

1229977

Registered provider: Oxfordshire County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This is a children's home run by a local authority. It provides care and accommodation for up to six young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The home provides short-term care and accommodation, which may be on a shared-care basis, aimed at preventing a family breakdown. It also accommodates young people while assessments of their longer-term placement needs are carried out. The home does not offer long-term placements. The home provides an emergency bed.

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 May 2017 and 6 June 2017

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 failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded.

Date of last inspection: 16 February 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: Requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is inadequate because:

- Safeguarding practice is poor. Appropriate action is not taken by staff or the manager when allegations are made.
- The manager's monitoring is inadequate and fails to ensure that children are safeguarded.
- The manager has failed to address an incident of poor staff performance.
- The support to staff through supervision and team meetings is not at the frequency required by the home's standards.
- The admission assessments are weak and lack consideration of all known factors.
- Not all risks relating to individual children have been assessed. When they are assessed, not all have clear strategies to guide staff to minimise risks.
- Some children's health needs are not identified and planned for.
- Staff have used prohibited sanctions.
- Record-keeping is poor.
- The home's register is not kept up to date.
- The statement of purpose is not compliant with regulations.

The children's home's strengths:

- Children feel welcomed into the home.
- Children develop good relationships with staff.
- There are good working relationships between staff and other professionals.
- Children have access to a good range of activities during their time in the home.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
16/02/2017	Full	Requires improvement

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
<p>The care planning standard is that children—</p> <p>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.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>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. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) and (2)(a))</p> <p>With specific reference to ensuring that thorough risk assessments are carried out prior to a child's admission to the home to ensure that the needs of all children can be met safely. Additionally, if conclusions are reached that a placement is not viable, then these placements must not take place.</p>	04/08/2017
<p>The health and well-being standard is that—</p> <p>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.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure that staff help each child to achieve the health and well-being outcomes that are recorded in the child's relevant plans; understand the child's health and well-being needs and the options that are available in relation to the child's health and well-being, in a way that is appropriate to the child's age and understanding; take part in activities, and attend any appointments, for the purpose of meeting the child's health and well-being needs; and understand and develop skills to promote the child's well-being. (Regulation 10 (1)(a)(b)(c) and 2(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv))</p>	04/08/2017

<p>The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>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 on signs that a child is at risk of harm. (Regulation 12 (1) and (2)(a)(i))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that all needs and risks are identified and assessed and that strategies to reduce risks are the contained in children's plans and are clear. Ensure that it is evidenced that staff have read and understood the plans to promote the welfare of each child.</p>	<p>04/08/2017</p>
<p>The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that staff have the skills to identify and act on signs that a child is at risk of harm; 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 are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. (Regulation 12 (1) and (2)(a)(iii)(v)(vi)(vii))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that allegations made by children are always acted on and referred in a timely way to safeguarding professionals.</p>	<p>04/08/2017</p>
<p>The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that—</p> <p>helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) and (2)(h))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the registered manager identifies safeguarding concerns through monitoring and addresses poor staff practice in a timely manner when allegations are made by children.</p>	<p>04/08/2017</p>

<p>In order to meet the quality and purpose of care standard, the registered person must:</p> <p>compile in relation to the children’s home a statement (‘the statement of purpose’) which covers the matters listed in Schedule 1, keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it; and notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (1) and (3)(a)(b))</p>	04/08/2017
<p>No measure of control or discipline which is excessive, unreasonable or contrary to paragraph (2) may be used in relation to any child. The following measures may not be used to discipline any child—</p> <p>imposing a financial penalty, other than a requirement for the payment of a reasonable sum (which may be by instalments) by way of reparation. (Regulation 19 (1) and (2)(a))</p>	04/08/2017
<p>The registered person must maintain records (‘case records’) for each child which: include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child; are kept up to date; and are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36(1)(a)(b)(c))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that all information that staff need to care for a child effectively is accurate, up to date and easily accessible to staff and children and records of missing episodes are fully completed.</p>	04/08/2017
<p>The registered person must ensure that all employees undertake appropriate continuing professional development, and receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33(4)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure compliance with the organisation’s policy in relation to the frequency and quality of the support to staff through supervision and staff meetings.</p>	04/08/2017
<p>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. 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) and (5))</p>	04/08/2017
<p>Schedule 4 sets out the other information that the registered person must keep in relation to a children’s home.</p> <p>The registered person must—</p> <p>maintain in the home the records in Schedule 4; ensure that the records are kept up to date. (Regulation 37 (1) and (2)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the home’s register is accurate and kept up to date.</p>	04//08/2017

