

SC013743

Registered provider: Action for Children

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home offers long-term care for up to 14 children who have profound and multiple disabilities, including communication difficulties, sensory impairment, complex health needs and challenging behaviour. The home is made up of three separate residential units which cater for groups of children who have diverse needs.

Currently, the home is only providing care from two of these units for seven children.

There has been no registered manager since 31 March 2021.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020. Since the date of the last inspection on 5 February 2020, Ofsted has not undertaken an inspection at this home.

Inspection dates: 13 to 14 April 2021

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: 5 February 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: declined in effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
05/02/2020	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
30/07/2019	Full	Good
12/03/2019	Interim	Improved effectiveness
07/08/2018	Full	Requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are supported by enthusiastic, caring, patient and creative staff who continually put a child's progress and experiences at the heart of what they do. For example, the staff have supported one child to begin to speak during this year where previously the child was non-verbal.

Children's education is supported well. During the pandemic, no matter what restrictions have been in place, children's educational achievements have been prioritised. One mother said that her child's learning had improved even though the child was home schooled during most of the pandemic.

The requirement made at the previous inspection in relation to supporting children's health is now met. The staff's support for children's health is effective. The staff have improved how well children receive support regarding their physiotherapy. The staff work well with health professionals to understand and meet a child's medical needs. Their careful monitoring and knowledge of one child have reduced the effects of the child's illness on her and are helping her to enjoy her life more.

Children's interests and social activities are supported well. The staff take every opportunity to provide engaging and interesting activities in and outside of the home. Photographs of the activities are frequently taken for the children and their families to remember what the children do each week. This supports families to talk with their child about their life and be able to know what they are doing.

Arrangements for children to speak to and meet with their families are well understood and met by the staff. One parent said that she is 'at peace' because she is confident in how her child is cared for. She can speak to staff regularly and any 'minor issues' are resolved quickly.

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

Children's safety is promoted well, and risks are managed effectively. Everyone who gave inspectors feedback about children's care said that children are safe at the home.

The staff understand the safeguarding risks for children who have a disability. The staff respond to safeguarding concerns appropriately. One social worker said that: 'Due to [child's initials]'s disabilities, he is unaware of safety. The staff at [name of home] ensure they monitor and supervise [him] at all times while accessing the community.'

The staff skilfully understand and support children to find ways to improve their behaviour. Care plans and risk assessments identify what the staff are expected to do in order to keep children safe and well. The guidance available for staff to follow promotes consistent and positive care for children. The staff consistently give a child

the same messages, which reinforces what behaviour they expect using visual cues that are appropriate for a child's needs. For one child, this is improving his ability to listen when he becomes excited.

Recruitment of permanent staff is generally undertaken well. Leaders and managers also carefully vet any agency staff who come to work at the home to ensure that they are suitable and can meet children's needs. However, recent recruitment records for staff transferring from another of the organisation's homes were not complete prior to these staff members commencing work. This means there is no evidence that all the necessary checks have been completed appropriately for these staff before they commenced work at the home. Leaders and managers are in the process of obtaining this information.

The home's environment is, in the main, clean and tidy, but maintenance of the property is variable. Two of the home's bathrooms are in an unacceptable state. The baths had mould around the sealants and one cupboard was in need of attention. These issues in the bathroom had not been noted by leaders and managers. Children's bedrooms, however, are well maintained and personalised.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the maintenance of some of the property because of the restrictions in place. As a result, many of the communal areas are tired and worn. In January 2021, external professionals undertook a fire safety risk assessment of the three buildings which make up this home. The assessments identified several issues which required attention, but there was no clear evidence available during the inspection that action has been taken to address them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers requires improvement to be good

There are significant weaknesses in the oversight of the home's operation. Two of the requirements from the last inspection have not been met. The chronology of a safeguarding concern does not contain details of all actions completed or a conclusion. The requirement to review the home's safeguarding policy is not met. However, the responsible individual is undertaking a wider review of all of the home's policies and said that she intends to make these more specific to the organisation's children's homes.

A new manager commenced work at the home at the beginning of April 2021. It is positive to note that there is only a few days' gap between the managers being in post. It is of concern, however, that senior managers could not evidence how the outgoing manager was in day-to-day charge of the home.

Leaders and managers have good aspirations for improving the care provided to children. There are clear lines of accountability and good arrangements for the day-to-day care of the children in each of the two houses which are currently in use. Senior staff in the houses have ensured that children's care has continued to be well organised and that their needs are met.

