

SC034211

Registered provider: Bristol City Council

Interim inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This local authority children's home is registered for up to four children who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The home is taking part in the Home Office's national initiative to accommodate young unaccompanied asylum seekers. In the past year, the home has accommodated children from Albania, Eritrea and Iran, as well as those from the local authority area.

Inspection date: 5 October 2017

Judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Date of last inspection: 3 May 2017

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

This inspection

The effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection

This home was judged requires improvement to be good at the last full inspection. At the interim inspection, Ofsted judges that it has declined in effectiveness.

The home has been through a turbulent period since the last inspection. There have been staff shortages, which coincided with looking after a group of children with very different and conflicting needs.

The registered manager said that during July and August, staff sickness meant that she had only five out of her 10 permanent staff available for work. Some staff have left and others are considering doing so. The registered manager said that there have been

problems in recruiting staff of sufficient quality to fill vacant posts.

Staffing was most stretched during July and August 2017. It is just starting to improve, but this will take time. The home's managers are currently undertaking a recruitment drive and two new staff members are due to start in December. One of these staff members is being recruited to a specialist project, so their recruitment may not make very much difference to the overall staffing on each shift.

There is a repeating pattern emerging. The home makes some progress, then there is a deterioration in the service. Some of the improvements made at the end of 2016, such as the quality of the environment, have been sustained. Others, such as staffing levels and the frequency of staff supervision, have not.

The home has a loyal and committed permanent staff team. They are supported by casual staff who are not linked permanently to the home, but they are employed by the local authority. Five of the casual staff worked regularly in this home. They know the young people and work well with the permanent staff team. The senior managers made a decision to disband this casual staff group. The permanent staff, together with the registered manager and her deputies, worked hard to fill the gaps in the rota. The manager was able to retain some of the casual staff to work at this home, which was positive. Some of the casual staff have formed good relationships with individual children and have worked well with them.

When shifts could not all be filled by local authority employees, the manager has had no choice but to request external agency staff. Some agency staff are not able to meet the children's needs. They cannot support their colleagues in the same way that a permanent member of staff could. For example, they cannot access the home's computers, so they cannot use electronic recording systems. They do not fully understand the children's histories. They cannot drive the home's car or be left in the home alone. These limitations have a direct impact on children.

For example, in the early hours of one morning, a very vulnerable 13-year-old child had to return home in a taxi after being missing. This was because they were on two-to-one staffing at the time and there were no permanent members of staff available to pick them up. Other children have sometimes had their planned activities disrupted because the right staff have not been available to support them.

The permanent staff were concerned about some of their agency colleagues' practice. They observed that some agency staff were frightened of the children, that the atmosphere on the shift changed when they were working and that children's behaviour escalated. Some agency staff called the police in relatively low-key situations, where the permanent staff would not have done so. This means that children are potentially exposed to the criminal justice system, with lasting consequences, when there is no need.

Agency staff are not trained to carry out restraints. Although the home has had only 12 restraints since the last inspection, trying to manage the children's more extreme

behaviour with only one permanent staff member on duty has, at times, placed staff and children at risk of harm.

The registered manager is well aware that children are distressed by staff changes. To minimise this, she has come into the home when on call at night and at weekends. The manager and deputies have also worked night shifts to support the children. Were it not for their dedication, the situation for the children would have been far worse. This was not sustainable in the long run, because it proved exhausting and left no time for management tasks.

For example, staff supervision has not always taken place as planned. Staff have received as much informal support as their managers could provide under the circumstances. There has been a team day and they have had informal discussions. This is not sufficient to support staff who are working with children who have complex needs. A new requirement has been made.

Other management shortfalls include some monitoring of restraint records. Some records contain a good account of the post-incident debriefing process. Others show no evidence of debriefing the child or staff member. This limits the extent to which all parties can learn from the experience.

The registered manager has made good progress towards completing the children's files. These are much improved since the last inspection. However, the requirement from the last inspection is not yet met, because some of the documents on the files are still not up to date. For example, children's risk assessments have improved and now contain historical risks. However, these have not been redrafted to show that the level of risk has changed. Some show inaccurate information about the child's behaviour. The requirement has been repeated.

On 16 October 2017, after many decades in her present role, the registered manager has the opportunity to go on secondment to support her professional development. She will be working on the local authority's new Staying Put Project. Although this is very positive at one level and she will remain in contact with the home as part of her new role, this is yet another change for the team and for the children.

Senior managers have appointed a member of staff from another children's home to stand in for the registered manager during her secondment. This person will have to apply to Ofsted to be registered, if the manager's secondment is to last for more than the initial three months.

To compound the staffing problems, there have been serious incidents due to the mix of children in the home. The registered manager scrutinises referrals closely. She advocates strongly for not accepting children whose needs the home cannot meet. She firmly declines admission to any children who will not be a good match for the existing residents. However, the registered manager has been overruled by senior managers on two occasions.

In one case, a child was admitted as an emergency into a bedroom without a fire door closure. This child was moved on after three days but was at risk while he occupied that room.

Another child was admitted in spite of a risk assessment to the effect that his assessed needs were incompatible with the existing residents. In this instance, the registered manager and a social worker for another child of the same age both expressed concerns about the plan to admit him. As a result of this admission and the effect that it had on the residents, the other child had to be moved at short notice. This was predictable and avoidable.