Recommendations

- Appropriately support children throughout their care and give them opportunities to discuss the impact of the care, or any changes that they feel they might need to be made to it. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 18, paragraph 3.31)

In particular, ensure that key work sessions with children are managed in a creative way that meets each child's individual needs.

- The registered person must challenge (under regulation 5(c)) any placing authority who asks them to accept a child in the absence of a complete and current relevant plan, as the expectation that a placement of a child without the necessary information would go ahead (in circumstances other than an emergency) is inadequate in relation to their role. It is essential that homes understand what will be required of them before they accept responsibility for a child's placement, to avoid disruption and instability for the child in future and for other children in the home. For children who are not looked after, the home should ensure that they have sufficient information from the child's placing authority (usually their parents/carers) and other relevant agencies to effectively assess whether they can meet the child's needs before agreeing to the placement. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.5)

In particular, ensure that, when social workers fail to arrange review meetings following emergency placements, this is vigorously challenged by the manager and staff.

- Expectations of standards of behaviour should be high for all staff and children in the home. These standards should be clear and unambiguous. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.11)

In particular, ensure that any agreements, such as those relating to internet use and anti-bullying, children are asked to sign up to are easy to understand and written in plain English.

- At least one person on duty at any given time in a children's home must have a suitable first aid qualification. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 35, paragraph 7.13)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

An additional day was added to this inspection, to gather further evidence specifically in relation to safeguarding practices. The additional inspection day took place on 6 June 2017, and this concluded the on-site inspection.

Since the inspection in February 2017, the home has had less than six children staying at any one time. This means that the adequacy of staffing levels, the quality of the team work and the competence of staff to work as a team has not been fully tested.

The assessments carried out prior to an admission being agreed are poor. Despite a wealth of information about each child being available to staff, this information is not used to consider the compatibility of the proposed group of children. As a result, areas of potential conflict are not planned for. Additionally, there is no consideration given to whether staff have the right skills and training to meet the proposed children's needs individually or as a group. On one recent occasion, despite staff's concerns about a placement and an assessment having concluded a placement not to be viable, the placement went ahead.

In one case of an emergency placement, the social work team failed to arrange a meeting within 72 hours of the placement, as required in the statement of purpose. This failure had not been challenged vigorously enough by the manager. The meeting did not occur for some days after placement and, at the time of the inspection, 10 days after the meeting had occurred, the minutes had not been received. Therefore, concerns raised during this meeting had not been included in risk assessments or care planning for the child. Nevertheless, staff do their best to welcome new children into the home and they settle quickly. Children are provided with useful information about what they can expect from their time in the home.

Planning for meeting children's individual needs is poor. Not all information known about children is used to inform the development of the care plan. In one case, a care plan was not reviewed despite a diagnosis confirming the child had an autistic spectrum disorder. This means that there have been lost opportunities to arrange the right support for the child and his family, so that he has the best chance to make progress. In another case, it is recorded on the electronic system that there was a restraining order against a child, yet it was not known by staff if this order was current or had expired.

Children develop good relationships with staff, who are interested in them and spend time with them. Children take part in making decisions about their day-to-day lives and more complex issues. They talk to staff informally and during meetings with their key worker. The records of key work sessions show that the quality of these sessions and the value they have for children are variable. Records show that some workers take a creative approach to key work and the child engages well in these sessions. Children explore their feelings, develop achievable and interesting targets and are rewarded with praise when aims have been met. Other records show that a fixed approach is taken to the agenda for each session, which leads to sessions being repetitive. One child described these sessions as 'boring'.

