

SC007608

Registered provider: Pear Tree Projects Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is owned and managed by a private provider. It provides care for up to three children who may have emotional and/or social difficulties.

During the inspection, the inspector spoke to all three of the children who live in the home.

The manager registered with Ofsted in March 2020.

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 this setting on 23 March 2021, to carry out a monitoring visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 March 2022

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

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

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

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 17 December 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
17/12/2019	Full	Good
16/10/2018	Full	Outstanding
09/01/2018	Full	Outstanding
03/03/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy trusting relationships with the staff, who are creative in how they work with the children. The staff engage with the children in diverse ways as they recognise the children's individual needs and what works best for each child. As a result, children make good progress from their starting points.

All children attend education or training. They are aspirational about their future careers, which is supported and encouraged by the staff. The staff attend all the children's education meetings and there is effective communication with the schools, including a daily handover. Working in partnership so effectively supports the children with their continued education progression.

The registered manager has been creative during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that the children who have not been able to visit the home are fully prepared before they move in. Children were provided with a virtual tour of the home, and video calls with the other children in the home and the staff. The manager has reflected on the success of this approach and intends to continue with this, alongside children visiting the home. This ensures that the children who move into the home are fully prepared and start to build relationships, which provides them with a sense of belonging.

Children are well supported in preparing to move on to independent living. There is a robust 'Preparing for Independence' plan in place, which covers all aspects of life that a child living independently will need to know. Children have tasks to complete and education material to read that support them to increase their knowledge and understanding. This provides the children with ongoing support and prepares them well for their future.

The home is furnished and decorated to a good standard. Lots of photos of the children enjoying activities are displayed throughout the home and in their bedrooms. The children said that they help the staff to choose which photos will be displayed. While the general cleanliness of the home is good, there is mould in the showers and the extractor fans are both dirty. A toilet seat is also damaged and needs replacing. This lack of care and attention to the home means that the children are not being provided with a clean and homely environment to live in.

All of the children spoke about daily arguments that take place between some of the children. One child said that this is the reason that they no longer attend the children's meetings. Another child said that when the arguments start, they try to keep out of the way and go into their bedroom. The registered manager and the staff are aware of this and while some work has been done with the children, this has not been effective.

Staff use a range of forums to seek the views of the children, including children's meetings and key-work sessions. However, the children say that due to the current staffing arrangements, with the exception of health appointments, they sometimes

do not have a choice about attending another child's appointment or activity. The current staffing ratios mean that the children are not able to make choices about their day-to-day living.

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

Children said that they feel safe living in the home and feel confident about raising any worries with either the registered manager or the staff.

Children's risk assessments are of good quality, and are implemented consistently by the staff, who understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Staff use key-work sessions and online education courses to increase the children's knowledge about risk-taking behaviours. This approach supports the children to develop meaningful relationships with the staff, which makes them increasingly safe.

Regular key-work sessions take place with the children. One child enjoys being involved with her key worker in writing up these sessions, and has chosen to record them as a monthly magazine. Staff are creative in their delivery of these sessions, for example by using real-life news stories. This gives the children the opportunity to discuss relevant issues, and increases their knowledge and understanding so that they can be aware of the potential risks.

Safer recruitment processes are followed when staff are appointed. This provides assurance that they are suitably vetted and qualified to provide care for the children.

The responsible individual completes an impact risk assessment prior to the children moving into the home. However, it does not include the identified risks, and does not consider the potential impact of these risks on either the children currently living in the home or on the child moving into the home. It is also not clear how the staff propose to manage these risks. This failure means that children are being placed without robust matching being undertaken, which has the potential to place them at risk.

While physical intervention has only been used on one occasion, the record of this is poor. The length of time the child was held for is recorded incorrectly, the child's views are not recorded appropriately and it is not clear from the record when the debriefs with the member of staff and the child took place. The record also does not evidence whether the manager feels that the use of the physical intervention was safe, appropriate, and proportionate. This failure means that the manager has no mechanism in place for reflection and to scrutinise practice to ensure that it is safe.

While few sanctions are given in the home, when they are given, they are not restorative in nature. This means that the staff are not providing the children with the opportunity to reflect on their behaviour and seek to make amends.

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

The manager is suitably qualified and experienced. She has a good understanding of the children and their needs. The manager is supported by a small, committed team of staff who share her vision for the home. This means that the children benefit from consistent staffing arrangements and practices, which provide them with stability and security.

