

SC042147

Registered provider: Child First Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is run by a private organisation. It is registered to accommodate up to six young people of either gender who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home aims to support young people to return to their family, move to foster carers or move on to independent accommodation. The organisation has its own school, which is registered with the Department for Education.

Inspection dates: 31 August to 1 September 2017

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 failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded.

Date of last inspection: 7 December 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is inadequate because:

- During a serious fire incident in May 2017, staff did not take effective action to ensure the safety of young people and protect them from harm. The fire service was not called despite there being compelling reason to do so. The staff who failed to follow fire safety procedures have not received refresher training in fire safety. Leaders and managers cannot demonstrate that purposeful work has been undertaken with staff following this incident involving poor practice.
- Leaders and managers failed to undertake an investigation or review following the serious incident. There has not been a reliable culture of learning from mistakes.
- Admission practice has not given sufficient consideration, prior to the admission, to the likely impact a young person's behaviours might have on others in the home. This has created avoidable risk.
- There has been a failure to record all the steps taken to ensure that the outcomes of child protection referrals are known. Managers have not escalated their concerns regarding the failure of safeguarding professionals to keep them informed.

The children's home's strengths:

- Practice is improving in a number of areas as the home's new management team becomes more established.
- Many young people have made significant progress in terms of their engagement with education.
- There is a strong focus on improving young people's emotional well-being, and more young people are willing to consider engaging in therapeutic counselling.
- There is a well-coordinated response to young people who go missing. Information gathered by staff has enabled placing authorities to take effective action to keep young people safe.
- Young people form trusting relationships with staff, and develop the confidence to share their worries and concerns.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
07/12/2016	Full	Requires improvement
25/04/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
24/09/2015	Full	Good
26/05/2015	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
12: The protection of children standard In order to meet the protection of children standard, the registered person must ensure: (2)(a)(i) 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; (2)(a)(iii) have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; (2)(b) 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 (2)(a)(i)(iii)(b)) This is with specific reference to the assessment and management of risk, staff seeking guidance when managing dangerous incidents and calling the fire service when there is a risk of fire in the home.	09/10/2017
13: The leadership and management standard In order to meet the leadership and management standard the registered person must: (2)(h) use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (2)(h)) This is with specific reference to undertaking management reviews of serious incidents and identifying what steps need to be taken to improve practice.	09/10/2017
After consultation with the fire and rescue authority, the registered person must take adequate precautions against the risk of fire and make arrangements for persons working at the home to receive suitable training in fire prevention. (Regulation 25(1)(a)(c)) Specifically, ensure the home's fire safety plan specifies what	09/10/2017

staff should do if they discover a fire and ensure staff undertake refresher fire safety training if they fail to meet their responsibilities regarding fire safety.	
The procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect must provide for records to be kept of an allegation of abuse or neglect, and the action taken in response. (Regulation 34(2)(d)) This is with specific reference to keeping records of what action has been taken to ensure managers and staff know the outcomes of child protection referrals made by the home.	09/10/2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that the home provides children with a homely, domestic environment. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9).
Specifically, take steps to ensure that any damage is promptly repaired and that communal spaces are homely, comfortable areas where children can relax.
- Ensure that staff help looked-after children to understand the role of an independent advocate and how they can access one. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 23, paragraph 4.17)
Specifically, ensure all staff are able to provide children with information about local and national advocacy services, and promote these in young people's meetings and key-work sessions.
- Ensure that where appropriate, staff seek expert advice from education professionals, such as the Virtual School Head. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 27, paragraph 5.11)
- Ensure there is a workforce plan that details the process for managing and improving poor performance. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.8)
Specifically, review the effectiveness of the current plan in relation to when disciplinary procedures will be implemented.
- Ensure that recruitment of staff safeguards children and minimises the potential risks to them. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)
Specifically, ensure that any gaps in the employment history of potential new staff are fully explored during the recruitment process.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Since the last inspection in December 2016, the home has faced a number of challenges. These have included changes of manager, challenging behaviour from young people, inappropriate admissions due to information not being shared by other professionals, and complaints from local neighbours following periods of anti-social behaviour displayed by some young people. At the time of this inspection, the home was more settled. A new registered individual and home manager took up their posts in April and May 2017 respectively, and they have had a positive impact on how the home is run. However, a serious incident in May 2017 was poorly managed, and young people were put at risk of harm and were not adequately protected. The management response following this incident was poor, and did not result in detailed planning to prevent a similar incident occurring in the future.

Young people currently living at the home are making good progress across many aspects of their lives. They have formed trusting relationships with staff, and are generally positive about the boundaries and expectations implemented by the new manager. One young person said, 'Staff will comfort you if something goes wrong; the new manager is the best we have had and she is strict because she cares.' As a result of the positive relationships young people have with staff, they become more confident in talking about past negative experiences and more willing to work with specialist support services.

