

SC005751

Registered provider: Care Afloat Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is operated by a private company. It provides care for one child with emotional and social difficulties. The provider offers an education service and therapeutic support from an external contractor.

The home is being run by a newly appointed manager who is in the process of registering with Ofsted.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

We last visited the home on 14 January 2021 to carry out a monitoring visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 February 2022

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	requires improvement to be good
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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: 21 August 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
21/08/2019	Full	Good
24/04/2018	Full	Good
11/10/2017	Full	Good
20/12/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

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

Two children have left the home since Ofsted last visited. Despite the best efforts of staff, progress was minimal and risk-taking behaviour was a constant concern, escalating to such an extent that staff could not keep either child safe. This resulted in placements being ended with limited opportunities to support planned transitions.

At the time of the inspection, one child was living at the home. He said that he felt cared for and gave examples of how staff try to support him. Relationships are positive and are sensitively used to try to help the child to develop resilience and feel better about himself. A professional said: '[Name of child] is afforded many opportunities but has, of late, not engaged. Despite the best efforts of staff, his progress has been stilted.'

Children are encouraged to attend the organisation's school. Staff work closely with teachers to adapt timetables to overcome barriers to learning. Despite this, attendance and engagement are poor, and children remain a significant distance away from achieving their academic potential.

Although not always successful, staff encourage children to maintain healthy lifestyles. Staff support children to access routine healthcare, and they engage specialist services when necessary. Strong links are maintained with the therapist, who provides direct support for the children as well as help, advice and guidance for staff. The manager and the therapist are keen to develop this relationship further to help staff better understand trauma-informed practice.

Children are given the support they need to maintain relationships with the important people in their lives. This includes enabling children to spend time with family members who live a significant distance from the home.

Despite the child living at the home since September 2021, there is little evidence that this is his home. Empty photo frames are examples of missed opportunities to make communal areas a celebration of the child's life. Except for the lounge, the home does not appear to be homely or welcoming. This has been recognised by the manager, who has started to involve the child in choosing colours to redecorate.

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

Staff are well motivated in their efforts to keep children safe. They take every opportunity to educate children through key work, direct work and ad hoc conversations. However, the determined efforts of staff have proved to be largely ineffective at reducing risk-taking behaviours, such as going missing from home or substance misuse.

Children often come with high-level concerns, such as child sexual or criminal exploitation. When children go missing, staff take swift action and work in partnership with a range of safeguarding agencies and professionals. This ensures the best possible response to this behaviour through a multi-agency approach.

The manager has not raised concerns when local authorities have not provided independent return interviews following episodes of missing from home, some of which were of significant concern. This is mitigated to some extent by the need to hold strategy meetings in response to the level of risk associated with this behaviour.

Risk management plans are lengthy, descriptive and contain language that is not helpful to children or staff. More significantly, they do not contain guidance for staff to follow when children are suspected to be under the influence of cannabis when returning home. Although no child has been harmed, there is a potential risk that is not fully understood or managed by staff.

When in the home, children are said to be respectful of the rules and boundaries. Sanctions are infrequent and it has not been necessary to use physical restraint.

Records of complaints lack detail and do not evidence that complaints are being effectively managed. For example, there is no evidence that a neighbour was contacted, following an incident in the home where they expressed concern to staff and called the police. This does not promote positive links in the community.

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

There has been a lack of management presence and leadership in this home. Staff are committed to the children but express a feeling of apathy about their role. Staff spoke about feeling disempowered and deskilled and having little responsibility beyond meeting the basic care needs of the children.

The previous registered manager has recently left, and an experienced and qualified manager has taken over the home. She has a good understanding of the challenges ahead and a clear plan for improvement. She has already started to focus on remotivating the team. Staff are enthusiastic about the manager's inclusive and developmental approach. The deputy manager wrote: 'The new manager seems to have more faith in my abilities and has already involved me in different areas, including decision-making.'

Children are cared for by a small team of experienced and qualified staff who have worked at this home for several years. Staff are trained in a range of subjects, including child sexual and criminal exploitation. However, the emerging needs of one child have highlighted a need for quality training in understanding mental health, trauma-informed practice and self-harm. A therapist said: 'Staff are doing everything they can and are aware that [name of child]'s mental health is deteriorating. There is no doubt that staff would benefit from more intense training.'

Children's records are disorganised. During the inspection, both the manager and staff found it difficult to find essential records, including some statutory documents. Several records did not contain up-to-date, and in some cases, very important information. The use of complex language in documents such as care plans and risk assessments makes them meaningless to the child.

Monitoring activity is not always effective. This was evident throughout the inspection when the manager failed to identify and address shortfalls, such as incomplete complaints records, poor quality records and badly organised records.

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
In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff— if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority's or a relevant person's performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 5 (c)) Specifically, ensure that concerns are escalated when the placing authority fails to offer independent return interviews following a child going missing.	31 March 2022
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; understand the barriers to learning that each child may face and take appropriate action to help the child to overcome any such barriers; help each child to understand the importance and value of education, learning, training and employment. (Regulation 8 (1) (2)(a)(i)(iii)(iv))	31 March 2022
The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.	31 March 2022

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; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(v)) Specifically, ensure that risk assessments provide specific guidance for staff about what action they should take if a child returns home and is suspected to be under the influence of cannabis.	
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 have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of 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— research and developments in relation to the ways in which the needs of children are best met; 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)(c)(f)(g)(i)(h))	31 March 2022

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; and are kept up to date. (Regulation 36 (1) (a)(b))	31 March 2022
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 (3))	31 March 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the house is homely, taking into consideration the child's individual tastes and personality. ('Guide to the Children's Home Regulations, including the standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- The registered manager should ensure that children's records are written in a way that the child can understand and is helpful to child. ('Guide to the Children's Home Regulations, including the 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 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: SC005751

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Care Afloat Limited

Registered provider address: 158-160 Birkrig, Digmoor Parade, Skelmersdale
WN8 9HP

Responsible individual: Michael Fletcher

Registered manager: Claire Russell

Inspector

Paul Scott, Social Care Inspector

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