

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	21 April 2016
Unique reference number	SC063110
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Suffolk County Council
Registered person address	Suffolk County Council, Endeavour House, Russell Road, Ipswich IP1 2BX

Responsible individual	Clifford James
Registered manager	Paul Plummer
Inspector	Ashley Hinson Clive Lucas

Inspection date	21 April 2016
Previous inspection judgement	Declined in effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	Two compliance notices and a restriction of accommodation order were issued on 21 March 2016
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Requires improvement
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.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

SC063110

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is requires improvement because:

- The home has experienced a significant amount of turbulence since the last inspection. This led to Ofsted issuing two compliance notices and a restriction of accommodation.
- Since two children have moved on, the restriction of accommodation has enabled the service to arrest the decline in standards. It has enabled it to begin the process of making the necessary improvements to the quality of care that the remaining children experience on a day-to-day basis.
- The impact of a previous placement decision continues to reverberate, with one child stating: 'It was hard for us. It was really unsettling.'
- Risk assessments still fail to fully capture known risks and to offer clear guidance for staff on how they can manage those risks.
- Liaison between the home and children's education providers is not wholly effective. This undermines the support children receive to achieve academically.
- The quality of some records is not high enough. There are inconsistencies in some key documentation, such as 'missing' protocols and profiles that internal monitoring systems have not identified. The statement of purpose is not up to date and recruitment checks and return from missing records are not readily accessible.
- Where improvements have been made, for example in the frequency of supervisions and the quality of the building, these are not yet sufficient to be good.

The children's home strengths

- The quality of children's day-to-day experiences has improved over the past few weeks. The children themselves recognise this recent change.
- The new management team is open to challenge and recognises the need for improvement. There is no undue defensiveness in relation to the shortcomings identified.
- The children have access to an independent advocate who knows them well. They are well aware of routes to raise concerns.
- The staff work to enable the children to have contact with people who are important to them. The staff do not see this as simply about contact with birth parents, they recognise the value of friends and the wider family network.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person(s) meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and 'Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards'. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
6. The quality and purpose of care standard In order to meet the quality and purpose of care standard the registered provider must: (2) (c) (i) ensure that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed and furnished so as to meet the needs of each child.	18 May 2016
8. The education standard In order to meet the education standard the registered provider must ensure that staff: (2) (a) (vi) 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; with specific regard to promoting homework and understanding the reasons for any absence.	18 May 2016
12. The protection of children standard In order to meet the protection of children standard, with particular regard to risk management, the registered provider must ensure that staff: 2 (a) (i) assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if	18 May 2016

necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child.	
13. The leadership and management standard In order to meet the protection of children standard, with particular regard to ensuring consistency between documentation and clarity in improvement plans, the registered provider must: (2) (h) use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home.	18 May 2016
The registered person must keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it (Regulation 16(3) (a)).	18 May 2016
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 a record is kept of the administration of medicine to each child (Regulation 23(1) (2) (c)).	18 May 2016
The registered person must ensure that all employees receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience (Regulation 33(4)(b)).	18 May 2016
The registered person must ensure that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month. When the independent person is carrying out a visit, the registered person must help the independent person, if they consent, to interview in private such of the children, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as the independent person requires; (Regulation 44(2) (a)).	31 May 2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- Ensure that children are able to see the results of their views being listened to and acted upon, with particular regard to giving feedback to children following discussions in residents meetings ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards', page 22, paragraph 4.11).
- Ensure that the home requests copies of 'return' interviews and takes account of information within them when assessing risks and putting arrangements in place to protect each child ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30).
- Ensure that recruitment of staff safeguards children and minimises potential risks to them, with particular regard to ensuring that recruitment records show that a satisfactory DBS certificate has been seen ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1).

Full report

Information about this children's home

Operated by a local authority, this home provides care and accommodation for up to five female children aged between 11 and 17 with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
8 January 2016	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
3 August 2015	Full	Requires improvement
6 August 2014	Interim	Improved effectiveness
26 June 2014	Full	Adequate

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Requires improvement
Very recent improvements have taken place. The children are living in a more stable environment than prior to Ofsted's intervention. However, there is limited evidence of the children making tangible progress since the last inspection. The manager recognises this and is putting in place a system designed to measure and capture progress. However, the opportunity for children to have made progress since the last inspection is limited, due to the instability that the home experienced. The children are encouraged to attend education. The staff have supported one young person to attend recent taster sessions at university to foster her sense of aspiration further. They have helped another to identify work experience opportunities. A third child recently gained a grade C in her mock examinations, a significant achievement given her starting position and one she is rightly proud of. However, the home has not supported one child effectively to make improvements with her homework. This is despite this being an issue identified within her personal education plan meeting and at a school meeting. Homework can be a challenge in any group living situation, and the recent turmoil within the home has not helped. It is not good enough that the home has not followed this up with the school to explore ways in which they can support her. In addition, the child has recently had some days off school. The reason for this is unclear. While there is evidence that the child is encouraged to attend, there has been limited engagement with the school to explore the reasons behind these absences. A member of school staff stated: 'I would have been expecting the home here to be chasing this up.' As a result, the child is at risk of not achieving her full potential. These absences could have a significant impact on her grades, and subsequently her future plans. This is a child with ambition, and the home needs to be more proactive to support her. The children understand how to raise concerns and can do so via a number of routes. For example, the children have access to an independent advocate who knows them well and visits regularly. They are also aware of external sources of support such as ChildLine and Ofsted. Regular children's meetings take place. The children actively participate in these. However, they do not receive routine	

feedback regarding any actions the staff take in response to the views that they express in these meetings. As a result, children are unsure about what has happened.