The manager completes a review of the quality of care provided for children. However, the report does not include an action plan for the next monitoring period. This shortfall means that the manager cannot effectively monitor and review the progress that is being made, in order to improve practice and outcomes for the children.

Independent visits take place monthly. A shortfall identified at the last inspection was that the independent visitor did not consistently seek the views of the children, professionals and the staff. This shortfall has continued. When consultation does take place, the resulting report is a list of quotes which is impossible to attribute to any specific person. The parents spoken to during the inspection all said that they had never been contacted by the independent visitor. This shortfall means that the registered manager and Ofsted are unable to scrutinise who has been spoken to, and are unable to be satisfied that the children are safe.

Staff, including the registered manager, receive regular supervision. However, there is no opportunity for reflection on practice in these sessions. This means that the staff do not have the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences of caring for the children and make changes to their practice.

The manager ensures that the new staff receive an induction and a structured training programme that are relevant to the individual needs of the children. However, training records are not kept up to date and attendance on mandatory training could not be evidenced for all staff.

The registered manager has not notified Ofsted of two separate allegations that have been made against the staff. This failure means that Ofsted has not been given the opportunity to scrutinise the information in order to ensure that the children are safe.

The manager has internal monitoring and auditing systems in place to monitor how the home functions, and to monitor the performance of staff. However, these systems have failed to highlight the shortfalls identified during the inspection. This means that there is not an effective system in place to monitor the quality of care provided and give an understanding of the impact that this has on the children's progress.

Some parents said that the manager and staff could do more to keep them informed about their children and to seek their views. The registered manager acknowledges that there is more work to be done. She intends to build better relationships with the children's parents and family members, and ensure that their views are represented.

There is an inconsistent approach to recording information in the children's records. Some children's case records are not signed and dated, some have been added to after they have been signed off and some contain language that is not child-friendly. This limits the usefulness of the records as a resource for the staff, and hinders the records from being meaningful for the children.

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, 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. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)) This specifically relates to impact risk assessments.	2 April 2022
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— use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(h))	2 April 2022
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.	2 April 2022

The registered person must ensure that— 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)(b) (3)(b)(i)(ii)(c)) This specifically relates to physical intervention records.	
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation; 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; a child protection enquiry involving a child— is instigated; or concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(i)(ii)(e))	2 April 2022
The registered person must ensure that an independent person visits the children’s home at least once each month. When the independent person is carrying out a visit, the registered person must help the independent person— if they consent, to interview in private such of the children, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as the independent person requires.	2 April 2022

The independent person must produce a report about a visit (“the independent person’s report”) which sets out, in particular, the independent person’s opinion as to whether— children are effectively safeguarded; and the conduct of the home promotes children’s well-being. (Regulation 44 (1) (2)(a)(b) (4)(a)(b))	
The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children (“a quality of care review”) at least once every 6 months. After completing a quality of care review, the registered person must produce a written report about the quality of care review and the actions which the registered person intends to take as a result of the quality of care review (“the quality of care review report”). (Regulation 45 (1) (3))	2 April 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the home is maintained to a good standard. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- The registered person should ensure that the children are helped to develop the skills to have positive relationships with the other children in the home. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 38, paragraph 8.6)
- The registered person should ensure that any sanctions used to address poor behaviour should be restorative in nature, to help the children recognise the impact of their behaviour on themselves, other children, the staff caring for them and the wider community. In some cases, it will be important for the children to make reparation in some form to anyone hurt by their behaviour and the staff in the home should be skilled to support the children to understand this and carry it out. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 46, paragraph 9.38)
- The registered person should ensure that the home has enough suitably trained staff on duty to meet the assessed needs of all the children in the home, and that the children have the option to remain in the home with a member of staff if they do not want to undertake a specific activity. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 51, paragraph 10.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the staff develop effective working relationships with parents, and consult with them regularly. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 52, paragraph 10.3)

- The registered person should ensure that training records are kept up to date, and staff complete all mandatory training. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.8)
- The registered person should ensure that systems are in place so that all the staff, including the manager, receive regular supervision so that they can reflect on their practice and the needs of the children assigned to their care. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the children's case records are kept up to date, and signed and dated by the author of each entry. Once signed and dated, records should not be added to. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)
- The registered person should ensure that staff are familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Staff should record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way and information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality 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: SC007608

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Pear Tree Projects Limited

Registered provider address: Peartree House, Bolam, Darlington, County Durham DL2 2UP

Responsible individual: David Bartlett

Registered manager: Lesley Holywell

Inspector

Paula Shepherd, Social Care Inspector

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