The manager has arranged for children to have access to an independent visitor, although this service has not yet commenced. Children know how to complain. One child spoke about how he would seek out his favourite member of staff if he wanted to complain or was unhappy about something. There have not been any complaints made since the last inspection.

Children make some progress in social skills. For example, some had made progress in managing conflicts more effectively, and were complying with boundaries set when they stayed in the home.

Children have meaningful, purposeful and enjoyable activities that keep them occupied during their time in the home. The home is well stocked with arts and crafts materials that children enjoy using. There was some impressive artwork that children had completed on display. Staff and children make good use of the spacious grounds for football or basketball games. Trips out into the community are arranged so that children have the chance to develop interests and skills such as swimming, attending the local gym, or just enjoying a walk with staff. During the inspection, a young person was helping staff assemble some new bicycles, and children and staff were enjoying trying these out. The children were helping staff cook the evening meal and then they all sat down together and enjoyed the mealtime as a social event. When a child has a religious preference, staff ensure that appropriate faith-based activities are arranged.

There was information missing from plans about children's health needs, which meant that staff were unaware of some significant potential health risks. These were, therefore, not being catered for. Specialist help is gained in relation to children's emotional and psychological well-being where necessary.

Staff support children to attend and achieve in their education. When a child is not attending their education placement, staff try and support young people to reintegrate back into school. As a provider of short breaks, the overall responsibility for most children's educational needs remains with their parents.

One of the main aims of this home is to support children and parents to remain together. Staff work to help children and parents to develop their relationships, and support parents to develop the skills they need to parent their child more effectively. A parent reported that she felt that the staff are supportive and that she is satisfied with the care provided to her son. She feels that she is always greeted with a warm welcome and this puts her at ease.

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

Children coming to stay in the home identified individual staff members who they felt they could talk to. However, when children have raised issues with staff, these have not always been dealt with. In one case, a member of staff failed to take action when an allegation was made by a child. This was highlighted to the manager during the first inspection visit. By the time of the second inspection visit, it was found that the manager had still not taken urgent action to deal with the issue. Another concern raised during the first inspection visit, about a child travelling in a taxi without using her seatbelt, had not been adequately addressed by the time of the second part of the inspection. Record-keeping in relation to how safeguarding matters have been dealt with, including the

outcome, is not easy to access and this makes monitoring difficult.

Some of the risk management strategies are compromised. In some cases, known risks have not been assessed; for example, there was a failure to assess the risk posed by a child with a history of fire-setting. Instructions for staff about how to reduce risks are not clear or are unrealistic. In respect of the potential for bullying, the action outlined is for staff to explain to the child that bullying will not be tolerated and to go through the bullying policy with the child. This does not provide staff with sufficient guidance as to how to prevent bullying occurring, or to manage bullying behaviour if it arises.

Policies and procedures for dealing with bullying are ambiguous and do not provide clarity for staff and children. Children have signed bullying agreements, but these are not written in a child-friendly way. Because these agreements are difficult to understand, it is unlikely children fully understand what the expectations of them are. No children have gone missing from the home since the last inspection.

Children's internet use on the home's computers is monitored by staff to ensure that they use it safely. Children are expected to sign up to and comply with a safe use of the internet agreement. This agreement is not written in language which is easily understood, and the extent to which the children understand what they have signed up to is in doubt. Children have appropriate access to phones. While they do not have access to smartphones in the home, they do have access to basic phones on which they can call their parents, or professionals if they wish to.

The staff work effectively with the children to help them develop more appropriate coping strategies. There has been some successful use of de-escalation techniques and of restorative approaches so that children make amends for their wrongdoing. There is a rewards system using tokens that children understand. Through this system, staff are able to effectively reinforce a wide range of positive behaviours such as helping with housework, being up for school on time, or welcoming a new resident in the home.

