

SC023746

Registered provider: Ethelbert Specialist Homes Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is owned and run by a private organisation. It provides care and accommodation for up to three children with emotional, social and/or behavioural difficulties. There was one child living in the home at the time of this inspection.

There has been no registered manager in post since April 2023.

Inspection dates: 11, 12 and 20 July 2023

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious and widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded, and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 27 March 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
27/03/2023	Full	Good
02/06/2021	Full	Outstanding
10/12/2019	Full	Good
08/01/2019	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Serious and widespread concerns were found at this inspection. Ofsted issued the provider with a notice restricting accommodation following the inspection. This means that the home is not permitted to admit any additional children until the significant shortfalls have been addressed.

Since the last inspection, two children who had lived at the home for a long period moved on in a planned way. Following this, three children moved in from another home in the same organisation. It was planned that the manager and staff from the children's original home would transfer with them. However, these individuals left the organisation before the move. Despite this, the move still went ahead. Consequently, children have had a poor experience of care in this home and this has hindered their progress and positive outcomes.

There are currently three permanent staff members in the home. Since the last inspection, three staff, who had little relevant experience, were recruited and subsequently left after a short time. There is a reliance on the use of staff from other homes in the organisation. Additionally, the home has had three different managers in recent months; this has further exacerbated the staffing situation. As a result, children have lacked cohesive and consistent care. They have not experienced stability in the home and meaningful relationships have been lost.

Two of the children new to the home have subsequently moved on. One child left at short notice in an unplanned way. The child did not receive any aftercare or support from staff to help them make sense of this move. The other child moved on in a more planned way. However, this child described life in the home in recent weeks as being fraught with difficulties between staff and the other children in the home. The instability in the home has had a profound effect on this child's education and the exams that they were taking at the time. For example, staff from the child's school had to take them to their exams, due to residential staff not knowing them well enough. On one occasion, the child missed an exam.

The child who remains in the home does have positive relationships with staff, who genuinely care for her. However, the care provided falls short of the nurture and thoughtfulness that children need, due to the lack of direction and cohesion in the way that care is provided. For instance, the child's bedroom was found to be untidy and dirty. This child is of an age where it would be unreasonable to place responsibility on them to make their room welcoming, clean and cosy. There was a lack of clarity about who should be responsible for this. This issue had been rectified by managers by the completion of the inspection.

All children have engaged in education in some capacity. The child currently living in the home attends the school operated by the same organisation and has made some progress. Despite this, the care and support they receive is not helping them to

achieve to their maximum potential. For example, school staff say that progress in education for this child is closely linked to their emotional state when they arrive at school. However, the child's care plans do not demonstrate that there is sufficient focus on achieving this. For instance, strategies identified by the child's therapist, which had previously been successful in helping this child with school transitions, are not used or considered.

The child living at the home benefits from healthy routines. They participate in a range of activities. They are supported to attend Guides and have attended several community events with them. However, not all children have had their health needs sufficiently managed. For example, staff failed to keep accurate records for one child who required a course of medication. This had not been identified by leaders or managers.

Children's backgrounds, ethnicity and wider family networks are not fully known and understood by staff. This means that children are not supported to understand their history, identity or culture.

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

The lack of experience in the staff team and lack of direction and support from leaders and managers have meant that there is a poor safeguarding culture in the home. This places children at risk of harm.

In one example, staff failed to intervene effectively when a child was at risk. The child was in the company of unsuitable and unknown adults, who encouraged the child to engage in risky behaviour. This occurred in the proximity of another of the organisation's homes. No staff from this home attended the incident and it was left to staff from the other home to deal with. Communication between the two homes was poor and staff remain unclear of the details in terms of what risks were present, what the child experienced and how they were managed. There has been no review of the incident and therefore no learning has been identified to better inform staff practice and understanding.

Incident records and daily logs demonstrate that the language used by staff describes children placing themselves at risk, rather than identifying children's vulnerabilities and risk of exploitation, and how staff can help to keep them safe.

There is a similar concern in relation to staff responses when children go missing from home. Staff follow children's missing protocols and take appropriate action when children go missing. However, when children return, staff lack professional curiosity about where they have been, what they were doing and what they have experienced. In a recent example, there was no follow-up for a child who was missing from home for several hours. The child's social worker reported to the inspectors that they struggled to get a clear account from staff as to what had happened.

Staff work in partnership with relevant safeguarding agencies in response to concerns, and share information appropriately as required. There have been no allegations against staff in the home.

