

SC013743

Registered provider: Action for Children

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

Inspection dates: 8 to 9 August 2017

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

requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

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: 22 February 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home requires improvement to be good because:

- Plans the managers have to improve services are not yet reflected in a sustained improvement for children.

- The safeguarding policy does not provide sufficient guidance for staff about which safeguarding agencies, and departments, concerns should be referred to. It does not sufficiently reflect the needs of the children living here.
- Effective action has not been taken to respond to safeguarding concerns. A new procedure has recently been implemented, but its impact on practice is difficult to evaluate.
- Monitoring and reviewing systems are inconsistent and do not adequately ensure timely and thorough responses to concerns, identify gaps in records, or routinely review practice.
- Educational goals are not supported sufficiently well for every child.
- Medication administration records do not provide a complete picture of which members of staff administered each medication.
- Care plans do not provide a holistic picture of children's strengths, risks and needs. Plans lack detail about how children's culture, ethnicity and religion will be taken into account.
- Full information about why staff left previous roles is not collected as part of the organisation's recruitment process.
- A high number of agency staff continue to work at the home. Managers have taken action to recruit more permanent staff. This has not as yet significantly decreased the number of agency staff used.

The children's home's strengths:

- Children build strong, trusting relationships with staff.
- Leaders and managers have a commitment and a plan for improvement which have resulted in some improvements, and are likely to result in more.
- Children's activities are frequent, stimulating and enjoyable. This is a strength of the service.
- Staff and managers' relationships with children's social workers are effective.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
22/02/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
14/09/2016	Full	Requires improvement
08/03/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
18/11/2015	Full	Good

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 registered person must make arrangements for the handling, recording, safekeeping, safe administration and disposal of medicines received in the children's home. In particular the registered person must ensure that— a record is kept of the administration of medicine to each child. (Regulation 23(1)(2)(c)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure there are accurate records which make it clear who has administered each medication.	30/09/2017
The education standard is that children make measurable progress towards achieving their educational potential and are helped to do so. (2) In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— (a) that staff— (i) help each child to achieve the child's education and training targets, as recorded in the child's relevant plans; (vi) maintain regular contact with each child's education and training provider, including engaging with the provider and the placing authority to support the child's education and training and to maximise the child's achievement. (Regulation 8(1)(2)(a)(i)(vi))	30/09/2017
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; (Regulation 14(1)(a)) In particular, children's files are structured so that information is easy to find and relevant plans cross-reference issues adequately. The registered person must also ensure that care plans adequately reflect each child's religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.	30/09/2017
The registered person may only— (a) employ an individual to work at the children's home; or	30/09/2017

if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). (3) The requirements are that— (d) full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32(2), (3)(d) Schedule 2) The registered person must ensure that records for any person employed in the organisation who has regular contact with children at the home meet the requirements of Schedule 2. In particular, that the reasons for a person having left a particular role are included in their application.	
The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the home that- Helps children aspire to fulfil their potential and promotes their welfare; (2) in particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to – (h) use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13(2)(h)) In particular, ensure that monitoring systems identify and rectify any deficits in a timely manner. Also, to ensure that policies and procedures adequately reflect the particular environment of the home and the needs of the children who live here.	30/09/2017
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy which— (a) is intended to safeguard children accommodated in the children's home from abuse or neglect; and (b) sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect. The procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect must, in particular— (f) describe how and to whom staff are to report, without delay, any concern about abuse or neglect of a child. (Regulation 12(2)(1)(a) and (2)(f)) In particular, the safeguarding procedures must better reflect the particular needs of children who live here. The procedures must provide explicit information about the local arrangements for contacting and reporting issues to the local authority child protection services, including any timescales for referrals to be made and the detail a referral must include.	30/09/2017
The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. (2) In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the	30/09/2017

registered person to ensure— (a) that staff— (vi) take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; (Regulation 12(2)(a)(vi)) In particular, ensure that where a child has an unexplained bruise, details are consistently and appropriately recorded; and referred to the Local Area Designated Officer in a timely manner.	
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Recommendations

- Staff need to have the knowledge and skills to understand each child's education and training targets and their next steps for learning. If a child's progress is not in line with their agreed targets or next steps, staff should seek expert advice from education professionals, such as the Virtual School Head, SENCO, learning mentor or teacher. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 27, paragraph 5.11)

In particular, staff should ensure they work in co-operation with the range of educational professionals who work with each child to ensure that a child can make full use of any communication system they use.

