

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	13/07/2016
Unique reference number	SC405985
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	ERA Care Limited
Registered provider address	Unit G22, Allen House, The Maltings, Station Road, Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire CM21 9JX

Responsible individual	Stephen Milton
Registered manager	Hayley Roberts
Inspector	Rosie Davie

Inspection date	13/07/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Requires improvement
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good

SC405985

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- The children who live in this home for a number of months make excellent progress from their starting points.
- Overall the frequency and intensity of missing has reduced.
- Most children at risk of exploitation respond to the advice and support offered by staff.
- Attendance and engagement with education improves for most children.
- Most children develop new life skills.
- Some children volunteer in the local community.
- Most children engage in the opportunities provided by staff to promote a healthy lifestyle, resulting in improved physical and emotional well-being.
- Feedback from parents and agencies is very positive and praises staff's endeavours.
- Shortfalls identified relate to the de-escalation of confrontations, liaison with police at the point of admission, clearer recording of physical intervention, review of the location risk assessment, confidentiality around the use of the office and the timely clearing out of some household items.

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 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
<p>11: The positive relationships standard</p> <p>In order to meet the positive relationships standard, with specific reference to incidents of bullying in the home, the registered person must ensure that staff:</p> <p>(2) (xi) de-escalate confrontations with or between children, or potentially violent behaviour by children.</p>	30/09/2016
The registered person must implement the missing child policy, setting out the steps taken, and to be taken, to prevent children from being absent without permission. (Regulation 34(4)(a))	30/09/2016
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 a description of the measure and its duration. (Regulation 35 (3)(a)(iv))	30/09/2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Ensure that staff seek to meet the child's basic needs in the way that a good parent would, recognising that many children in residential care have experienced environments where these needs have not been consistently met. Doing this is an important aspect of demonstrating that the staff care for the child and value them as an individual. This is with specific reference to replacing chipped crockery and the timely removal from the home of household items no longer in use. (Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards, page 15, paragraph 3.7)
- Homes should take account of information provided from an independent return to home interview 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)

- The review of the location risk assessment should include the identification of any risks and opportunities presented by the home's location and strategies for managing these. Providers should refer to the non-statutory advice about the location assessment process: 'Children's homes regulations amendments 2014: Advice for children's homes providers on new duties under regulations that came in to effect in January and April 2014'. (Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards, page 64, paragraph 15.1)

Full report

Information about this children's home

This children's home is owned and managed by a private provider. It provides care and accommodation for up to three children, irrespective of gender, with behavioural and or emotional difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/01/2016	Full	Requires improvement
15/06/2015	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
19/11/2014	Full	Adequate
02/10/2014	Full	Inadequate

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
<p>For some months after the last full inspection one child lived at the home alone before two new admissions. One of the new children did not respond to this environment or the support offered and as a result moved on quickly to a different setting. This means that at the time of this inspection there were two children living in the home.</p> <p>Children who live in the home for some time make exceptional progress from their starting points. Those who have been out of education re-engage with learning. They achieve and make progress in reading and writing. They make the successful transition from home tutoring and reintegrate back into the school environment. This represents significant progress for those individuals. One placing social worker said: 'I am very impressed with how proactive the staff have been to support and prioritise education.'</p> <p>One child said: 'I have been here for longer than I have been anywhere else. That should tell you something about what being here is doing to help me.' A placing social worker said: 'It's good to see that she has good relationships with staff who really do want the best for her.' This means that living in this home makes a positive difference to children.</p> <p>Families and those who are significant are helped to feel welcome. They phone regularly and visit the home. This helps children to feel comfortable and to maintain their cultural identity. One placing social worker said: 'The staff have been so quick to identify her needs and to engage with her.' One parent said: 'She has made a good turnaround and I am really proud of her.'</p> <p>Children receive guidance to help to prepare them for their future. They are encouraged to stop smoking and to identify ways to be healthy. They are encouraged to take responsibility for money management and to learn how to budget. This helps them to practise independent living skills.</p> <p>Children routinely access external health and support, such as mental and sexual health services. This helps them to learn how to meet their own needs and emphasises the importance of positive well-being. They also thrive from taking an active part in the community. For example, one child volunteers at a local charity shop, is completing a sewing course locally and has taken part in an organised charity run. This helps children to build confidence and to learn skills that can be utilised now and in later life.</p>	

The home offers ample space and accommodation for each child. Downstairs there is a comfortable living room and a separate education area for children to have quiet space should this be necessary. Bedrooms are personalised. Children are encouraged to invest in their private space. For example, one child has fish. This helps them to take responsibility for their environment and to feel at home. This inspection found that some household equipment no longer fit for purpose remained in the home. This has minimal impact on the children. However, it detracts from an otherwise homely environment.