Many young people have made significant progress in terms of their engagement with education. Attendance at school has increased for all young people currently at the home, and one young person has started attending school after a long period of school refusal. The manager and staff take a proactive approach to identifying the right educational provision for young people, and maintain regular communication with teaching staff. The manager has not always consulted the virtual headteacher for children looked after when planning alternative educational provision, or when there have been concerns regarding the service a young person is receiving.

There has been a focus on helping young people to improve their mental health and emotional well-being, and the manager has focused on encouraging young people to access the counselling provision provided by the organisation. At the time of this inspection, all of the young people were either engaging in therapeutic work, or had agreed to do so. Specialist assessments are also arranged when it is felt that the needs of young people need to be more clearly defined. Staff also engage positively with professionals from other agencies, such as the youth offending service, who are supporting young people to overcome the negative impact of past experiences. Despite this, not all young people have been able to reduce their level of unsafe or offending behaviours.

Young people are given the opportunity to express their views on the care they receive in young people's meetings and individual key-work sessions. All young people spoken to during this inspection knew how to use the home's complaints system, and were

confident that complaints would be taken seriously. However, the manager and staff do not know, and are therefore unable to advise young people, about the route to securing an advocate. One young person has been waiting for his placing authority to refer him to an advocacy service for several months. Managers and staff do not have the knowledge to intervene effectively.

Generally, young people are made to feel welcome when they arrive at the home, and staff ensure that they are given the information needed to help them settle quickly. Overall, there are positive peer relationships, and one young person spoke about becoming 'best friends' with another young person at the home.

Although there have been unplanned placement endings for some young people, others have had a positive experience of moving on. Staff have supported young people to gain the skills needed to successfully move to semi-independence, and provided time-limited outreach support to help young people settle. One young person who moved on from the home recently is making positive progress towards his career ambitions.

Thoughtful, well-planned arrangements for young people to keep in touch with their families have led to improved relationships, and more young people are now having overnight stays with family members. One parent stated that she is, 'always kept informed and made welcome by the staff when I come to visit my son'.

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

Risk assessments for young people moving into the home are not sufficiently detailed, and this detracts from the ability of staff to keep young people safe. This contributed to the poor management, by staff, of a serious incident which escalated and compromised the safety of all in the home. In addition, staff did not follow the organisation's procedures or promptly inform managers of the incident.

At the time of this inspection the home's fire safety plan did not instruct staff on the actions they should take on discovering a fire. The registered manager took action to rectify this shortfall during the inspection. The amended fire safety plan needs to become embedded in practice to ensure that staff are familiar with the steps they should take in relation to fire safety.

Although the management of risk has not been consistently good, staff do have an awareness of each young person's vulnerabilities. For example, staff were able to explain how they monitor and support young people who could be at risk of poor mental health and self-harming behaviours. Staff often build trusting relationships with young people, and this ensures that young people have the confidence to speak about their worries and concerns. As a result, young people have felt able to disclose incidents of historic abuse.

Managers and staff have acted promptly when disclosures of abuse have been made, and made referrals to the relevant agencies. However, managers have failed to ensure that they have been kept informed of the actions taken in response to these referrals.

Although managers stated that they have sought updates from local authority safeguarding teams and allocated social workers, they have not always kept a record of this. Insufficient steps have been taken to escalate concerns when other agencies fail to keep the home informed of actions taken in response to child protection referrals.

Practice in relation to young people who go missing is strong. Staff have clear procedures and strategies to follow when young people go missing, and these are implemented in practice. Managers and staff have engaged positively with the police and placing authorities to minimise the potential for young people to go missing, or come to harm when they do so. Staff are proactive in trying to locate missing young people, and when they return from a missing episode, young people are sensitively welcomed back to the home. Managers and staff liaise with relevant professionals to ensure that independent return home interviews are conducted with young people, when necessary.

Managers and staff have been particularly effective in gathering information regarding unsafe behaviours young people might engage in while missing from the home. This has helped to identify risks pertaining to gang-related activity and the potential for young people to become influenced by extremist views. Appropriate sharing of information has ensured that the police and placing authorities have been able to take action to prevent young people coming to harm.

Young people spoken to during this inspection said that they feel safe in the home, and all could identify a member of staff they would speak to if they had concerns. Young people also confirmed that bullying does not take place in the home, and expressed confidence in the ability of staff to address the issue should it become a concern in the future.

The home's manager, who is relatively new in post, has begun setting clearly defined boundaries and expectations for young people's behaviour. This is beginning to have a positive effect. A restorative approach to behaviour management is becoming embedded in practice, and the use of sanctions has decreased in recent months. There is minimal use of physical restraint to contain young people's challenging behaviour.

