

SC064931

Registered provider: Pear Tree Projects Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is owned and managed by a private company. It provides care for up to eight children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

There were eight children living at the home at the time of the inspection.

The manager registered with Ofsted in November 2018.

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 December 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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: 12 March 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
12/03/2024	Full	Good
15/03/2023	Full	Outstanding
01/03/2022	Full	Good
10/12/2019	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

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

Children are making progress in the home but the judgement for the overall experiences and progress of children has been influenced by the shortfalls identified in how children are helped and protected. Children have been exposed to harm because of staff not taking effective action to protect them. Furthermore, the punitive nature of consequences used by staff is not in line with the home's stated therapeutic approach. This impacts on how children experience living in the home.

The home is a large property set across three floors. The home is separated into two sides, with five children living on one side and three children living on the other. Access to each side of the home is via a locked door meaning that children are not able to access all areas of the home. This is not clearly described in the home's statement of purpose. Children said that they are unable to access the fridge and are supervised in the kitchen. These restrictions are not reflective of a family home.

Children meet with staff prior to moving into the home. This helps children to start building relationships and feel more at ease in their new environment. Feedback from children is that they can identify staff members who they can trust. This is because staff continue to develop positive and meaningful relationships with children.

Children are making good progress from their starting points. Some children have felt able to share their feelings with staff. This demonstrates that children are feeling comfortable and safe in their home. A professional has commented that one child's self-esteem and confidence have grown since they moved into the home.

Staff support children to attend education, and children are achieving academically. Staff maintain regular communication with the school and work in partnership to ensure that there is consistency for children.

Children say that they are supported by staff to take part in a range of hobbies, activities and days out. These include supporting children to access football, music lessons, swimming and gymnastics. This helps children to develop their personal interests and explore their talents.

Staff support children to see their family. Children say that their families can visit them at the home. Staff maintain relationships with family members as they recognise the importance to children. One family member gave positive feedback about the care that staff provide to their child.

Children have memory books that capture important moments of their time living at the home. Staff capture special events and memories that they have shared together.

This will support children to remember important times in their lives when they transition on from the home.

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

Staff do not always take effective action to prevent harm to children. There have been serious incidents in the home that could have been prevented. One incident caused sexual harm to a child, and another exposed a child to inappropriate online content. This has a high impact because the home cares for children who experience trauma related to sexual behaviours.

Staff have failed to intervene effectively to prevent injury to a child. A physical altercation between two children resulted in one child being taken to hospital. The recording states that staff used only verbal direction to prevent the incident, however the manager acknowledges that staff restricted the children's movements. This has not been recorded in line with regulation. Consequently, there is no evidence of children being given an opportunity to discuss the incident or of management oversight of the accuracy the recording.

Children are not helped to understand and manage the risks that the internet and social media can pose. The manager holds strong views about how technology can be a negative influence on children. Consequently, children's use of mobile devices and the internet is heavily restricted. One child has not had a mobile phone for three years, despite their age. Another has a mobile phone but is not allowed to use it in the home but can use it outside. Risk assessments and plans do not capture why these restrictions are necessary or what is being done to help children to make progress. This means that some children are not being given the chance to experience the same opportunities that children of similar age do. It also prevents children from learning how to use technology safely and responsibly as they move into adulthood.

There is a punitive style of behaviour management in the home, which impacts on children's ability to flourish. When children need support with their behaviours, they can be subject to excessive and prolonged consequences, which are not restorative in nature. This does not fit with the therapeutic model of care as described in the home's statement of purpose. Children are excluded from activities, such as holidays, and one child has received a financial sanction. These consequences were linked to actions and behaviours displayed as a trauma response linked to their experience of harm and neglect. This does not help children to recover from their childhood experiences.

When children make complaints, these are considered by the manager. They are not always accurately reflected in the recordings. This can cause difficulties for children and staff in providing a clear understanding of the concerns and how the outcomes are reached.

Children rarely go missing from the home. When they do, staff respond appropriately to ensure the safety and well-being of the child.

The manager ensures that all new staff are checked and vetted prior to working in the home. Safer recruitment checks are completed. This helps to ensure that the adults working in the home are suitable to do so, thus keeping the children safer.

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

The recording of information on children's files is not consistent. Records do not provide a true reflection of children's experiences in the home. This includes records not including significant information, such as injuries and physical interventions. The content is not always child-focused or helpful to children in providing a clear, factual account of children's lived experiences.

The manager does not have full insight into some of the serious incidents that have occurred at the home. This does not help to provide assurances that children are receiving the help and care they need, or that strategies used to support children are effective.

The manager is not completing annual appraisals for staff. This hinders the manager's oversight of staff's professional development and training needs.

Staff receive regular supervision sessions. These provide staff with the opportunity to discuss any personal and work-related issues. Actions and tasks are reviewed during supervision as a performance tool. Staff receive praise for work that the manager views as good practice.

The manager has positive working relationships with partnership agencies. When issues arise, the manager will address these with professionals. The manager advocates on behalf of children to ensure that their needs are being met. This has included health assessments being explored to ensure that children receive the care they need.

Some staff members have worked at the home for a long period. This provides consistency and stability for children. When cover is needed due to staff sickness or annual leave, the manager utilises staff who are familiar with the home from within the organisation. This provides a level of continuity of care to the children.

When staff come to work at the home, they are provided with an induction and subject to a probationary period. Staff have commented that they feel well supported by their manager and there is an open-door policy that allows them to raise issues without any delay.

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, The 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 protection of children standard is that the registered person must ensure 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; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and 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 (1) (2)(a)(i)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(b))	31 January 2025
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 name of the child;	31 January 2025

details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of the measure; the date, time and location of the use of the measure; a description of the measure and its duration; details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure; the name of the person who used the measure ("the user"), and of any other person present when the measure was used; the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and a description of any injury to the child or any other person, and any medical treatment administered, as a result of the measure; within 48 hours of the use of the measure, the registered person, or a person who is authorised by the registered person to do so ("the authorised person")— has spoken to the user about the measure; and has signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35 (3)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(viii)(b)(i)(ii)(c)(iv))	
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—	31 January 2025

provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background; and 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))	
No measure of control or discipline which is excessive, unreasonable or contrary to paragraph (2) may be used in relation to any child. (Regulation 19 (1))	31 January 2025
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— 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; use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(h))	31 January 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that staff are familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Staff should record information about children in a non-stigmatising way. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. This particularly relates to the recording of complaints made by children. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff have their performance and fitness to carry out their role formally appraised at least once annually. ('Guide to the

Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.5)

- The registered person should ensure children are able to access all shared areas of their home unless there are specific reasons why this would not meet a child's needs. Any decisions to limit a child's access to any area of the must only be made where this is intended to safeguard the child's welfare. All decisions should be informed by a rigorous assessment of that individual child's needs, be properly recorded and be kept under regular review. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.10)

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: SC064931

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Pear Tree Projects Limited

Registered provider address: Peartree House, Bolam, Darlington, County Durham
DL2 2UP

Responsible individual: David Bartlett

Registered manager: Diana Hewick-Crawford

Inspectors

Kerry Chater, Social Care Inspector
Laura Roberts, Social Care Inspector

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