

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 and accommodation for up to five female children aged between 11 and 17, who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Inspection dates: 26 to 27 April 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 and widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded.

Date of last inspection: 8 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: Sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is inadequate because:

- There has been insufficient action taken to safeguard children's welfare.
- There has been a failure to intervene effectively to prevent bullying in the

home. A high number of recent incidents in the home have resulted in one child being exposed to a number of assaults and behaviours aimed to intimidate.

- The home is not managed effectively. There is a lack of leadership and a lack of accountability in the management of incidents.
- Placement decisions have been made to admit children to the home when the existing group is unstable.
- Monitoring is poor. There has been no report on the quality of care provided for children.
- Attendance in education is low for the majority of the children in the home.
- There is significant damage to the fabric of the home.
- The level of incidents in the home has limited the staff's ability to complete paperwork and update records to a good standard.

The children's home's strengths:

- Children enjoy positive activities and benefit from regular, quality time with the staff. They are positive about the staff, who care for them with warmth and empathy.
- Children are actively encouraged to take part in the home. Promotion of independent living skills is good.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
08/03/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
21/04/2016	Full	Requires improvement
08/01/2016	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
03/08/2015	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
12: The protection of children standard In order to meet the protection of children standard, the registered person must ensure that staff meet the following: (1) The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. (2) In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure: (a) that staff: (i) 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; (ii) help each child to understand how to keep safe; (iii) have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; (iv) manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; (v) understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; (vi) take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and (vii) are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. (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; (d) that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed, furnished and maintained so as to protect each child from avoidable hazards to the child's health.*	26/05/2017
13: The leadership and management standard	26/05/2017

In order to meet the leadership and management standard, the registered person must ensure the following: (2) In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to: (a) lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose. *	
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))	12/05/2017
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. (Regulation 40 (4)(b))	26/05/2017
The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children ('a quality of care review') at least once every six months. (Regulation 45 (1))	26/05/2017

* These requirements are subject of a compliance notice.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

The home reopened in December 2016 after a closure of three months. During this time the interior of the building was refurbished. Since then there have been six admissions to the home, two of which have resulted in unplanned endings for the children concerned.

The home is failing to ensure that all children are safe. The staff are not able to manage incidents of bullying effectively. Disruptive incidents in the home are having a negative impact on the children's welfare.

An assessment of each child's needs has been completed before admission. There have been no children admitted through emergency referrals. However, the quality of placing decisions has been weakened by changes in management. Matching and rationale assessments indicate that matches are poor. Matching decisions have not been made with proper oversight or sufficient account being taken of the impact on the stability of the existing group of children. This does not demonstrate effective management of the

home.

Despite the serious concerns about the home, relationships between the staff and children are warm and caring. Children value this. The staff are resilient and support individual children throughout difficult behaviours. Children know that staff are approachable and understand them as individuals. Relationships between the children and the staff are tactile. Children enjoy spending time with staff and enjoy a variety of activities.

However, while the children are positive about the staff, they have not been able to prevent bullying.

Relationships with parents and carers are well developed, with parents regularly visiting the home. Parents and staff share some of the care of children, which provides consistency for children and is supportive for parents. This approach benefits the children.

All children have an education provision timetabled to their individual needs. One child has good attendance in education, although this is her first two weeks, as the child is new to the home. The other three children have an attendance rate of 50% or below. The staff are supportive and proactive in liaising with schools and attending personal educational planning meetings in order to improve on attendance. The staff regularly provide activities and quality time, such as key-worker time. This gives the children and staff the opportunity to discuss current issues and events in the home. The children raise any concerns, such as expressing their anxieties and fears about the group dynamics and personal bereavements. The staff listen and understand their concerns. However, the difficult dynamics between the children have continued and have had a significant impact on the children's experience and ability to make progress.

The staff involve children well in the running of the home. Children's meetings provide an opportunity for the children to be listened to, and they can influence the running of the home.

The children develop their culinary skills while living at the home. They cook meals, and bake and prepare healthy snacks with staff, developing valuable skills for independent living.

The home fails to provide the children with a safe, homely environment as intended. There has been repeated damage to the fabric and appearance of the building. While actions are taken in response, the number and severity of incidents has meant that it does not currently resemble a family home. This is after an extensive refurbishment and investment programme and is, therefore, demoralising for the children and the staff.

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

The home has failed to ensure that all of the children are safe. The manager and staff have not been able to manage the extremely volatile relationships between the children in the home. Recent bereavements in children's families, and rivalry for staff attention, have added to the pressures, leading to a number of serious incidents between children. This has had a significant impact on one child's welfare and well-being.

Relationships between the children are extremely tense. The atmosphere in the home is explosive at times. Children's frustrations have led to prolonged incidents, with one child being bullied relentlessly. The records show that there were more than 13 bullying incidents in the last month directed at one child. These include physical assaults, intimidation, name-calling, destroying property, damage to her bedroom, damage to her clothes and preventing her from having access to parts of the home. The ongoing level of intimidation is such that at times this child is frightened to come out of her room unless she is with staff. This child was observed to be in her room when other children were in the home, saying that she felt unsafe most of the time and had been injured the previous evening. One record of the child's views following an incident states that this is 'getting on top of her and she is feeling unable to cope because it is constant and she does not want to be here; she will be taking it further with the police as she can only take so much'. Records of these incidents include the views of staff of feeling, 'distressed' and 'powerless', to prevent these incidents. A number of records over the last two months pertain to the child being the victim of collusive bullying that is increasing in intensity. The logs of these are not always categorised in the bullying log. This makes monitoring the number of bullying incidents unclear. While the staff respond and support this child, they are unable to prevent these incidents from happening.

