

SC047483

Registered provider: Mulberry House Care Homes Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This privately run home provides care for up to three children who may have social and/or emotional difficulties.

The manager holds a level 5 leadership and management qualification and has been registered with Ofsted since 30 October 2020.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

We last visited this setting on 12 and 13 October 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 March 2022

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	requires improvement to be 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: 2 October 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
02/10/2019	Full	Good
05/02/2018	Interim	Not judged
15/05/2017	Interim	Not judged
13/01/2017	Interim	Declined in effectiveness

Inspection judgements

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

At the time of this inspection, there were three children living at the home. Two of the three children have lived at the home for two years and are settled.

Children's experiences of moving into or out of the home are varied. One child's move to the home was well supported by staff and, as a result, the child has settled well. However, another child's placement was ended abruptly. The manager ended this placement because staff were unable to meet the child's needs, keep them safe or prevent them from having a detrimental impact on other children in the home.

Staff do not consistently develop independence plans to help children learn the skills they need. Staff had not devised an independence plan for a child who will be 17 years old in July and who currently has limited access to free time. The child told the inspectors that he does not know how he will be prepared and supported to move on. In contrast, another child was appropriately supported to move on to semi-independence. This inconsistent approach to independence planning means that there are no clear strategies in place for staff to follow and children are not always supported to develop the skills they need in preparation for adult life.

Children's plans do not clearly record the progress they make or provide guidance on how staff will help children achieve the aims and objectives of the placement. In addition, staff do not support children to view and contribute to their plans. This shortfall means children do not fully understand their plans, how they have progressed or how they can work towards their goals.

Staff review children's plans, however, not all staff are promptly reading the updated plan following review. This oversight could mean staff are not fully aware of changes to children's plans and may result in children receiving inconsistent care.

The system put in place for staff to record and acknowledge praise to children is not being used effectively. Two children have not had any praise recorded since November 2021. This shortfall prevents children from understanding their areas of achievement.

Staff carry out regular key-working sessions with children. However, staff are not recording all important conversations. In addition, conversations are not linked to children's plans. This is a missed opportunity for staff to explore children's difficulties with them and for staff to demonstrate the work that they are doing to support children.

Despite the shortfalls, children are making progress in some areas. Staff support children to take part in a variety of activities in the home and community. Children

attend youth clubs and participate in band practice. This helps children develop friendships, confidence and self-esteem.

All three children have educational provisions in place and their attendance is good. During the inspection, staff were supporting one child with home study due to a period of exclusion from school. Staff had been proactive in obtaining work from the child's school and helped the child complete the work set. This demonstrates that staff understand the importance of education. Feedback from one child's school was very positive.

Despite some changes in the staff team and the challenges faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, children have received care from a core team of staff. As a result, children are cared for by a staff team that knows them well.

Children have positive relationships with staff and appear comfortable and settled. The environment is clean, tidy and welcoming. Children have personalised their bedrooms. The inspectors observed genuine warmth from staff towards children. Children said they liked the staff, felt well cared for and were able to tell inspectors who they would talk to if they had any worries or concerns.

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

Managers do not take into account all the information available to them when considering the risks to children who move into the home. For example, the manager did not consider the location of the home, which is close to a motorway, when accepting a child who was known to try and gain access to main roads. This omission compromised the child's welfare. In contrast, two children are well matched to each other and to the skills of the staff. As a result, they are settled and continue to make progress.

Staff have not been successful in supporting children to reduce their substance misuse. There have been occasions when a child has smoked, used illegal substances and brought alcohol into the home. In addition, staff did not ensure appropriate welfare checks when this child was under the influence of alcohol or drugs and did not seek medical advice. Despite these shortfalls, staff are able to engage children through conversations and build positive relationships, which in this case helped the child to have a positive move on from the home.

Risk assessments put in place to keep children safe do not contain all known risks and are inaccurate. This means that staff are not sufficiently guided on how to keep children safe. For example, one child's risk assessment contained conflicting information regarding access to electronic equipment. As a result, the required checks of children's electronic equipment, phones and use of the internet have not been consistently carried out. These shortfalls have the potential to compromise children's welfare.

Overall, staff manage children's behaviours well and the number of incidents requiring staff intervention is low. Staff rarely use physical interventions and when they do, they are appropriate. However, the registered manager has not ensured that staff debriefs following a restraint are always documented. This shortfall could hinder the manager's oversight of staff practice.

Children rarely go missing from the home, however, when they do, staff have not ensured that children are offered a return home interview. This creates a missed opportunity to explore with children why they went missing.

When staff impose sanctions on children, these have not all have been recorded. The registered manager has not always reviewed their use to assure herself that these sanctions are appropriate and effective. As a result, children may be having inappropriate or unnecessary sanctions imposed on them.

Managers have not ensured new staff working at the home are safely recruited. Staff have started working with children before all the required checks have been completed. As a result, children may have received care from adults who are not suitable to work with children.

On one occasion, there was a significant delay in the registered manager notifying Ofsted of a serious incident. This hinders Ofsted's oversight of staff's safeguarding practice between inspections.

Despite the shortfalls, children report having everything they need. The children have built trusting relationships with the staff. They feel safe and appear comfortable and settled at the home.

