.'

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 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)(b)) In particular, this refers to there being risk management and home care plans in place that identify known and potential risks for each child so that staff, especially those new to the home, understand the strategies for keeping children safe.	12 March 2025
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. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(c)) In particular, this relates to staff receiving the training required as set out in the home's statement of purpose to meet children's needs.	12 March 2025

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— ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate; 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)(b)(f)) In particular, this relates to key information from experiences and incidents being used to develop children's care plans and ensuring that they contain all the required information for staff to follow.	12 March 2025
The registered person must make arrangements for the handling, recording, safekeeping, safe administration and disposal of medicines received into the children's home. In particular the registered person must ensure that— medicine which is prescribed for a child is administered as prescribed to the child for whom it is prescribed and to no other child; and a record is kept of the administration of medicine to each child. (Regulation 23 (1) (2)(b)(c))	12 February 2025

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that where children placed in a home are not participating in education because they have been excluded or are not on a school roll for some other reason, the registered person and staff must work closely with the placing authority so that the child is supported and enabled to resume full-time education as soon as possible. In the interim, the child should be supported

to sustain or regain their confidence in education and be engaged in suitable structured activities. This particularly refers to the home having plans regarding the child's education and structuring days for children not in schools, so they continue to learn. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 28, paragraph 5.15)

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: 2795987

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: The Hills Children's Homes Limited

Registered provider address: Coronation Court, Northampton NN4 8SZ

Responsible individual: Post vacant

Registered manager: Danielle Roberts

Inspector

Chris Haines, Social Care Inspector

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