The children know who to go to about their concerns. They spend a lot of time with the staff and readily share their views. One child has raised a number of concerns to the staff about being bullied. These have been recorded in the key worker notes, in debriefs of incidents and in the bullying log. These include concerns raised over a month ago that were reported to the manager. The staff have also expressed their concerns about these incidents and recorded these. While the staff attempt to provide immediate protection and conflict resolution, these strategies have not reduced the severity or regularity of bullying incidents. The police have been involved on a number of occasions when the staff have been unable to defuse tensions. This does not increase the children's sense of personal responsibility. Children have been able to gang up on one child, with a recent escalation of bullying incidents. The home has failed to address this effectively.

The staff have a good rapport with children, know them well and understand their individual vulnerabilities. Despite this, the plans to reduce risks lack a consistent approach. The recording and evaluation of risks vary. The risk assessments are weak, one is contradictory in content and another fails to include significant information about one child making an unprovoked attack on another. There is no clear assessment of the risks of self-harm. The risk assessments and combined behaviour management plans do not give a clear analysis of the severity of the risk posed to each child. This weakens the management of group tensions and does not evaluate the child's actual intent when self-harming. There is no clear plan about how to help keep children safe.

The staff seek to take a non-punitive approach to behaviour management. The record of consequences following incidents shows that consequences are considered, and generally the child's views are recorded. Physical intervention has been used proportionately. The records demonstrate that the children understand why this has been used and are asked for their views afterwards during debriefs. These records show consideration of whether the situation could have been managed differently.

There are very few missing from home incidents recorded. The staff have good links with the local police, who are based close to the home. A good working relationship with

the police community support officers who visit the home encourages children to manage their time in the community safely.

Since being at the home, two of the children have been drawn into criminal behaviour and have attended court following recent incidents. While this involvement was deemed necessary, a lack of attention to risk of offending is undermining the progress children make while at the home, and could have a negative impact on their future life choices.

Recent recruitment means that there are new staff working in the home. Suitability checks undertaken for these staff are mainly in place, except for one reference. A second written reference for one member of staff has not been received. Despite this, the member of staff has been appointed and has been allowed to start work.

Investigations into allegations and complaints about members of staff have improved since the last inspection. This has resulted in a number of actions taken to safeguard the child and the staff members. The head of service oversees investigations under the guidance of the designated officer. Recent allegations have been handled well, in accordance with the home's policy. This includes taking advice from external professionals. As a result, investigations are transparent, non-biased and provide appropriate safeguards to the children.

Environmental safety checks are regularly carried out to provide the children with physical safety. Fire prevention work includes extra visits from the fire service to educate the children about the dangers of fire and reduce risks following unsafe behaviours. This follows repeated incidents of the children smoking inside the home, starting one small fire on the landing, one in the grounds and holding a lighter to another child's bedroom door. These incidents have reduced, but are indicative of the risks that children are taking in this home.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

A lack of managerial oversight has failed to ensure that the children are protected from bullying. Effective action has not been taken to safeguard children's welfare, resulting in the home's judgement being inadequate.

The registered manager has not been working in the home. There are management cover arrangements in his absence. The acting manager has been providing managerial cover along with two deputies since 28 February 2017. He is an experienced deputy manager of another children's home and has recently been appointed as the acting manager. However, these arrangements are not effective. The need to change manager, combined with a period of annual leave and his having to provide cover at his previous home, has left the home without direction, reduced the capacity for oversight and diluted staff accountability. An absence of monitoring has meant that there has been no escalation in response to the recent incidents, and this has left a child in a situation that is not safe.

The staff are dedicated and show resilience and commitment, but some are tired and worn down by the high number of prolonged incidents. This reduces their capacity for keeping records up to date and assessing repairs and maintenance. The staff say that they feel supported and are given supervision regularly. This ensures that the staff are

provided with support and training for their roles.

Monitoring is weak, however, and it has been ineffective in identifying the triggers and patterns to recent events. Attempts to read incident records and review these are constantly interrupted by events in the home. External monitoring is in place, but is very basic, and the reports involved are too brief. The six-monthly review of care has not been received by Ofsted, despite being due at the end of March 2017. The previous review made a number of commitments that have not been realised. While this review of care is in process, this signifies the lack of managerial oversight in the home.

The acting manager is in the process of assessing the running of the home and staff practice, to identify areas for improvement. Thought has been given to the management structure, with development plans being introduced to strengthen the management team. While this fairly represents some areas for development, there is a lack of decisive or effective action taken in response to recent incidents. The severity of these incidents, and the involvement of police on one occasion, have also not been notified to Ofsted. This prevents Ofsted from having a clear picture of events in the home, and therefore reduces the additional safeguard intended through its regulatory role.

These incidents mean that the home is not meeting all the objectives set out in its statement of purpose. In particular, this states that, 'children must feel safe, boundaries are used to give a child a sense of containment and safety'. The staff have been unable to uphold the home's promise in the guide for children that bullying will not be accepted. This states that 'no one at the home will tolerate bullying behaviour'. While a laudable commitment has been made, this has not been upheld. This gives a false promise to children and to stakeholders.

While there is a general understanding of diversity and equality, children in this home are not receiving an equal service with all feeling safe and relaxed in the home. The staff try to provide individualised care and to value each child but are often left managing high-level incidents, which means that they cannot respond to individuals as they would like. Children's views are valued by staff, and they encourage active participation in the home.

A number of factors within a short space of time are key in the failure to safeguard children. Changes in management, a recent admission, and significant events in children's lives have left the home extremely unstable.

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 who 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: Paul Plummer

Inspector

Deirdra Keating, social care inspector

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