The children and staff are currently having a sunflower-growing competition. This educates and teaches children new skills.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
<p>Children confidently say that they feel happy living in this home. They recognise the help and support that the staff provide to help them feel safe in and out of the home.</p> <p>While episodes of going missing had increased significantly, this was for a short period and related to the arrival and departure of the third child. Police say that staff are proactive when children go missing. However, on one occasion staff had not alerted them to the arrival of one child known in another area due to high-risk behaviours. This means that on this occasion the staff did not fully implement the home's policy on going missing. This shortfall has no impact on the current children. The registered manager has a system to ensure that placing authorities meet their obligation to provide an independent return to home interview. However, of examples sampled, the home could not demonstrate how it had taken into account any information provided from the interview. This does not enable staff to enhance the quality of their written risk assessments.</p> <p>Overall and since the last inspection, the frequency and intensity of incidents of going missing has reduced significantly. Children are aware that staff follow, search and work hard to stay in contact with them. One member of staff said: 'I spent two hours walking around the local area to find her because I wanted her to be back at the house and safe.' Most of the children previously at risk of exploitation accept help and learn to make safer choices. This means that overall, the risk of children coming to harm from other adults in the wider community reduces meaningfully. One child said: 'Before I came here I did a lot of things that put me in danger. All of that has stopped and I am doing different and better things with my life now.'</p>	

Incidents in the home had reduced significantly. The manager has an effective system to track and record information about events in the home. This helps her to manage and understand what has taken place when she is not present and enables her to go back and address any issues arising. Nonetheless, one significant event occurred between two children who became involved in an altercation. The effective systems for capturing bullying meant that children had previously made staff aware of potential difficulties. On this occasion, staff had not used the information available to them to anticipate where conflict could arise and, as a result, were unable to de-escalate a confrontation. The result was one child's arrest at the home.

Staff rarely use physical intervention. However, the single record of the intervention since the last inspection is not sufficiently clear in detailing the description of the measure and its duration. While this example of this shortfall has minimal impact on the children, the practice of vague recording in this area leaves staff vulnerable to misinterpretation in the event of an allegation.

Staff celebrate success. They recognise achievement by rewarding children with certificates, praise, and treats. This helps to motivate children and furthermore inspires a culture of positivity and progression.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good

Qualified with the appropriate level 5 diploma, the registered manager has been in post for approximately one year. Staff describe her as approachable and knowledgeable. More than one member of the team said, 'She certainly knows what she is doing.' This means that the team have confidence in her ability to drive improvement for the children. One placing social worker said: 'I have been inundated with emails asking me to take things forward for my child.' This shows that the home keeps in regular contact with other agencies, and that the manager is proactive, and has the skill and the fervour to advocate for children. Another placing social worker said, 'I am very impressed.'

There have been no complaints since the last inspection. However, the registered manager has made improvements to the system by introducing a post-box for any child to write to her. This shows the children that the manager is accessible and ready to listen. One child said: 'If I had a problem I would go to the manager and she would listen.'

The team meets regularly to discuss the children's needs and progress. They

complete detailed case records towards charting children's experiences day to day and use planning documents to record progress. They reflect on what has gone well and where a new approach may make a difference. The manager encourages learning from practice and ensures that she shares feedback from the children and key stakeholders with staff to help them to improve. She is keen to learn from any mistakes and is ready to take effective action where she sees that children's needs are compromised, for example, through inappropriate matching. This means that achieving progress for all children is central to the ethos of the service delivered.

The regulations from the last full inspection are met. For example, the manager and senior managers have ensured that children's education is progressed by the home with positive results for the majority of children.

The manager has a development plan, which she reviews. This helps her to see where improvements have been made in the home and what is yet to be completed. The routine internal and external monitoring helps the manager to track and act towards improving the overall experiences of children as reflected in the homes statement of purpose. The manager, as required by regulation, has reviewed the location risk assessment. However, the document continues to fall short because some new information about the impact of the home's proximity to the local train station has not been added. This has no impact on the current children.

The registered manager was promoted from within the home and, as a result, the home does not yet have an assistant manager. However, this has not compromised the frequency or quality of staff supervision, which she regularly provides. There have also been some additions to the staff team, which is an improvement. The new staff experience good induction into the home. One said: 'I really feel that the support, training, and guidance that I receive help me to do my job and show me where I need to improve so I can get better at helping the children.' All required staff hold the mandatory level 3 diploma, which means that those who should be, are appropriately qualified.

The manager and staff have sought to work proactively as a team to engage stakeholders. In the community they creatively identify resources and facilities to help to meet the individual and cultural needs of children. The result is that those children who are willing to accept help develop a sense of belonging and purpose. One child said: 'This is a good home. It is the best that I have ever been in.'

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 children looked after 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 that 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 that 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 the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'.

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