

SC035439

Registered provider: Lancashire County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is operated by a local authority and is registered to provide care for up to three children who may be experiencing emotional and/or social difficulties.

At the time of the inspection, two children were living at the home. Both children were present and were spoken to during the inspection.

The manager registered with Ofsted in October 2023. The manager is currently absent and an interim manager is leading the home. They are in the process of submitting their application to register.

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 October 2024

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: 11 June 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Enforcement action since last inspection:

The home was judged to be inadequate at inspection on 11 and 12 June 2024. As a result of the concerns identified at inspection, on 17 June 2024 compliance notices

were issued under regulation 12 (the protection of children standard) and regulation 13 (the leadership and management standard).

A monitoring visit took place on 29 July 2024 to consider the progress made in relation to the compliance notices. At the subsequent case review it was decided that not enough progress had been made to meet the steps in the notices. On 2 August 2024 further compliance notices were issued under regulations 12 and 13.

This inspection included consideration of the compliance notices.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/06/2024	Full	Inadequate
06/06/2023	Full	Good
13/03/2023	Full	Requires improvement to be good
05/01/2022	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

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

Children are not yet making consistent progress across all areas of their lives. Leaders and managers have begun putting in place necessary changes to improve the quality of children's experiences.

Leaders and managers have now set clear expectations for how staff should support children to maintain a hygienic environment. Staff now understand how to encourage children to complete independent household tasks, while also providing nurturing care. Staff have helped children to personalise their bedrooms, meaning that children feel more invested in keeping their space tidy. Children bedrooms are kept clean.

Children do not yet benefit from living in a homely and welcoming environment. Although staff have redecorated and updated some rooms, the building still feels largely institutional due to plain corridors, signage, and visible wear-and-tear. Children said, 'You can tell it's a care home as soon as you walk through the door' and 'Broken things take ages to get fixed.' At the time of inspection, there was a broken trampoline in the garden. The manager is developing a program for household improvements and is involving children in decisions about the home's appearance.

Children's experiences of education continue to be poor. Staff actively liaise with the virtual school and educational providers; however, neither child is currently engaged in formal education, employment, or training. Clear plans to support children's return to education are not yet in place.

While children are out of formal education, staff offer a variety of learning opportunities. A daily term-time schedule has been established for each child, including educational worksheets, online learning, and other educational activities. However, staff have had varied success engaging children with this informal education.

Children are offered a variety of enjoyable activities, with staff documenting their experiences through photos and mementos. This supports children in learning important social skills and building stronger relationships with staff.

Managers conduct a thorough assessment before children move into the home to ensure that staff can meet each child's needs. Through careful planning, children are also well-supported when they are moving out of the home. Children report positive experiences during major life changes.

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

The registered manager has improved oversight of safeguarding incidents, with Ofsted being appropriately notified when children are at risk. Enhanced systems for internal and external oversight have increased children's safety.

Leaders and managers have refined children's risk assessments. Strategies for staff are now clearer, information is more streamlined, and the language is easier to understand. Staff sign and date to confirm they have read and understood the document. Risk assessments are now a standing agenda item during daily handovers and team meetings. The manager is working to ensure that all new or emerging risks related to criminal and sexual exploitation are included in children's risk assessments. Staff's understanding of how to keep children safe is improving.

When children go missing, staff take all necessary steps to bring them home safely. Staff are working to build stronger relationships with children to better understand the reasons for absences. Consequently, children are going missing from home less frequently.

Leaders and managers take allegations seriously, thoroughly investigating any concerns. Children are kept informed throughout these processes. Concerns regarding staff conduct are well-managed.

Staff are using a more consistent approach to support and manage children's behaviour. Each child has a personalised behaviour support plan, helping staff understand what strategies work best for each child. Children are experiencing more consistent care.

Only one incident has required staff to physically hold a child for safety reasons. The record of this incident is detailed, clearly documenting the necessity of this action to keep the child safe. Relationships between children and staff are improving.

All staff have now completed training in safe medication handling. However, some gaps and errors remain in the recording of medication administration, posing a potential risk of harm if medication is administered incorrectly.

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

The registered manager is currently off work, with a suitably qualified and experienced manager leading the team in his absence. Staff say that the acting manager provides approachable and transparent support. Staff also said that since the last inspection, expectations around their roles have become clearer, resulting in more consistent care for children.

Leaders and managers work well with the team around each child. Social workers said that communication is always good, and that staff advocate well on behalf of children. The acting manager is now trying to use these professional networks to drive improvements for children, especially in education.

Staff receive regular supervision that encourages reflection on their role and ways to better support children. However, staff have not had an annual appraisal in some time, which limits opportunities for formally reviewing performance and setting critical professional development goals.

Staff training is now up to date, with all team members completing training specific to the children's needs. Staff possess the skills and knowledge necessary to provide consistent care.

The manager has completed an annual assessment of local area risks. Currently, this assessment does not account for the proximity of a nearby town and its associated risks. Additionally, it inappropriately contains specific details from children's care plans. This is a missed opportunity to identify and manage local risks.

Leaders and managers have successfully recruited a complete staff team, with sufficient staff caring for the children and reduced reliance on agency staff. One new recruit is still completing pre-employment checks, after which the home will be fully staffed with permanent employees. This will allow children to build familiarity with the adults looking after them.

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 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; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(iii)(v)(vi)(vii)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that the children's individual risk management identify all new and emerging risks for each child, particularly in relation to criminal and sexual exploitation.	31 December 2024
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—	31 December 2024

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; raise any need for further assessment or specialist provision in relation to a child with the child's education or training provider and the child's placing authority; help a child who is excluded from school, or who is of compulsory school age but not attending school, to access educational and training support throughout the period of exclusion or non-attendance and to return to school as soon as possible. (Regulation 8 (1) (2)(a)(vi)(vii)(viii))	
The registered person must make arrangements for the handling, recording, safekeeping, safe administration and disposal of medicines received into the children's home. In particular the registered person must ensure that— medicine which is prescribed for a child is administered as prescribed to the child for whom it is prescribed and to no other child. a record is kept of the administration of medicine to each child. (Regulation 23 (1) (2)(b)(c)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that medication is administered consistently and safely. All records must be up-to-date and accurate, even when a child has not taken their medication.	31 December 2024
The registered person must ensure that all employees—have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. (Regulation 33(4)(C)).	31 December 2024

Recommendations

- The registered person should review the appropriateness and suitability of the location and premises of the home at least once a year. The review should include the identification of any risks and opportunities presented by the home's location and strategies for managing these. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 64, paragraph 15.1)
- The registered person should make sure that the home is a nurturing and supportive environment that meet the needs of the children who live there. They

will, in most cases, be homely, domestic environments. Children's homes must comply with relevant health and safety legislations (alarms, food hygiene etc.); however in doing so, homes should seek as far as possible to maintain a domestic rather than 'institutional' impression. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 15, paragraph 3.9)

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: SC035439

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Lancashire County Council

Registered provider address: County Hall, Preston PR1 8XJ

Responsible individual: Michael Nunn

Registered manager: Richard Lawler

Inspector

Nicola Shaw, Social Care Inspector

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