

SC398393

Registered provider: Hillcrest Children's Services (2) Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

A large private company operates this children's home. The home provides care and accommodation for up to two children. Ofsted has registered it for children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Inspection dates: 9 to 10 May 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

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

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 29 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: Declined in effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection

At the interim inspection in March, Ofsted found that the service has declined in effectiveness. Ofsted imposed two compliance notices. These concerned the standard of bedrooms and the quality of written risk assessments. A monitoring visit in April confirmed that the organisation has addressed these shortfalls.

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because

- The staff team provides a good, consistent service to young people. Staff are conscientious. Therefore, young people establish meaningful relationships with them.
- The majority of young people make remarkable progress, while a small minority find that the service does not meet their needs. Staff endeavour to provide young people with positive transitions to new placements.
- During the recent pressures caused by the absence of a registered manager and other convergent issues, the team has displayed resilience. The staff focus on young people's needs.
- Staff liaise well with other professionals and challenge them when they do not collaborate in young people's best interests. This dialogue is a key part of young people's care.
- The staff team is reflective. Staff members learn from incidents in order to give young people the best opportunities possible.
- Overall, staff keep young people as safe as possible. When young people repeatedly put themselves in harm's way, staff alert other agencies and decide on a suitable strategy.
- Young people have fun and undertake new and stimulating activities.

The children's home's areas for development

- The service suffers from a lack of leadership. The organisation has now appointed a new manager.
- Staff are not sufficiently well prepared to undertake additional duties, when the need arises. This has contributed to certain administrative shortfalls and delays.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
29/03/2017	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
11/07/2016	Full	Good
09/03/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
15/09/2015	Full	Good

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
13: The leadership and management standard In order to meet the leadership and management standard, the registered person must: (1)(d) ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child. This is with regard to staff being capable of undertaking more senior roles, when required.	21/08/2017
Keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it; and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16(3)(a)(b))	19/06/2017
Recruit staff ensuring that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. This is with regard to providing full information about agency staff. (Regulation 32(3)d)	19/06/2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that the home seeks as far as possible to maintain a domestic rather than 'institutional' impression. This is with regard to addressing the maintenance issues raised in this report. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- Use the workforce plan to record the ongoing training and continuing professional development needs of staff. This is with regard to making staff familiar with recent regulatory changes and with Ofsted's new inspection framework. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.8)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Young people enjoy living in a comfortable, detached property surrounded by open countryside. There is plenty of communal and private space for each resident. Each bedroom has its own en-suite bathing facilities. A young person said, 'Staff are kind, the house is nice.' Minor tasks require attention, including a dripping tap, a missing plug, and dirty windows. However, these routine maintenance issues have minimal effect on young people's positive feelings about the property.

Staff follow suitable admission procedures for each young person. The most recent young people both found that this worked well for them and their placements started strongly. Subsequently, one has progressed from strength to strength. His independent reviewing officer said, 'There's been a startling improvement; it's clicked into place for him.' Staff successfully encourage the majority of young people to undertake tasks for themselves, according to their ages and abilities. One ex-resident recently contacted staff to say how well she is doing. One current resident jokingly said that it is a bad thing that he has to tidy up after himself. More significantly, young people understand how to make formal complaints but seldom feel the need. Staff address their concerns promptly and make sure young people understand decisions that affect them.

Young people improve their attendance at school. The organisation has its own school, which some young people attend. Staff maintain a high level of contact with teachers, whichever school young people attend. In the short period since arriving at the home, one young person has made substantial educational progress. His newly acquired emotional stability means he now requires substantially less support at school. He enthusiastically attends every day, and is catching up academically. He has gained confidence to the extent that he supports other pupils and has started attending after-school clubs. Young people see that their views make a difference. Following consultation, one young person will now go the secondary school of his choosing rather than the more obvious choice. This encourages his engagement in education.

Staff help young people engage in new and stimulating activities at school and in their free time. One young person attends a dance club and has been camping overnight. He attends Scouts, which has increased his social circle, and engaged him in the local community. Such events also prompt conversations about religion and other important topics, which help young people to understand social issues. Sometimes, young people just prefer to relax with staff. One said, 'Most of the time it's fun here.' The staff team adapts the activity programmes to meet young people's wishes and needs. Recent difficulties, for example, have meant that additional staff have supported young people to continue with their chosen pastimes. The young people enjoy festivals, such as Easter and Christmas, and seasonal events, such as their planning for the summer holiday. These events contribute to positive memories, which staff capture in photo albums for each young person.