Not all staff are suitably experienced and trained to meet the needs of children. In one example, a staff member who had no prior social care experience and who had not completed core training, such as safeguarding and behaviour management, worked alone at the home. The same staff member had also supported physical interventions without being trained to do so. This created a preventable risk to children.

Children's individual behaviour management plans are clear and identify a range of useful strategies to guide staff. Staff have dealt with several challenging incidents well, demonstrating resilience and patience to support children to calm and settle. Staff use physical intervention on occasion to keep themselves and children safe. Incident records are clear and demonstrate that restraints are used as a last resort and for as short a time as possible. However, the conversations that take place with children after physical interventions and incidents tend to focus on their behaviours, rather than reflect on the incident as a whole with a view to learning. The managers' reviews of these incidents do not comment on the physical intervention practice in terms of being satisfied that the intervention was appropriate and safe.

Staff newly recruited to the home are carefully checked and vetted, in line with safe recruitment procedures.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The strategic decision to move all three children from one home to another was poorly planned and executed. The children were relatively settled in the previous home and had strong relationships with the staff and manager.

When it was apparent that the manager and five of the staff would be leaving the organisation, this planned move was not revised to consider the impact on the children. Similarly, the close proximity of another of the provider's homes, which accommodates children with similar risk factors in relation to being vulnerable to exploitation, was not considered. Some of these children were known to each other as they attend the provider's school, and the resulting dynamics had a significant impact on the safety, progress and experience of children in both homes.

There has been no stable manager with oversight of day-to-day care in the home for a sustained period. At the time of the inspection, the current acting manager had only been in post for two weeks. This means that there has been no clear direction and oversight in terms of the day-to-day care of the children.

Individual staff make their best efforts in difficult circumstances but there is no cohesion as a team and there are gaps in the individual supervisions provided to staff and managers. There has been one team meeting since this home admitted the three children. Consequently, there is no opportunity for reflection, for staff to think

about the emotional impact of their work or a shared approach to understanding children's needs. Previously, staff benefited from support from a therapist to facilitate child-focused discussions as a team. However, this is no longer available. This means that staff do not always provide care that is well informed and based on an understanding of children's previous experiences.

Building an effective staff team has been hindered by poor retention of new staff. The decision to put staff with little or no residential care experience on shift without completing core child protection and behaviour management training has placed an additional burden on experienced staff. This also sets an unreasonable expectation for new staff to manage difficult situations and dynamics without the required training and management support. This has potentially put children at risk and is indicative of poor decision-making that has contributed to the poor safeguarding culture and poor outcomes for 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, 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 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; ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child; ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c)(d)(e))	29 August 2023
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust; an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and positive responses to other children and adults In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— strive to gain each child's respect and trust; understand how children's previous experiences and present emotions can be communicated through behaviour and have	29 August 2023

the competence and skills to interpret these and develop positive relationships with children. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(viii)(ix))	
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— 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 attend education or training in accordance with the expectations in the child’s relevant plans. (Regulation 8 (1) (2)(a)(iii)(x))	29 August 2023
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; help each child to understand how to keep safe; 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)(a)(i)(ii)(b)) In particular, ensure that staff make all reasonable effort to check on the welfare of children when they have been missing or at risk of harm and update risk assessments in response to new information.	29 August 2023
The registered person must make arrangements for the handling, recording, safekeeping, safe administration and disposal of medicines received into the children’s home.	29 August 2023

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))	
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home's statement of purpose; that arrangements are in place to— ensure the effective induction of each child into the home; manage and review the placement of each child in the home; and plan for, and help, each child to prepare to leave the home or to move into adult care in a way that is consistent with arrangements agreed with the child's placing authority. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iii))	29 August 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the children's home is a safe and supportive environment. In particular, staff should support children to learn about their own heritage and culture. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 16, paragraph 3.14)
- The registered person should ensure that arrangements for staff recruitment, staff supervision and performance management of staff safeguard children and minimise potential risks. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 3.10)

- The registered person should implement a system which ensures that all staff, including the manager, receive supervision of their practice which allows them to 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 records of restraint are kept which enable them and staff to review the use of control, discipline and restraint to identify effective practice and respond promptly where any issues or trends of concern emerge. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 49, paragraph 9.59)
- The registered person should ensure that any child who has been restrained should be given the opportunity to express their feelings about their experience of the restraint as soon as is practicable. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 50, paragraph 9.60)

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: SC023746

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Ethelbert Specialist Homes Limited

Registered provider address: Ethelbert Specialist Homes Limited, 17 Leigh Road, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 5EU

Responsible individual: Leslie Davenport

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Lee Kirwin, Regulatory Inspection Manager
Jules Harrild, Social Care Inspector

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