Since the last inspection, the children and staff have experienced a series of potentially dangerous incidents in the home and outside in the neighbourhood. These proved very difficult to manage with the staffing problems described above. One 13-year-old child went missing several times during their two-month placement, and was often out until the early hours of the morning. He and his peer of the same age were smoking cannabis together.

Other children did a great deal of damage in the home and were violent towards the staff. Two of the existing residents do not get along together and staff records note on 22 August that 'the relationship between (child 1) and (child 2) seems to have totally broken down'. On 30 August, staff had to lock themselves in the office for their own protection.

One child suffers from night terrors. For months, the staff sat up for long hours during the night to support and comfort him. There is no waking night provision in this home, so the staff concerned were supposed to be sleeping. They have now helped this child to settle a little earlier and they have been able to reduce the time spent sitting on the landing. Another child, who is very sensitive to noise, found the numerous incidents, as well as staff presence on the landing, very difficult to cope with.

It is remarkable that the staff managed as well as they did during this difficult time. One casual member of staff wrote in the shift log that they had 'done three sleep-ins in [the] last seven days' and was suffering as a result of the late nights and early starts. 'I think you guys are superhuman to be managing with the staffing issues and the late nights.' In spite of all this, the staff speak very highly of their jobs, the children and their genuine affection and warmth towards them.

The requirement made at the last inspection about leadership and management has been repeated. There is now an additional element about the need for sufficient staff. A compliance notice has been issued with regard to this requirement.

The home's statement of purpose has not been updated for at least a year. It says that the home will accept children for short-term intervention for up to 16 weeks. This is clearly not the case. Some children have lived in the home for nine months and in one case, well over a year. A new requirement has been made to update the statement of purpose. The managers must ensure that the home operates in line with this document.

Only one of the four requirements from the last inspection has been met in full. One asylum-seeking child had not had prompt access to an interpreter. He had not been adequately consulted about his religious, cultural and educational needs. The registered manager is now much more assertive about obtaining support for any child whose first language is not English. This child's language skills have improved considerably since the last inspection. The manager rightly insists on an interpreter attending all important meetings. This requirement is met.

There were no new staff files available for inspection. No work has been done on the staff files which, at the last inspection, were lacking a full employment history. This is because the staff concerned are on long-term sickness absence and are not available. This requirement has been repeated.

The recommendation made about achieving consistency in behaviour management has not been met. This has now been incorporated into the requirement under leadership and management.

In spite of the serious shortfalls described above, all three children have made progress in the home. For example, two children are now in full-time mainstream education. In view of their previous disrupted schooling, this is good. English is not their first language, so the achievement is all the more commendable.

The third child has been offered three hours per week of education. The registered manager has challenged this with his previous school because it is insufficient to provide the education that he needs. During the inspection, the manager learned that the child has now been accepted by an alternative provision. This is good news, because he can now work towards the full timetable that he needs.

Two of the children have settled so well that they are now actively working towards a move into foster care. This is an excellent achievement. One child is being supported through the process of seeking asylum in this country. Another child helped and supported him when he first arrived. She was nominated for a special award for her contribution.

These achievements have been possible because the home has a dedicated, skilled permanent staff team that keeps children at the centre of its practice. The registered manager is highly experienced and leads her team well. The home's real strengths mean that it has the potential to be good. This is unlikely to occur unless there is an increase in permanent staff and the local authority is able to retain them.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
03/05/2017	Full	Requires improvement to be good
21/12/2016	Full	Good
21/09/2016	Full	Inadequate
30/06/2016	Full	Inadequate

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 leadership and management standard 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: lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate; 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; 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 feedback on the experiences of children, including complaints received; and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the	26/11/2017

quality of care provided in the home. This is with particular reference to ensuring that there are sufficient staff in the children's home to care for the children and to allow enough management time for the registered manager's tasks to be completed. The registered person must ensure that the use of agency staff is kept to a minimum. They must continue to work towards appointing sufficient permanent staff to allow for seasonal variations in staff availability, sickness and other factors. The registered person must ensure that all staff asked to work with children who have complex needs have the skills to do so safely. The staff must work together as a team to ensure that children receive consistent care. The registered person should not place children who are risk assessed as not being suitable to be matched with existing residents of the home. The registered person should not place children in rooms without effective fire door closure devices. (Regulation 13 (1) and (2))	
Statement of purpose 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 (3) (a) and (b))	26/11/2017
Fitness of workers The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The registered person may only employ an individual to work at the children's home if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). The requirements are that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. In particular, ensure that all staff working in the home have complete information on their files in relation to their full employment history. Also, ensure that all staff files contain two written references and all other documentary information in line with Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (3) and Schedule 2)	26/11/2017
Employment of staff The registered person must ensure that all employees undertake appropriate continuing professional development and receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience.	26/11/2017

In particular, ensure that all staff receive regular supervision to guide their practice and professional development. (Regulation 33 (4) (a) and (b))	
Children's case records 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, are kept up to date and are signed and dated by the author of each entry. In particular, ensure that all children have case records that are regularly updated to reflect changes in the care plan or risk assessment. (Regulation 36 (1) (a) (b) and (c))	26/11/2017

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

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.

This inspection focused on the effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection.

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: SC034211

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Bristol City Council, Director of Legal Services, City Hall, College Green, Bristol BS1 5TR

Responsible individual: James Beardall

Registered manager: Patricia Harding

Inspector(s)

Heather Chaplin, social care inspector

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