

SC063110

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 for up to five children aged between eight and 17 who may have experienced neglect and/or emotional abuse or had a traumatic experience that has left them vulnerable and who may find it difficult to manage in society.

The manager has been in post since 17 September 2018. He has been registered for this home since 6 June 2019.

Inspection dates: 20 to 21 June 2019

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: 7 August 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: declined in effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: The service has been subject to enforcement action. However, the provider took the necessary action to address the regulatory shortfalls.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
07/08/2018	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
04/04/2018	Full	Requires improvement to be good
19/07/2017	Full	Requires improvement to be good
26/04/2017	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 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— understand the barriers to learning that each child may face and take appropriate action to help the child to overcome any such barriers; and promote opportunities for each child to learn informally. (Regulation 8(1)(2)(a)(iii)(v))	09/09/2019
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. (Regulation 12(1)(2)(a)(i))	08/07/2019
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 the home has sufficient staff to provide care for	22/07/2019

each child; and ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child. (Regulation 13(1)(a)(b)(2)(d)(e))	
The registered person must— ensure that each employee completes an appropriate induction. (Regulation 33(1)(a))	26/08/2019

Recommendations

- Ensure that all incidents of control, discipline and restraint are subject to systems of regular scrutiny to ensure that their use is fair. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.36)

In particular, ensure that records consistently evidence the actions taken by staff. Furthermore, ensure suitable independent review of each restraint record by someone who is senior to any staff involved in or witness to the incident.
- Ensure that all staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.11)

In particular, provide staff training in understanding mental health, anxiety and depression.
- The registered person should actively seek independent scrutiny of the home and make best use of information from independent and internal monitoring (including under regulations 44 and 45) to ensure continuous improvement. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 55, paragraph 10.24)
- As set out in regulations 31–33, the registered person is responsible for maintaining good employment practice. They must 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)
- Ensure that staff understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Staff should record information on individual children in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

Inspection judgements

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

The service has improved in the last six months. However, the inspection identified shortfalls that mean that the home requires improvement to be good.

The high level of staff vacancies and turnover has had a negative effect. It is not unusual for the home to have only two members of staff on duty. Sometimes, the second member of staff is the manager. The children have highly complex emotional and behavioural needs, and are at home for most of the time. They require consistent and intensive staff support.

The staff nurture the children and show them love and attention. As a result, the children invest emotionally in their relationships with the staff. The children constantly seek out the staff. For example, one child, on return from their first day at school, ran in, gave the staff a big hug and told them about their day. However, since the last inspection, the children have seen many valued staff leave or reduce their working hours. Although the manager has tried to ensure that regular staff work at the home, the children have had 40 different staff working with them in the past six months. This has had a negative effect on the children's emotional well-being and is linked to one incident of self-harm.

The staff are mindful of the children's physical health and emotional well-being. They encourage the children to make use of local emotional well-being services. Some children make regular use of art therapy services. However, staff do not receive suitable training to enable them to support children to manage some of their mental health issues effectively.

Two children have accessed some part-time alternative education. However, they have not had regular formal education for six months. The manager has strongly advocated for more suitable education arrangements. The staff discuss the importance of education with the children and listen to their opinions. However, there is little evidence of daily work being undertaken with children to get them ready for education. Neither is there a well-thought-out approach to using day-to-day activities to help children to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

Placements and transitions into the home are well planned. The manager gives full consideration to the needs of all children prior to accepting any new admissions. The children are gradually prepared for a new resident through introductions and discussion.

Although there are some shortfalls, the children do make individual progress in most areas of their life. Levels of aggression and incidents of going missing from home and of self-harm have reduced, and the learning of independence skills is increasing. A social worker said, '[The child] has moved from a timid, withdrawn child in all environments to now being confident and able to express themselves at the home.' A child said, 'I feel

happy. I love it here.'

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

The children's individual risk factors in respect of going missing have reduced. A social worker said, 'The fact that there have been only two missing-from-care incidents is a pleasant surprise.' However, information about the children's needs and the care provided is not always documented effectively. One child's missing-from-home risk management plan contained inaccurate information and had not been shared effectively with the child's social worker. Consequently, the child's social worker and the staff do not share a common understanding of expectations.

A social worker said that the staff are vigilant and responsive. However, the staff do not consistently maintain records that clearly evidence this. Sometimes, the records do not document the actions that the staff took or the reason for their actions. Post-incident debriefing discussions do not always fully explore all avenues of potential significant interest.

Staff vetting procedures are generally sound. However, records of staff qualifications are not always held, and staff employment dates are not consistently scrutinised effectively. The records of checks undertaken on agency staff are sometimes unclear. These shortfalls limit the ability of the manager to robustly scrutinise the suitability of new staff.

Staff use physical restraint only when the children present a clear risk to themselves or others. The staff are suitably trained. However, the records of restraint do not consistently detail their attempts to de-escalate the situation or state whether the child was offered medical support. The manager reviews the records of every incident of restraint to ensure that its use is fair and proportionate. When the manager has been involved in a restraint, the records have often been reviewed by a member of staff for whom he has line management responsibility. This is not appropriate.

The staff understand that the children communicate their anxiety through their behaviour. The staff seek to anticipate the children's needs and encourage positive communication to prevent situations from escalating. Staff use praise, rewards and discussion to encourage positive behaviour. The behaviour management approaches are beginning to effect positive change. For example, a child who was restrained eight times in December has been restrained just twice in recent months.

The children demonstrate through their affectionate interactions with staff that they feel safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager provides visible and effective leadership. He has successfully driven improvement in the service. A social worker said, 'This home used to be chaos; now it is totally different.'

Recent investment in the building means that the children's living environment is almost unrecognisable. The children now enjoy a much cosier and inviting home than previously. The manager ensures that any damage is swiftly repaired. The programme of refurbishment continues.

The staff are individually enthusiastic and committed to the children's well-being. It is testament to the commitment of individual staff that they have been able to maintain such positive relationships with the children, despite the staffing challenges. A child's social worker said, 'The staff are always very patient and positive. It's lovely that my child gets this acceptance from the staff.'

The manager has strongly and successfully advocated for the recruitment of more staff. The manager works as a member of the team, delivering direct support to the children when needed. Although this has limited his capacity to oversee records, it means that he has good insight into the quality of the direct care. It also means that the children identify him as someone whom they trust and want to spend time with.

The staff individually feel well supported by each other and the manager. They said that the recent changes mean that they now benefit from improved guidance, training and support. However, completed records of staff induction are not held. It is therefore difficult to understand whether new staff are provided with the skills and knowledge that they need. The staff turnover has been high. The children have complex emotional and behavioural needs. Therefore, it is particularly important that new staff receive a good-quality induction and training to ensure that they can competently support the children.

The visits carried out by the independent visitor are announced. This means that the visitor does not get a true sense of how the home operates on a day-to-day basis, and it reduces the effectiveness of the visit as a quality auditing tool.

There are significant areas for development. However, the home has improved and there is good capacity for continued improvement.

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: SC063110

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: Joseph Cox

Inspector

Joanna Heller: social care inspector

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