

SC453726

Registered provider: Aston Children's Care Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This privately owned home provides care for up to four children aged between 8 and 18 years old, with complex behaviours due to childhood trauma.

The manager registered with Ofsted in May 2021 and holds the level 5 diploma in leadership and management.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 7 to 8 September 2021

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 the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 15 May 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection:

During a monitoring visit on 19 January 2021, two compliance notices were raised under regulation 13 and regulation 14.

Regulation 13 was raised in relation to the leadership and management of the home. There were concerns in regard to the home being without a registered manager

since April 2019. There was insufficient monitoring of the service and risk assessments and behaviour support plans were not up to date or accurate. There were also concerns about staff training.

Regulation 14 was raised in relation to care planning. Children's care plans did not contain up-to-date information relating to their specific care needs. Managers failed to consider all known risks for children admitted to the home and there were concerns about the home's physical environment.

These were deemed to have been met at the monitoring visit a 2 March 2021.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
15/05/2019	Full	Requires improvement to be good
03/01/2019	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
20/06/2018	Full	Good
12/09/2017	Full	Requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Managers have failed to sustain the improvements made following compliance action in January 2021. As a result of this inspection, five compliance notices have been raised, and a notice restricting the number of children who can live at the home has been issued. Ofsted will continue to monitor the organisation's ability to meet these.

Four children live in this home. Three children have lived in the home for around one year and one child moved in three months ago.

The registered manager did not fully consider one child's vulnerabilities and risks when agreeing to him moving into the home. Information known about the child was not used effectively to inform any planning or matching with the other children living in the home. This left staff with inadequate information to enable them to care for the children. As a result, children have a negative experience of care.

Staff have poor relationships with children. They fail to provide positive responses to children or attempt to build relationships based on mutual respect and trust. For example, staff threatened to damage a child's personal item in response to the child's behaviour. This resulted in the child harming themselves and being harmed by other children. Furthermore, during the inspection, children were witness to staff arguing about who was going to provide care to them in a derogatory manner. This does not help children who have already experienced childhood trauma to feel valued or to help them build positive relationships.

Not all children have access to full-time education. While some children have sufficient education, one child who has lived in the home for nearly one year still only receives around 10 hours of home tutoring a week. The registered manager has failed to escalate this to the appropriate professionals. Currently, this child does not have their education needs fully met, which may have a negative impact on their future.

Children do not receive enough support to help them lead a healthy lifestyle. One child smokes tobacco and has done so within the home. It is unclear what strategies have been put in place to help the child and to keep everyone safe. It is also unclear if staff have the skills to support him to access professional support. As a result, the child has been allowed to continue to take part in an activity that could damage his long-term health and that puts others at risk of harm.

The physical condition of the home fails to provide children with a safe environment in which to live. The home is dirty, plaster is missing from the walls, exposed wires create a potential risk, and some children's bedrooms are in a poor condition. Furthermore, the day-to-day security of the home is insufficient as the inspector was able to walk into the home unchallenged as the front door was wide open. This is not an environment that helps children to flourish, nor does it keep children safe.

More positively, children have enjoyed trips out to visit theme parks and have enjoyed riding their bicycles. Staff support children to visit their friends and families. Social workers told inspectors that their children have made some progress in better managing their thoughts and feelings.

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

Staff fail to safeguard children and to provide them with the support they require to keep safe. Risk management is insufficient and does not protect children from harm. The registered manager is not fully informed of all risks associated with each child. As such, the home's risk assessment documents do not provide staff with enough information about how to manage potential risks.

Incidents of children harming one another have occurred on several occasions. Staff do not take enough action to stop these incidents occurring as they do not follow children's plans. As a result of this insufficient care, children have caused injuries to one another despite staff being present. Staff have a poor understanding about the detrimental impact this can have on children; this was exemplified by one member of staff who dismissed harmful behaviour by saying that 'boys will be boys'.

The registered manager fails to review incident records effectively and identify serious practice concerns within them. For example, she did not identify that staff do not follow children's behaviour strategies or the occasions when staff have been unkind to children. Furthermore, records are not written in a child-friendly manner and staff's frustrations with children are evident in these records. The registered manager has missed the opportunity to address poor practice and improve children's experiences.

Recruitment of staff is not safe or sufficient to protect children. Agency staff work in this home to address shortfalls in the rota. However, they have not been safely recruited. Omissions in safe recruitment include missing references, no identification checks and no checks completed for the reasons for leaving when the worker has previously worked with vulnerable adults or children. This means that managers do not ensure that children are cared for by staff who are suitable or safe to do so.