- A child's EHC plan or statement of special educational needs may contain detail about planned and agreed approaches to restraint or restraint techniques to be applied in the day-to-day routine of the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 47, paragraph 9.43)

In particular, the registered person should ensure that the use of low level gates to limit a child's freedom of movement in the home is agreed at the beginning of a placement. The registered person should also ensure that the agreement is kept under regular review with all concerned, including, where possible, the child. The home's statement of purpose should clarify if restrictions, such as gates, are used.

- As set out in regulations 31–33, the registered person is responsible for maintaining good employment practice. They must ensure that recruitment, supervision and performance management of staff safeguards children and minimises potential risks to them. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)

In particular, ensure that clear audit trails are kept of how performance management concerns are managed and followed up. Also, ensure that

the number of supervision sessions each person receives meets the organisation's requirements.

- The registered person should have a workforce plan which can fulfil the workforce related requirements of regulation 16, schedule 1 (paragraphs 19 and 20). The plan should detail and keep appropriate records for staff in the home. The plan should be updated to include any new training and qualifications completed by staff while working at the home, and used to record the ongoing training and continuing professional development needs of staff – including the home's manager. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.8)

In particular, review whether each member of staff's training record adequately covers children's needs and evidences all training a member of staff has completed. The workforce development plan should include detail of how the registered person has verified that agency staff's training meets the children's needs.

- The registered person should only accept placements for children where they are satisfied that the home can respond effectively to the child's assessed needs as recorded in the child's relevant plans and where they have fully considered the impact that the placement will have on the existing group of children. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.14)

In particular, the impact assessment completed before a child arrives should confirm how the child's placement might affect any child already living in the home. Further, the assessment should include the measures that will be put in place to minimise any identified areas of need.

- The design of the home should include any necessary adaptation to meet the needs of children with disabilities or specific health issues. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 17, paragraph 3.24)

In particular, the kitchen area of the house should have further adaptations which improve children's ability to use it.

Inspection judgements

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

Children do not yet have consistently good experiences and do not progress well

because the care provided is variable, and does not fully support their needs. In addition, a number of significant concerns in the last six months show that leaders and managers do not robustly monitor and review the care and protection provided. There are signs that leaders and managers are improving the systems in place, but as yet these improvements are not fully embedded.

Managers have identified, and plan to improve, systems that allow children to make their views known. Their plans include reviewing how each child's communication can improve so that each child can voice their opinions. Children do not always quickly receive the right communication aids. This inhibits their abilities to improve their communication skills. It also limits their educational attainment. One child had to wait a considerable time for an electronic tablet and programs compatible with those he uses at school. Another child uses a book of pictures and symbols at school, but not all staff in the home were trained in its use and therefore continued to use Picture Exchange Communication System symbols with her. Actions taken so far have yet to demonstrate measurable improvements. Several improvement plans, such as regular children's meetings and a children's focus group, will only commence in September 2017.

Placement planning does not always guide staff sufficiently well. There is limited information about how staff should meet a child's cultural, linguistic and religious needs, even when these have been identified.

The progress children make in all areas of their development is not clear. The records do not provide a full picture of how the care provided supports their needs effectively. How staff record children's progress is changing. Staff are moving records to an online system, but this is not yet fully operational. No recommendation or requirement is made as there are clear plans to improve this process, and these plans are already in progress.

Staff support children's healthcare, but do not regularly access specialists who can support them to learn about how to care for children with complex physical needs and associated behavioural needs. Staff have no immediate or regular access to specialist services to help them consider the best way of supporting all children. Any specialised support is arranged by the local authority. However, staff help children to maintain good health, and children access local and specialised health services when necessary.

Arrangements to manage and administer medication are safe and well organised. However, records of medication administration are not always clear. Who administers a medication is not always recorded. No record of staff members' initials is kept to easily identify which person administered the medication. Monitoring systems are in place, but have not picked up these omissions.

Support to help children gain independence skills is variable. In two of the houses, children can help with daily living tasks such as doing the laundry and cooking meals. This opportunity is more limited for physically disabled children

because wheelchair accessible kitchen facilities have not been introduced.

Staff support children well to regularly access community facilities and to take part in activities they enjoy. The children are assisted to engage in new stimulating activities, which widen their experiences and understanding. This is an area of strength in the services provided.

