

## Children's homes inspection – Full

<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>12/09/2016</b>
<b>Unique reference number</b>	<b>SC462809</b>
<b>Type of inspection</b>	<b>Full</b>
<b>Provision subtype</b>	<b>Children's home</b>
<b>Registered provider</b>	<b>ERA Care Limited</b>
<b>Registered provider address</b>	<b>Unit G22, Allen House, The Maltings, Station Road, Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire CM21 9JX</b>

<b>Responsible individual</b>	<b>Stephen Milton</b>
<b>Registered manager</b>	<b>Samantha Bagshaw</b>
<b>Inspector</b>	<b>Rosie Davie</b>

<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>12/09/2016</b>
<b>Previous inspection judgement</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
<b>Enforcement action since last inspection</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>This inspection</b>	
<b>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
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.	
<b>How well children and young people are helped and protected</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
<b>The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>

**SC462809**

## **Summary of findings**

### **The children's home provision is requires improvement because:**

- Collectively the staff do not have the skills and experience to respond effectively to children at risk.
- Despite staff efforts to engage with individuals, children go missing and for the majority this behaviour increases.
- Local youths congregate outside the home, causing a disturbance and enticing children out of the home.
- Staff call police to the home frequently. However, they do not consistently pass on information to them about individual children.
- Children do not meaningfully engage in education because they do not live in the home for long enough.
- While working with another colleague, one member of staff left the home during a shift.
- Information provided on referrals is not appropriately considered in relation to the location of the home.
- The kitchen is locked from 11pm to 8am.
- Some aspects of woodwork and bedding in some children's bedrooms require attention.

## **The children's home's strengths**

- A new registered manager has been appointed since the last full inspection. She has some previous experience of managing children's homes.
- The registered manager recognises the current issues in relation to the impact of the local community on staff ability to engage meaningfully with children and is working with the responsible individual to improve the quality of care provided.
- Local authorities say that they receive regular feedback and that communication is good.
- Most staff do their best to try to encourage children to engage with different activities.
- Managers act appropriately and also inform other agencies when concerns about staff practice come to light.

## 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>12: The protection of children standard</p> <p>(1) In order to meet the protection of children standard the registered provider must ensure that staff protect children from harm and enable them to keep themselves safe.</p>	31/10/2016
<p>13: The leadership and management standard</p> <p>In order to meet the leadership and management standard the registered person must enable, inspire and lead a culture in relation to the children's home that:</p> <p>(2)(c) ensures that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child</p> <p>(2)(f) understands the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and uses this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home.</p>	31/10/2016

### Recommendations

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

- Ensure that placements are only accepted for children where they are satisfied that the home can respond effectively to the child's assessed needs as recorded in the child's relevant plans. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.4)
- Ensure that beyond local authorities, other agencies, specifically the police, receive information about children referred to and leaving the home ('Guide to

the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 12, paragraph 2.7)

- 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. This is with specific reference to bedding, removing sharp implements from bedrooms and painting woodwork in bedrooms. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.7)
- Ensure that the review of the home's location is robust in the identification of any risks, and strategies for managing these. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 64, paragraph 15.1)
- Ensure that, just as in a family home, 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. Limits on privacy and access may only be put in place to safeguard each child in the home. (Regulation 21(c)(i)) This is with specific reference to the routine locking of the kitchen from 11pm to 8am. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.10)

## Full report

### Information about this children's home

This privately owned children's home is one of a small group run by the organisation. It provides care and support for up to three children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

### Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
08/03/2016	Full	Requires improvement
17/08/2015	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
06/01/2015	Full	Adequate
14/05/2014	Interim	Declined in effectiveness

## Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
<b>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
<p>Collectively the team is unable to influence children towards sustaining positive behavioural change. For a number of months, groups of children including previous residents have been coming to the home at different times of the day and night. The result is disturbance, including formal complaints from the neighbours and children enticed out of the home. The outcome is that all children's placements have come to an end because staff do not have the skills to enable children to sustain keeping themselves safe.</p> <p>The last child to leave moved recently to another home in the group. Initiated by the provider, this happened because the registered manager had identified, as with the two children immediately preceding this one, that this home could not effectively safeguard them. This means that the managers and leaders know that, at this time, this home cannot meet the needs of some children with particular behaviours.</p> <p>The staff do try. They work, at times creatively, to engage the children. They encourage them to do new things or to become involved in pursuits they have previously shown interest in. For example, they offer a range of activities such as horse-riding, dancing, athletics, cultural trips and table tennis. Some children do make small progressive steps from their starting points; for example, securing a job or achieving a part in a play. However, they cannot sustain progress and personal achievements are overshadowed. This is because all children continue to place themselves at risk of harm by leaving the home.</p> <p>Staff talk to children about the dangers of smoking and using drugs. Nonetheless, children continue to engage actively in these behaviours, encouraged by the children who come to the home from within the community. This means that staff are not able to protect children from these powerful external influences.</p> <p>Staff do a good job of providing most agencies with information about their child's experience and progress. They link children in with relevant health and well-being services, including the looked after children's nurse, and they maintain regular, meaningful correspondence with placing local authorities. One representative said that the staff are 'proactive'. The home has signed a memorandum of good practice with the local police force. However, the police say that communication is at times inconsistent, resulting in delays in relevant information being forwarded to them. As a result, effective working relationships with the range of agencies required to work together to keep each individual child safe are not being maintained.</p>	

Most children referred to the home are disengaged from education. Staff do encourage education and learning. For example, there is a dedicated room available which in theory would enable one child to have quiet time to engage with their studies. In addition, staff talk to children about the importance of making positive choices for their future. This encourages some to engage with home tutors for some of the time. However, children do not sustain progress. Since the last inspection, the majority have not lived at the home for long enough for measurable progress to be achieved.

