

SC037256

Registered provider: Suffolk County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This local authority home provides care and accommodation for up to seven children aged between 11 and 18 years. The home looks after children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Inspection dates: 13 to 14 June 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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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: 3 November 2016

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:

- There continues to be a significant number of incidents of children going missing from the home.
- The children regularly leave the home during the late evening, without permission. This poses risks in terms of peer influence, substance misuse and road safety.
- Tensions remain between the children, who at times feel unsafe in the home. Although these tensions are decreasing, there are recent incidents that the children easily recall.
- The analysis of the data relating to the incidents of children going missing from the home is not fully utilised.
- The recruitment checks for new staff are not robust enough.
- The manager has failed to notify Ofsted of two serious incidents in the home.

The children's home's strengths:

- The management of the home has improved. There is a concerted drive to make positive changes and to improve the children's experiences.
- The staff team is experienced and stable. It provides continuity of care and consistency of approach.
- Attendance in education has improved for the majority of the children.
- The children all benefit from good relationships with the staff.
- Multi-agency working is strong. The management team has proactively promoted this. Work takes place with a wide range of external professionals to identify concerns and actions to reduce these.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
03/11/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
20/07/2016	Full	Requires improvement
09/03/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
03/11/2015	Full	Requires improvement

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— 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 and help each child to understand how to keep safe. (Regulation 12(1)(2)(a)(i)(ii))	30/06/2017
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40(4)(e))	30/06/2017

Recommendations

- Evaluation of missing from home incidents should be undertaken. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.31)
In particular, using the wide range of data available in the missing from home records, further develop the evaluation of these incidents to better inform the home's understanding of them.
- 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)
This is with particular regard to ensuring that checks relating to the reasons for staff ceasing prior employment with children or vulnerable adults are explored effectively.

Inspection judgements

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

The home provides care that is tailored to meet the children's individual needs. The staff know the children well and create care plans that support them to make progress. These plans include an assessment of the risks that are pertinent to the child. Although these risks are identified, they often do not reduce after the child's admission to the home, and for some children the risks have increased. One social worker said that a child had, 'picked up some negative behaviours', since coming to the home. Feedback from social workers in regard to progress is mixed. The feedback identifies concerns that several of the children are not making sufficient progress, and for some children, there has been a deterioration in their behaviour since their admission. This includes an increase in incidents of going missing and increased drug use in one instance. Despite the concentrated efforts of the staff, the culture of children going missing from the home continues. This places children at risk and hinders their overall progress.

The relationships between the staff and the children are good. The children are positive about the staff. One child said, 'The staff are nice and always fair.' A social worker spoke of good relationships. They said, 'His key worker gets on very well with him and has come in on his days off to take him [child] to contact.' Key-working sessions are regular and ensure that children are offered support, and that areas of difficulty are discussed and addressed. The majority of the children spoken to talked positively about being at the home. However, some of the children do raise some concerns about the hierarchy between the children, and some children causing damage to the home. There was little evidence of damage to the house because repairs and replacements are made in a timely manner.

The house is in a residential area of the town. The environment is homely, and there is enough space for the children to spend time in groups or on their own. The children benefit from a choice of bedroom and decor. The house is clean and orderly. There is a new front door and new carpet tiling throughout the ground floor and stairway. The garden is established and includes a pleasant seating area and grassed area that the children use. This encourages children to spend time outside. The children can easily get into town to use the amenities or to meet up with peers.

The children's attendance in school has generally improved since the last inspection. All of the children have an education provision, and the staff work closely with the schools to ensure that barriers to attending are addressed. One child has just finished his GCSEs without any gaps in attendance. The children are supported to apply for further education courses at college. The staff encourage the children to meet the college's entry criteria by working hard towards their exams. The staff celebrate the children's school achievements. They took the children for a celebratory meal as the term ended, to acknowledge the children's hard work and effort.

The staff support the children's psychological health well. The mental health support

team provides a consultancy service. This gives the staff direction and guidance in the care of children who display self-injurious behaviour or low mood. This has been successful in reducing the number of incidents for one child. Staff are fully aware of the triggers of the child's behaviours, and they have built up trusting relationships that support the child during difficult periods. The staff work closely with an agency called Turning Point, which provides advice and support to children who are susceptible to substance misuse.

The staff prepare the children for independence and support them to gain independent life skills. The use of a semi-independence flat in the home has been reviewed to ensure that all of the children get opportunities to cook and prepare meals with staff support.

Transition work for the children leaving the home is planned well. The manager is proactive and works well within a multi-disciplinary team to ensure that future placements are given due thought and consideration.

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

The children in this home do not all feel safe. Some of the children feel intimidated by others, and they are aware of the risks posed by other children. The children regularly leave the home and fail to return at agreed times. A number of these incidents have taken place at night. Although there has been a strong response to these incidents, for the majority of children, risk taking has increased.