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

The shortfalls identified at this inspection show that the registered manager does not monitor the home effectively. The leadership and management of the home have not been sufficient to sustain the progress seen at the assurance visit in October 2020. The one requirement raised at the assurance visit has not been met and is reissued. In addition, nine further requirements have been raised following this inspection.

The registered manager does not have effective monitoring tools in place for sufficient oversight of the home. The registered manager's oversight of recording and reporting is poor. She has failed to identify and address poor recording in documentation or gaps in paperwork.

The registered manager's oversight of staff training is lacking. The training matrix is not accurate. In addition, not all staff have been trained in areas that would help them support and meet the needs of children living at the home.

In some areas, the registered manager does not have monitoring systems in place to evidence the practice in the home. For example, the registered manager was unable to demonstrate how she shared important information about the children when agency staff start working at the home. This has the potential to result in inconsistent care to children.

The registered manager has failed to ensure that there is an accurate roster in place that records the planned and actual hours worked by staff. As a result, these documents cannot be relied on to identify when staff have been at work or to determine if children have received care from suitably experienced and trained staff.

The review of the quality of care is poor. The registered manager had failed to consult with children, families or professionals to obtain feedback that would inform the review process. There is a lack of critical analysis of incidents involving children, to drive improvements and ensure that children experience continuously improving care.

Managers have not ensured that the home's statement of purpose is updated and shared with Ofsted within the required time frame. This prevents the regulator from having oversight of changes in the home between inspections.

The staff feel supported by the registered manager and have regular supervisions and reflective practice meetings. Monthly staff meetings have not always taken place. However, staff share important information informally and during shift-to-shift handovers. As a result, staff receive information on the day-to-day care needs of the children.

The registered manager has developed effective relationships with external professionals such as social workers and education staff. This means that despite the shortfalls identified during this inspection children are making progress in some areas, such as education.

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 quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children; use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff— provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background; help each child to develop resilience and skills that prepare the child to return home, to live in a new placement or to live independently as an adult. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(iv)(vi)) The registered person must ensure that children's care plans are individualised and meet their specific needs, and that these care plans are accurate and up to date. This also refers to ensuring that children are prepared for leaving the home and for adult life.	1 May 2022
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—	1 May 2022

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 understand how to keep safe; help each child to understand how to keep safe; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(vi)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that children's risk assessments are in place, up to date, accurate and include effective strategies for staff to follow. The registered person should ensure that staff follow risk assessments. In addition, the registered person must ensure that staff support children to learn to identify risks and how to keep themselves safe.	
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; and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c)(h)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that there is effective monitoring and oversight of all aspects of the home and that shortfalls in practice are identified and addressed. In addition, ensure that staff undertake all relevant training to meet children's needs.	1 May 2022
The care planning standard is that children—	1 May 2022

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. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that they only admit children to the home whose needs they can meet, and children should experience a positive move on from the home. In addition, the registered person should ensure that children's progress is evident in care records.	
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)(b)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that they provide Ofsted with an updated statement of purpose within the required time frame.	1 May 2022
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. 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. (Regulation 32 (1) (3)(d)) This relates to ensuring that full Schedule 2 checks are completed for all staff recruited to the home.	1 May 2022

This requirement was issued at the last inspection and is restated.	
The registered person must ensure that— within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a child in the home, a record is made which includes— the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure. (Regulation 35 (3)(a)(vii)) This relates to ensuring that there is appropriate management oversight of sanctions and that all sanctions are recorded.	1 May 2022
Schedule 4 sets out the other information that the registered person must keep in relation to a children's home. The registered person must— maintain in the home the records in Schedule 4; ensure that the records are kept up to date. (Regulation 37 (1) (2)(a)(b)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that the staff rota shows planned and actual hours worked by all staff.	1 May 2022
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious; there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(b)(e)) The registered person must ensure that the registered manager notifies Ofsted without delay of all incidents considered serious.	1 May 2022
The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children ("a quality of care review") at least once every 6 months. In order to complete a quality of care review the registered	1 May 2022

person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating—

the quality of care provided for children;

the feedback and opinions of children about the children's home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it; and

any actions that the registered person considers necessary in order to improve or maintain the quality of care provided for children.

The system referred to in paragraph (2) must provide for ascertaining and considering the opinions of children, their parents, placing authorities and staff.

Regulation 45 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c) (5))

The provider must produce a quality of care review report that meets the requirement of regulation 45.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that staff support and encourage children to view and contribute to their records so that children's views are reflected in their records. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.6)
- The registered person should ensure that children are offered an independent return home interview after being missing from care. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30)
- The registered person should ensure that children's positive behaviour is praised and acknowledged. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.11)
- The registered person should ensure that staff are debriefed following any physical intervention. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 49, paragraph 9.56)

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: SC047483

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Mulberry House Care Homes Limited

Registered provider address: 2 Railway Street, Stafford, Staffordshire ST16 2EA

Responsible individual: Lisa Hall

Registered manager: Anita Yewdall

Inspectors

Debbie Holder, Social Care Inspector

Debbie Bond, Social Care Inspector

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