Regulations raised at the last full inspection highlighted that some rooms in the home required attention. Since then a number of aspects of the home have improved. This means that these regulations have been met. For example, walls have been painted, some flooring replaced and the living room made more homely with bright pictures. However, in some of the children's bedrooms some woodwork is marked and in one room a message remains on a door from a child who has left. Also, one duvet cover has two holes and in two bedrooms the inspector found sharp screws. The registered manager attended to the bedding and screws immediately. She advises that there is a plan for the woodwork in the bedrooms to be refreshed. The provider does make funds available for children to personalise their rooms when they arrive. However, arrangements fall short because aspects of some children's bedrooms lack the care and attention that a good parent would provide.

To a certain extent, staff encourage the children to be involved in the day-to-day running of the home. They ask them what they would like to happen in the home and what they think could be improved. They help the children to develop and practise domestic skills, for example in budgeting, laundry and meal preparation. This promotes independence. However, at 11pm staff lock the kitchen, reopening it at 8am when the morning shift begins. Records show that on one occasion, a 17-year-old had to wait in the morning before gaining access to the kitchen. This arrangement is institutionalised and means that staff miss opportunities to encourage individual children to take responsibility.

	Judgement grade
<b>How well children and young people are helped and protected</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
<p>One child spoken to said that she had not liked living in the home. However, the same child also said that she would not settle in any home until such time as her placing local authority returned her to her local area.</p> <p>As placements progress, staff regularly update plans, adding more personalised information that reflects individual needs. All children have well-written and</p>	

detailed risk assessments. These documents provide information about the likelihood of external and internal risks posed. While clear, not all relevant information is taken into account in the matching process. For example, one child was placed in the home when information about the demographics of the location had the potential to be a risk to her personal safety. Staff, who were unaware at the point of referral of the relevant information, tried to work with her. However, overall, they were not able to sustain meeting her specific needs and her behaviour and emotional well-being deteriorated. As a result, the registered manager ended the placement after a short period of time.

Physical intervention is rare. Staff try to manage conduct effectively by incentive. They offer rewards for positive behaviours and sanction undesirable actions. The registered manager maintains good oversight of the system, intervening when necessary to ensure that all consequences are fair and proportionate.

Children referred who are at risk of missing or known to go missing significantly increase this behaviour. Staff do follow procedure and also go out to look for children. One child went missing on over 20 occasions in one month. Staff reported him missing and did make an effort to engage with him when he was in the home; for example, they took him out to the cinema. In addition, the manager sought to engage his placing local authority, requesting that they come to meet with him individually. However, the combined efforts of the team were unsuccessful in seeking to reduce this behaviour and the placement came to an end because of the significant influence of the children in the local community on his behaviour.

	Judgement grade
<b>The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
<p>Registered in August, the manager has been in post for a short time. She has some previous experience of managing children's homes and is completing the required level 5 diploma in management and leadership. Records show that she makes herself available to the children and is quick to act when they bring issues to her attention. She has previous experience of working with and supporting children with mental health issues.</p> <p>The assistant manager is new to the home. He also has previous experience of working in social care and has obtained the required qualification.</p> <p>Together, the managers provide supervision, support and guidance to the staff team. Some members have left or are about to leave, which means that the registered manager is rebuilding the group and expects to be appointing new staff. However, the manager says: 'If there was a suitable and appropriate referral there would be a team available to care for a child.' Nonetheless, the home has</p>	

previously agreed to take children who go missing, knowing that there is an issue with the children in the local community targeting the home. This shortfall fails to demonstrate that the home consistently accepts referrals when it can respond effectively to the child's assessed needs as recorded in the child's relevant plans.

The provider does ensure that all staff access some mandatory training in areas such as safeguarding and managing challenge. The majority of training takes place online. Some staff who have completed the level 3 diploma work one shift each week. This means that for those individuals their time in the home is limited. New staff are, or will be, registering to undertake the required residential childcare qualification. The registered manager is currently working to resource external training in order to increase the skills of the staff group, for example in relation to developing knowledge and understanding about sexual exploitation and mental health. However, at the time of inspection no additional training had been delivered. The result is that there are few staff working consistently in the home who have the required qualification and therefore the level of skill and experience necessary to effect change with vulnerable children.

The registered manager keeps the designated officer from placing authorities appropriately informed of allegations against staff. The provider and manager take robust action to address performance issues. For example, while on shift with a colleague, one member of the team left the home because she said that she could no longer cope with the impact of one child's behaviour. This example confirms that some staff do not have the sufficient skill and experience to deal with the level of need that the children have. The registered manager says: 'I need to do a lot more work with the team here.'

The majority of regulations and quality standards from the last inspection are met. For example, the review of the quality of care was completed and records show that managers address complaints efficiently. However, this inspection raises the same one regulation and one quality standard again.

The registered and assistant manager are working together to have a positive impact on the quality of care delivered in the home. They seek to solve the problem of children from outside the home coming to the home and making contact with any of those children living there. For example, they have challenged the children directly, used waking night staff to try to reduce absconding, completed a chronology of events, and have attended community meetings with the police. However, at the time of this inspection the registered manager has not identified with the responsible individual a strategic approach to tackle this chronic issue. The result is that any development work about the quality of the care provided in the home is futile. Furthermore, while the location risk assessment has been reviewed to acknowledge the issues of the local community, the changes do not go far enough to demonstrate the impact of the risks posed. The registered manager says: 'If I look at this home, the biggest issue is the local community.'

## 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 looked after children 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 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 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'.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It inspects services for looked after children and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted).

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2016