Managers and staff are familiar with the risks young people might face when they access the internet and social media websites. There is a system in place for monitoring young people's internet activity when using the home's wi-fi, and young people receive advice and guidance from staff in key-work sessions on how to keep safe online. This has had some success, and one young person was quick to inform staff when an unknown person tried to make contact with him online. During the inspection, managers concluded that the home's policy on young people accessing social media sites is not well developed, and gave a commitment to develop the policy and guidance in relation to the issue.

Overall, the home's recruitment procedure is effective and seeks to prevent unsuitable adults becoming employed in the home. However, one shortfall was identified in relation to safe recruitment practice. Although an applicant had been asked to explain most of the gaps in their employment history, leaders and managers failed to identify one of the

gaps that was evident on examination of the candidate's application form.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

At the time of the last inspection, in December 2016, there had not been a registered manager in post for over 26 weeks. A manager was subsequently appointed, but withdrew before becoming registered. A new manager was appointed in May 2017, and she has submitted an application to become registered, which Ofsted is currently processing. The new manager holds the level 5 diploma in leadership and management for residential childcare, and has suitable experience of working in residential childcare settings.

In April 2017, the organisation nominated a new registered individual. Staff spoken to during this inspection were positive about these changes, and identified a number of improvements that have been implemented by the new management team. These changes are positive, but in terms of implementing cultural change it is still early days.

Systems for monitoring the quality of care and reviewing serious incidents have not been effective enough, as evidenced by the serious fire incident in May. Managers did not use the opportunity to identify and properly challenge the poor practice. Although the members of staff involved were interviewed after the incident, the notes taken at the time do not confirm that all aspects of the incident were fully explored.

When leaders and managers have identified poor staff performance, they have not always recorded the actions to be taken, or why specific decisions have been made. For example, in one case there was no written explanation as to why leaders and managers had decided not to instigate disciplinary proceedings. Despite these shortfalls, there are indications that performance management processes are improving. Prior to the new management team commencing in post, no staff members had received an annual appraisal of their performance. More than half the staff have now had an appraisal, and there is a timetable to ensure that all staff have had their performance appraised by the end of September 2017.

There are also indications that, as the new management team becomes established, more effective monitoring is taking place. For example, the manager's monitoring of one recent incident report has identified that staff could have taken more effective action in relation to a young person misusing prescribed medication that was not his.

Since the last inspection in December 2016, leaders and managers have not consistently given detailed consideration to the likely impact that new admissions may have on the young people currently residing in the home. An impact risk assessment undertaken in February 2017 did not take account of a young person's unsafe behaviours, and how these might affect the other young people. More recent impact assessments, examined during this inspection, indicate that practice in this area has improved. The needs and vulnerabilities of all young people living in the home are now given consideration before a decision is made to admit a new young person.

Leaders and managers did not give sufficient priority to the urgent training needs of staff following a fire setting incident involving a number of young people. More broadly however, meeting the training and development needs of staff is an area of improving practice. Consideration is now being given to whether staff have the knowledge and skills needed to meet the specific needs of young people being admitted. This has resulted in staff recently receiving specialist training in relation to the needs of a particular young person. The registered individual has recently changed the training provider for staff undertaking the level 3 diploma in residential childcare, after concluding that the previous provider was not providing sufficient support to those registered on the course.

Staff spoken to during this inspection consistently expressed the view that the support they receive has improved in recent months. They receive supervision with the regularity specified in the home's statement of purpose, and benefit from being able to discuss the needs of young people in regular team meetings. One member of staff spoke positively about consultation meetings with the organisation's clinical psychologist, which have been introduced in recent months. She was able to give examples of how this had led to a greater understanding of the young people's behaviours, needs and vulnerabilities.

The home's plans for young people have a strong focus on how care will be delivered in the home, to meet young people's needs. However the plans do not always reflect the placing authority's goals for some young people.

A proactive approach is taken to ensuring that young people's social workers are fully engaged in planning young people's care. Leaders and managers will challenge placing authorities that they perceive are not fully engaged in the planning process. Multi-agency meetings are requested when young people are not making sufficiently good progress. One social worker commented on how this process has resulted in agreement being reached for a young person to receive a specialist assessment of need.

Leaders and managers have worked in partnership with local community-based agencies to resolve conflicts with neighbours. These complaints resulted from the anti-social behaviour demonstrated by some young people who have now left the home. The manager is taking steps to form positive relationships with neighbours, and encourages young people to do the same. The number of complaints from neighbours has significantly decreased in recent months.

Some communal areas of the home do not provide a welcoming, homely environment. Some walls are bare, and apart from the sofas there few soft furnishings, ornaments or pictures. Some damage was also seen on doors in the upstairs landing. The manager acknowledged that more could be done to achieve a homely environment, and plans to make improvements. At the time of this inspection, the home's kitchen was being completely refurbished.

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.

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: SC042147

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Child First Limited

Registered provider address: c/o, 40 Oxford Road, Worthing, West Sussex BN11 1UT

Responsible individual: Johanna Davys Havard

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Stephen Collett, social care inspector

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