Caring and compassionate staff show genuine warmth towards children and know a great deal about each child, including how he or she reacts to situations. Staff identify when a child's behaviour indicates that they are happy, unwell or sad, and invest time in building relationships with the children. Social workers have positive views of how well children are cared for. One said, 'This is definitely the right place, because staff recognise (her) needs.'

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

Staff demonstrate an improving awareness of safeguarding, but more is required to ensure that staff consistently follow good safeguarding practice in all areas of their work.

The safeguarding policy and procedure are comprehensive but generic, and do not support staff well in understanding the actions they must take. In particular, there is insufficient clarity for staff on what action to take in different circumstances. For example, the order in which they must inform different agencies of their concerns so they do not impede any police or social services investigations is unclear. The policy is not sufficiently detailed about how safeguarding procedures consider the particular complex needs of the children. In the last six months, five instances of concerns about safeguarding practice have been raised. Each investigation concluded that staff acted appropriately in their care of children. However, staff have not always reported incidents quickly, especially when the concern relates to unexplained bruising. Managers have recently strengthened reporting procedures, and are working to improve relations with the local authority designated officer by meeting with them and inviting them to the home.

Children are helped to behave well. There are no reported incidents of bullying, physical interventions are minimal and sanctions are not used. Reward systems for positive behaviour are less clear. The current behaviour management strategy lacks clarity about how staff should promote positive behaviour and respond to difficult behaviour. The manager had already noted that these two areas require improvement, and has made plans to address the shortfalls.

Risk assessments cover a wide range of topics. Important risks are detailed in each child's 'all about me' record, which ensures that staff are aware of the risks they should pay attention to. The number of risk assessments impedes regular

review, and makes it difficult for staff to keep them all in mind. For example, one child had a total of 78 risk assessments. Assessments regarding which children come to live at the home relate well to how the home can meet their needs. However, these assessments do not include a summary of the child's compatibility with children who live here already, and how any risks would be minimised.

Children do not go missing and there are appropriate procedures to follow should this happen. Staff complete information sheets for reference if a child should go missing, but not all of these contain up-to-date information. This may delay how quickly the police can respond and how quickly a child can be found.

Appropriate recruitment practice is followed for both internal and external candidates. There has been some success regarding recruitment of permanent staff, which is now keeping pace with the number of people who leave. Managers have also specified what training, skills and experience are needed for staff from recruitment agencies to work at the home. The staff team considers that this has improved the quality of agency staff, thus increasing the range of activities they can undertake to support the children.

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

The senior management team is ambitious, and is committed to making the necessary improvements. Managers are well aware of the need to improve the areas of practice noted in this report, and plan to make significant improvements by the end of 2017.

Improvements to recruitment, the use of agency staff and safeguarding practice have been made. As yet the impact of these improvements on children's experiences and progress is limited, but the changes made should support greater improvements in the future. Further plans are ready to implement once the summer holidays are finished. Staff morale has improved as a consequence of better leadership and management. Staff say that they have confidence in managers, they like the changes and they are well supported and listened to now.

A sufficient number of staff, including regular agency workers, provide consistency and stability for the children. In pursuit of improved permanence, the current recruitment drive seeks to increase staffing levels to lessen the impact of staff absences caused by circumstances such as sickness and maternity leave.

Staff benefit from the improved regularity and quality of their supervision and team meetings. Additional team leader arrangements for the night team provide better structure, and all staff with supervisor responsibilities are set to complete

training specific to this task by the end of September 2017.

Managers do not robustly ensure that the systems, records and procedures which underpin the operation of the home fully support the children's needs. For example, some policies and procedures used across the organisation's services do not relate well to the children's complex and multiple needs. Weak monitoring and reviewing systems lead to gaps and errors in records not being swiftly identified and rectified. Slow and incomplete responses to important aspects of practice have led to unnecessary drift and delay in managing concerns. For example, maintenance issues are not resolved in a timely way, and there is no clear overview of how issues are being dealt with at any given time. The one complaint received since the last inspection was not dealt with in line with the organisation's procedures. The complainant did not receive a response to their concern, and was not given information about who they could escalate their concern to if they were not satisfied with the outcome.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC013743

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Action for Children

Registered provider address: 3 The Boulevard, Ascot Road, Watford WD18 8AG

Responsible individual: Shelagh Frankcom

Registered manager: Jennifer Frogley

Inspectors

Ruth Coler, social care inspector

Natalie Trentham, HMI social care inspector

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