There is low use of the police and they are only called when absolutely necessary. Since the February 2017 inspection, there have been very few incidents, none of which have been significant enough to require police intervention. There have been no physical interventions and very few sanctions. However, children have been fined for smoking in the grounds, and this is not a permitted sanction within the regulations.

Staff recruitment processes are thorough and staff are employed only if all checks are completed.

The environment of the home is of a high quality and all required health and safety checks are carried out. If shortfalls are found, these are addressed in a timely way.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The registered manager is permanent, suitably experienced and qualified and holds a diploma in social work. He is currently studying for a level 5 qualification in leadership and management.

The monitoring arrangements are inadequate. The manager failed to identify the inadequate safeguarding practice of a member of staff. Despite these matters being highlighted to him by inspectors during the first part of this inspection, the manager had failed to ensure that appropriate action was taken to address the staff member's poor performance by the time of the subsequent inspection visit. Another example of insufficient management oversight includes the failure to robustly review an incident involving a taxi journey. This is a lost opportunity to learn lessons and review staff's safeguarding practice.

Support for staff is poor. There are some significant gaps in the frequency of supervision sessions for staff, which do not ensure that staff are adequately supported. One staff member had not met with their supervisor for three months. Staff meetings do not occur at the frequency described in the statement of purpose. It is not clear how staff who are not in attendance at a meeting are provided with the detail of the discussions. The manager stated that absent staff are updated via email; however, as notes are not made of all meetings, this could not be demonstrated.

There are some staff vacancies. These have been managed effectively so that there has been no impact on children. This is a relatively new staff team as the home has been in operation for under a year. The staff team members have developed good working relationships with each other and share a desire and the enthusiasm to support children's progress.

There is a training and development plan and, overall, staff are up to date with most training. Where there are gaps, staff have been booked on the next available training. Managers have not ensured that the staff rota indicates if a member of staff trained in first aid is on duty at all times. All staff are either qualified to at least a level three standard in caring for children, or are undertaking the qualification.

At the last inspection, eight requirements were made. The manager has not fully met the requirements in relation to: improving the quality of risk management; amending the statement of purpose and providing this to Ofsted; and ensuring staff have adequate support through regular supervision and team meetings. Two requirements have not been met because there has not been an opportunity for the manager to demonstrate improvement in these areas. These relate to making improvements in the quality of the manager's review of the quality of care, and the quality of the record-keeping of episodes of missing from care. These requirements have been restated.

The manager has met requirements and made improvements in the following areas: how complaints are dealt with; ensuring that children are able to contact their parents or other people significant to them without recourse to staff; the arrangements for notifying Ofsted of significant events.

Of the six recommendations made, the manager has improved: the arrangements

for the maintenance and upkeep of the premises; the quality of recording of supervision sessions; the arrangements for recording events that occur in the home. As no child has been missing from the home, a recommendation to ensure that children have the offer of an independent return home interview has not been able to be evidenced as met. There remain shortfalls in how children's health needs are catered for and a requirement has been made as a result. There also remain shortfalls in the quality of recording systems and a requirement has been made in respect of this.

As a local authority home, the manager and staff have strong links to children's social workers, the clinical team and education and health professionals. They have also developed links with the local police officer and with the local school. The community police officer has periodically visited the home. There are cordial relationships with the neighbours and the local community.

Case records maintained are not of a good quality. Information about children that staff need to care effectively for them is not well organised or easily accessible. This has led to some important information about children's needs being missed and not being included in their care planning. Not all care plans had the details of the child's GP. The records in their current form would not increase a child's understanding about their history and experiences. Not all staff have signed to confirm that they have read and understood the children's individual risk assessments or the care plans.

There is a register of children who have stayed or who are living in the home, but this has not been kept up to date.

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: 1229977

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Oxfordshire County Council, County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND

Responsible individual: Matthew Edwards

Registered manager: Paul Jacobs

Inspectors

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