Under the guidance of the in-house therapists, staff identify and address each young person's emotional difficulties. Good work with other agencies means that young people

show clear improvements, whether they are local or from further away. For example, young people express their opinions, learn to take pride in their own appearance, and dress in ways that demonstrate their self-esteem. The service succeeds in helping young people take important steps towards resolving their emotional difficulties. Staff help each young person to contribute meaningfully to decisions about how often to meet their families. The vast majority of young people improve these relationships, which is an important emotional benefit. Staff take suitable steps to help young people who are not making progress.

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

Staff work hard to keep young people safe and act on their concerns, for example, when a young person appears to be under pressure from another. Young people feel this is successful and other agencies are impressed with what staff achieve. However, the fluctuating but severe risks posed by one young person have led to her moving recently to a more suitable placement. Staff feel disappointed by this outcome. At the same time, the manager was sick and then resigned, which caused additional pressure. This contributed to Ofsted issuing two compliance notices, one of which related to inadequate written risk assessments. The new documents are fewer and more succinct. The remaining young person presents no major risks, so this improvement is not yet been fully tested.

Staff practice a reparative approach to managing negative behaviour. They focus strongly on helping young people understand the implications of their decisions, the risks posed by others, and explain boundaries to them. This approach maintains young people's self-respect and rarely relies on physical interventions and negative consequences. This constructive ethos helps staff sustain good relationships with young people during difficult periods, which the lack of complaints or allegations by young people demonstrates.

Staff agree strategies to keep young people safe with other professionals, such as the police and social workers. In light of their understanding of each young person's risk, for example, to sexual exploitation, staff choose the best approach, bearing in mind young people's legal right to free movement. For example, they use bedroom door alarms and other restrictions appropriately. Staff help young people understand the right way to deal with difficulties through discussions, encouragement, and rewards. When a young person returned from being missing, one placing authority did not arrange return home interviews as often as necessary. This impeded the staff's understanding of the young person's behaviour. Senior staff, therefore, raised their concerns with the authority and implemented alternative, temporary arrangements to safeguard the individual.

Since the last full inspection, the staff team has not changed. However, one young person required additional support, part of which agency staff provided. A clear system is in place for the safe recruitment of agency staff, but the evidence on site is incomplete. This means, for example, that it is not clear if some staff have a right to work in this country or have appropriate qualifications. This increases the risk of unsuitable people working with the young people.

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

The quality of leadership of the service has declined since the last full inspection. This is because the registered manager was away from work and then resigned at the same time as the difficulties presented by one young person increased markedly. The interim inspection in March found that the whole service had declined in effectiveness. The manager's withdrawal created uncertainty for several months and removed important elements of leadership and capacity from this small team. The deputising team leader subsequently undertook some managerial duties and has a good understanding of the service. However, this episode has highlighted shortfalls in the capacity of team members to step into other roles, when required. In addition, the completion by staff of certain tasks has lapsed. For example, the updating of the statement of purpose, the completion of placement plans, obtaining the formal minutes of meetings, keeping up to date with the inspection framework, and young people signing documents they have read. These shortfalls have minimal impact on young people, but reflect the lack of leadership. The organisation has recruited a new manager who will start work later this month.

The senior staff have sustained a good level of support to the team and training has continued. This has helped to ensure that young people receive a good standard of care during a challenging period. All the staff are qualified and they show a strong focus on the young people, which is in line with the statement of purpose. Staff have addressed the requirements and recommendations from the Ofsted inspection in March, some of which Ofsted monitored during a visit in April. For example, staff now treat young people with sufficient care and respect by ensuring that their bedrooms and bathing facilities are of a high standard. Written risk assessments now protect young people appropriately by providing staff with relevant guidance. Where the relationships between young people have broken down, staff take action to remedy the situation.

Young people's records capture their progress in a clear and accessible way. Their progress shows particularly well in a new process that the registered manager has introduced. However, in the absence of the manager, this has fallen into disuse and has lost its value. The new manager will take responsibility for such processes imminently. Through regular formal and informal meetings, young people understand the issues that need attention. Their key workers are well organised and prepare the topics that need special consideration in advance.

The internal processes for monitoring the service are satisfactory and the independent visitor provides helpful analysis and evaluation. Staff members are keen to improve their practices and are committed to the service. The responsible individual has thoroughly reviewed the lessons from the last inspection with the team and charged the new manager with implementing an action plan.

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: SC398393

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Hillcrest Children's Services (2) Limited

Registered provider address: Turnpike Gate House, Alcester Heath, Alcester,
Warwickshire B49 5JG

Responsible individual: James Barlow

Registered manager: Post Vacant

Inspector

David Morgan, social care regulatory inspector

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