The responsible individual takes effective action when children make an allegation of harm. She reports these as required to the designated person in a timely way. During the inspection, children made further allegations of harm to the inspector. The responsible individual reported these as required and took immediate action to protect children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Leaders and managers have failed to demonstrate that they can successfully maintain improvements to the care they provide children. As such, children receive poor care which puts them at risk of harm.

During the inspection, the registered manager failed to take prompt action to address serious concerns which the inspector identified. For example, action was not taken to address the exposed electrical wires which posed an immediate risk to children. This demonstrates poor leadership and management.

Staff do not have the skills or training to meet children's needs. Children do not receive the required support in their everyday lives because staff do not understand their additional needs. In addition, despite some children being subject to a deprivation of liberty order, staff do not understand the responsibilities that come with this order. Furthermore, it is unclear which staff hold the necessary level 3 qualification in residential childcare as managers could not provide this information during the inspection.

Staffing levels do not meet the requirements as stipulated in children's plans. The registered manager identifies that seven staff are required to meet the needs of all four children living in the home. However, on a number of occasions, staffing levels have not met these requirements. In addition, staffing is not consistent. As some staff have resigned, gaps are filled with agency staff and staff from the organisation's other homes. Children told the inspector that they often do not know the staff working in the home and this affects their ability to form relationships with trusted adults. Staff do not receive supervision in line with the organisation's policy. This is a missed opportunity to support staff, address poor practice and help them to develop.

The registered manager now shares the quality of care report with Ofsted as required. This was a shortfall at a previous inspection which resulted in a requirement under regulation 45. Despite this, the registered manager has not ensured that the quality of care report takes into consideration the views of children.

Monitoring and review systems are not effective in addressing shortfalls and protecting children. The registered manager fails to use internal audits to bring about necessary changes. For example, the quality assurance officer identified some shortfalls as found during the inspection. However, actions have not been taken to address these and improve the care to children.

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
In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that— if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority's or a relevant person's performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 5 (c)) This specifically relates to escalating concerns when children's educational needs are not met.	17 October 2021
The health and well-being standard is that— the health and well-being needs of children are met; children receive advice, services and support in relation to their health and well-being; and children are helped to lead healthy lifestyles. (Regulation 10 (1)(a)(b)(c)) This specifically relates to ensuring that staff providing children with appropriate support and guidance to help them to stop smoking cigarettes.	17 October 2021
*The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust; an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and	3 October 2021

positive responses to other children and adults. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c)) This specifically relates to ensuring that staff build positive relationships with children and one another.	
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— help each child to understand how to keep safe; (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(ii)) This specifically relates to ensuring that staff address the risk of children smoking in the home effectively.	17 October 2021
*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— manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; 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)(iv)(b)) This specifically relates to ensuring that staff take action and support children so they no longer harm one another. It also relates to ensuring that staff keep each child safe from harm.	17 October 2021
The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.	3 October 2021

In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— 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. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(d)) This specifically relates to ensuring that staff provide children with a safe environment to live in. It also relates to staff ensuring that the home is well maintained.	
*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 staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c)(h)) This specifically relates to ensuring that members of the staff team have sufficient training required to meet the needs of children and have their level 3 qualification. It also relates to ensuring that the manager has effective monitoring and review systems.	17 October 2021
*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.	3 October 2021

In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(d)) This specifically relates to ensuring there is sufficient staff to meet the needs of each child.	
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home's statement of purpose; that each child's relevant plans are followed. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(c)) This specifically relates to ensuring that the provider only admits children to the home when it fully understands their needs and can confidently meet those needs. It also relates to ensuring that staff follow all children's relevant plans, including behaviour support plans, risk assessments and deprivation of liberty orders.	17 October 2021
*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.	3 October 2021

(Regulation 32 (1) (3)(d)) This specifically relates to ensuring that agency staff are safely recruited as required.	
The registered person must ensure that all employees— receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33 (4)(b))	17 October 2021
The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children (“a quality of care review”) at least once every 6 months. In order to complete a quality of care review the registered person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating— the quality of care provided for children; the feedback and opinions of children about the children’s home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it; and any actions that the registered person considers necessary in order to improve or maintain the quality of care provided for children. The system referred to in paragraph (2) must provide for ascertaining and considering the opinions of children, their parents, placing authorities and staff. (Regulation 45 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c) (5)) This requirement was raised at the previous inspection in relation to the quality of care review report not being written and shared with Ofsted.	17 October 2021

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that staff record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and

third-party information. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 6, paragraph 14.4)

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: SC453726

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Aston Children's Care Limited

Registered provider address: 181 Penn Road, Wolverhampton WV3 0EQ

Responsible individual: Mahesh Mehan

Registered manager: Leanne Hobday

Inspectors

Louise Battersby, Social Care Inspector

Sarah Junor-Fitzpatrick, Social Care Inspector

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