There are a high number of missing from home incidents. The number of incidents has increased each month since January 2017. In both April and May 2017, there were more incidents of children going missing than there were in total in the first three months of the year. The management team analyses these incidents on a monthly basis. These evaluations are helpful but could take better account of the available data to further inform the staff's understanding of incidents and to influence subsequent planning.

The management team works well with the local police and the local authority missing person coordinator. Neither the police nor the local authority have any concerns about the way in which the managers or the staff manage or respond to missing from home incidents. A police inspector said, 'They work hard and we work well together. They have a very good understand of the children and their vulnerabilities. They run a really tight ship.' Another professional commented, 'I find them really good. We have had really good communication with all of the staff and particularly the manager.' This good communication and working across agencies has driven an improvement in the home's ability to access the records of return from missing interviews. The missing person coordinator identified the efforts of the staff and manager as being integral to this improvement. There is, however, less of an impact on reducing the number of missing from home incidents. The staff and associated professionals recognise that risk-taking behaviours have increased for some children since they arrived at the home.

Some of the children are currently at risk of child sexual exploitation. The incidents for these children have reduced, although they remain at high risk. Staff work well with local project workers and support groups to educate children and to help them to understand their particular vulnerabilities. A number of the children smoke tobacco, and some smoke other substances. Staff use a drug support agency to provide direct support to children and to guide staff in helping the children to become aware of the risks involved.

Some of the children present with high-risk behaviours in respect of fire setting. There have been incidents when a child has lit a fire in their bedroom. In response, the manager has implemented a number of actions intended to reduce the risk. These include commissioning an independent fire risk assessment, and engagement with the local fire service to ensure that all of the children have received fire safety training. The individual risk assessments, although up to date, lack clarity in some areas. For example, they state that regular checks should take place but offer no indication as to how often this should be. They do not include reference to the need to undertake regular visual checks, although the staff, including the manager, understand this to be the approach. In addition, the incidents of fire setting in the house should have been notified to Ofsted. This would have influenced Ofsted's response to subsequent notifications and the timing of the inspection.

The incidents of bullying have reduced significantly. However, although bullying is not persistent, there are vulnerable children who remain intimidated by some of the other children. Vigilant staff always intervene early and make their presence known, and they monitor these situations. They facilitate resolution and good conflict management. This offers support and strategies to individuals.

The staff have used 26 sanctions over a six-month period. These sanctions relate to four children. The sanctions are fair and proportionate. They are mainly in response to damage to the home or items in the home. The staff have provided a number of interventions that range from losing an activity or treat or financial reparation to clearing up with staff support. The staff offer key-work sessions and time with staff to help the children to resolve their pent-up feelings. This is good practice, demonstrating a non-punitive, individualised approach so that the children have an opportunity to make amends.

Safeguarding arrangements are fully understood by the staff. Regular training keeps staff abreast of the procedures to protect the children. The staff team is professional and experienced. There have been no allegations about members of staff in the home.

Safe recruitment checks are carried out on new staff prior to commencement of employment. Warner interviews are also carried out to provide an extra safeguard when making suitability decisions. The process of pre-employment checks includes verbal verification of references. However, there was no evidence to show that two of the written references that were reviewed during the inspection had been verbally verified.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager has been in post since August 2015. He holds a level 4 qualification in residential childcare and a level 5 diploma in management. The manager benefits from a tiered management structure within the local authority. This provides a head of service who supports the manager.

The children benefit from a staff team that is established and experienced. Staff receive the right training to equip them for their roles and undergo regular supervision with a deputy manager or the manager. This ensures that practice issues are explored and future training needs are identified.

There is a strong drive to improve this service and to make changes to improve the children's experiences. The manager has implemented several preventative work initiatives. He has inspired better ways of working with other professionals. He has actively set up an action group that provides local profiling and determines where potential concerns are in the locality. This collaborative working identifies risks to the children and looks at ways of reducing these. Challenge is made to local authorities when plans are not in the child's best interests. The manager challenges other professionals who work with the home, and this has resulted in the consistent provision of return interviews for the children who have been missing from the home. The manager has developed confidence in his style of management. His challenges are effective and result in improvements to children's experiences. Despite this targeted drive, the impact has not yet reduced the risks to the children. This is reflected in the judgement grading.

Since the last inspection, the manager has developed a new auditing tool to ensure that records read well and that all of the components are updated and reviewed by key staff. Additionally, the rota has been redesigned to ensure that at busy times the staff provide good levels of support. This is in response to the high number of incidents that occur during the late evening.

Feedback from external professionals is mixed. The social workers were positive about the quality of the relationships that they have with the home and with the manager in particular. Despite this, there are concerns about behaviour, risk taking and progress in general. Although such incidents are managed well, there is no reduction. This limits progress and contributes to a culture where children are repeatedly being reported as missing from the home.

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 difference 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: SC037256

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Suffolk County Council, Endeavour House, Russell Road, Ipswich IP1 2BX

Responsible individual: Clifford James

Registered manager: Tobias Hall

Inspector

Deirdra Keating, social care inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

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