There has been recent improvement to the range of leisure activities that the children access. A child said: 'There were not enough staff.' The staffing ratio has now increased and, as a result, individual interests and activities are pursued. If one child does not want to go on an activity, or is not permitted to go on an activity, the other children no longer lose out. A child said: 'if someone does not want to go then staff can stay with them.' Recently, staff have supported a child to attend after-school clubs and to visit a friend for tea. This enables the child to experience similar social experiences to her peers.

The staff work to enable the children to have contact with people who are important to them. The staff see this as more than just contact with birth parents. They recognise that the children have other people in their families with whom contact is important. Two children have developed contact with brothers and sisters. The staff are working with another child's social worker to ensure that she has contact with her family. This is particularly important as the child is keen to return to her family home once she leaves this home. The staff are alert to the emotional impact of contact, and factor this into their responses to the children.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
There are occasions when children go missing. When this happens, children have 'return home' interviews. However, neither the interviewers nor the social workers share these with the home. Significantly, neither does the home request them. This absence of curiosity means that the service is lacking potentially key information in assessing the risks that relate to 'missing' incidents and in identifying ways to lessen the likelihood of children going missing in the future. While there have been some recent improvements, risk assessments are not good enough. They do not include known risks. For example, while a placement plan references incidents of self-harm, the child's risk assessment does not. Where they do consider risks, they do not consistently do so in sufficient detail. For example, in another child's risk assessment there is a lack of information about triggers for self-harm. This means that the staff who rely on this for information may not have all	

of the information that they need. Although the staff who were interviewed during the inspection were aware of these factors, this is not sufficiently robust.

There are occasions when staff need to intervene physically to keep the children safe. The staff give the children the opportunity to comment upon the intervention. The children feel that when the staff need to intervene physically, they do so appropriately. One child said: 'Honestly, at the time it made me more angry, but looking back I am glad they did it. When I am angry I lose control.' Another child said: 'A couple of weeks ago I was restrained because everything got to me, and I got real angry and started smashing the house up and they took me outside. They did this safely and fairly. At the time I thought, what you doing? Get off me! But the day after, I thought they were just trying to keep me safe.'

The staff and managers recognise and acknowledge positive behaviour. When they need to implement consequences, they do so fairly and involve the children in the process. A child stated: 'They reflect with us and ask us for our comments and what we think of it. We all sit down together and see what discipline is going to happen. It does not feel unfair.' This supports the children to feel safe and cared for. It also encourages them to reflect on and to improve their behaviour. This contributes to better relationships within the home. A child said: 'We are all getting on really well. I class this as my home. Before, it was up and down and not my home. But the staff are all good and supportive.'

The children report that they now feel safe in the home, stating that this was not the case prior to the compliance activity. They are able to identify trusted adults with whom they can share concerns. For some children, this is staff in the home. For others, it is family members with whom the staff promote contact. The children also report that relationships within the home have significantly improved in recent weeks. The children state that they get on well, while acknowledging that there are occasions they fall out. When these fall-outs occur, the children say that staff support them to work through the issue. A child said: 'We are helped when we argue.'

The staff are able to articulate what they would do if they had concerns about the practice of a colleague. They are aware of whistleblowing procedures and other avenues of support.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

A suitably qualified and experienced registered manager has been in post since January 2016. He acknowledges that the first few months of his role have been challenging. The impact of a poor placement decision has prevented him from undertaking some of the development work that he intends to carry forward, as he found himself frequently working on shift. Two deputy managers support him. The manager and the staff hold the deputies in high regard. The head of care and the head of corporate parenting also maintain an overview of the service. The manager reports feeling supported by his line managers. The statement of purpose is not up to date. This does not reflect the current staffing and management arrangements, with no update since November 2015.

The home currently has enough staff and resources to meet the needs of the children living there. This reflects the recent changes in levels of occupancy, rather than a significant increase in staffing.

Where monitoring and regulation identify issues, the managers have responded with varying degrees of effectiveness. For example, there are improvements to the decor and homeliness of the site. The plants in the front garden make a positive first impression and the painting of the walls inside the building are an improvement. However, there remains a damaged sofa that was due for replacement some months ago. The ongoing failure to replace damaged furniture does not convey to the children that they are valued.

The management team is developing a realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. There is openness to challenge. Throughout the inspection, the manager and staff engaged in a transparent manner. There is definite recognition that there remains much work that still needs to take place.

Current plans for improvement lack clarity and precision. The development plan, while identifying some key areas for development, is verbose and confused in places. Furthermore, targets are not measurable or specific. This does not provide staff with clear direction on plans for improvement.

Independent monitoring visits take place. These have become more thorough in recent months and offer some considered challenge to the service. However, reports do not include sufficient contact with parents, with no consultation with them for over six months during these visits. As a result, parental perspectives are missing and managers are potentially missing early opportunities to explore familial concerns. Internal monitoring has not been robust enough. This has not identified inconsistencies in some key documents, for example discrepancies between 'missing' protocols and profiles, and information that is in placement plans but not risk management plans. Additionally, a medication record showed two with gaps.

Lack of clear recording does not support staff to provide the most effective care possible.

The majority of staff have accessed training in first aid and physical interventions since the compliance investigation. The staff report that the training that they access enables them to meet the needs of the children. Although staff talk positively about the support they receive, the impact of the new management team and the progress over recent weeks, the provision of supervision is not always frequent enough. One member of staff had a gap of five months between supervisions. While the new manager is now ensuring better frequency, this improvement must be sustained to ensure that staff receive the right support to carry out their role safely.

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of looked after children is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place, however, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm, or result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, 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 who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and 'Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards'.

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