Most staff benefit from regular supervision and annual appraisals, which they appreciate and consider helpful. Some senior staff do not have regular supervision meetings as outlined in their signed supervision agreements.

Staff training has mainly relied on online training during the pandemic. The training matrix indicates that there are several gaps in staff renewing essential training. Most of the team members are awaiting an overdue refresher in behaviour management and restraint training. Staff, however, gave good information about how they are expected to support children if restraint was necessary, and were able to articulate the strategies that they use in order to ensure that physical restraint is only used as a last resort.

Competency checks on staff's medication administration knowledge are completed well. Staff also confirmed that face-to-face medication training would soon be taking place. However, there is no detailed plan in place that outlines how any gaps in training will be met or how face-to-face training will be reintroduced.

There are sufficient staff on duty to meet children's needs, but there remains a high reliance on agency staff to ensure that the right number of staff are always on duty. There are occasions where most staff on duty are agency staff. Nevertheless, the agency staff are generally well known to the children and some agency staff have worked here for several years. Observations of practice on the days of inspection indicated that children's needs were being met by all staff present, including agency staff.

Leaders and managers' aim to reduce agency staff use has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as several of the home's staff have been unavailable to work. Leaders and managers have employed three new members of staff in April 2021 and plan to recruit more.

Staff build effective relationships with a range of professionals, who speak highly of staff's communication skills and abilities to advocate for children and their involvement in the wider professional network around the child. One professional said: '[name of child] keyworker... keep[s] me up to date with any changes or significant events or incidents. I find them [the staff] easy to get hold of and there is always someone who will answer the phone.'

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— understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person. (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(v)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that the staff keep appropriate records regarding safeguarding concerns which provide details of all actions taken and a conclusion to each referral.	10 May 2021
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 premises used for the purposes of the home are designed, furnished, and maintained so that it protects each children from avoidable hazards to the child's health. (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(d)) This specifically relates to the provider ensuring that all issues identified in fire risk assessments are given immediate attention and resolved without delay. In relation to the fire risk assessments completed in January 2021, the registered person must take immediate steps to ensure that all issues are dealt with by the due date noted in these requirements and the letter to the provider dated 20 April 2021.	7 May 2021
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	10 May 2021

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))	
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. The registered person must— keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it; and notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (1)(3)(a)(b)) This requirement is repeated from the last inspection report.	10 May 2021
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy which— is intended to safeguard children accommodated in the children's home from abuse or neglect; and 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— provide for liaison and cooperation with any local authority which are, or may be, making a child protection enquiry in relation to a child accommodated in the home; provide for the prompt referral of an allegation about current or ongoing abuse or neglect in relation to a child to the placing authority and, if different, the local authority in whose area the home is located; provide for the prompt referral of an allegation about past abuse or neglect in relation to a child to the placing authority and, if different, the local authority in whose area the alleged abuse or neglect occurred; provide for records to be kept of an allegation of abuse or neglect, and the action taken in response; describe the measures which may be necessary to protect children following an allegation of abuse or neglect;	10 May 2021

describe how and to whom staff are to report, without delay, any concern about abuse or neglect of a child. (Regulation 34 (1)(a)(b)(2)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)) This particularly relates to the provider ensuring that they have a safeguarding policy which fully covers all of the points in this regulation. The safeguarding policy must also clearly outline the safeguarding risks to children with a disability. This requirement is repeated from the last inspection report.	
The registered person must ensure that all employees— undertake appropriate continuing professional development. Regulation 33 (4)(a)) This specifically relates to the provider ensuring that their training matrix always provides an accurate record of which training all staff have completed. Where any gaps are found, the provider must put a plan in action to quickly rectify these omissions.	10 May 2021
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; 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. Other records with respect to children's homes— A copy of the staff duty roster of persons working at the home, and a record of the actual rosters worked. (Regulation 37 (1)(2)(a)(b)(c) Schedule 4 (3)) In particular, the provider must ensure that the home's manager's working hours are clearly recorded.	10 May 2021

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered person should check that staff use legible and consistent signatures and initials when writing information in children's records. If the members of staff's initials or signatures are not legible, and/or consistent, leaders and managers should take action to ensure that this changes. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)

- The registered person should ensure that any recruitment information about staff who transfer to work at this home, from another home which the organisation operates, is available at this home before the person commences employment. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the numbers of supervision meetings for all staff meet the guidelines set out in the organisation's policy. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2)

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: SC013743

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Action for Children

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

Responsible individual: Bethan Davies

Registered manager: Vacant post

Inspectors

Ruth Coler, Social Care Inspector

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector

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