

1230725

Registered provider: Pathways Care Group Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This privately run home is one of five owned by a national organisation. The home provides care and accommodation for up to six children aged between 10 and 18 years. The home looks after children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Inspection dates: 22 to 23 August 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: 8 November 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: Requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- The staff team is established and staff work well together to provide continuity of care and consistency of approach.
- The children all benefit from good relationships with the staff.

- Safeguarding procedures underpin all practice. The staff are confident and practised in using their knowledge to ensure these procedures support the children's safety and welfare effectively.
- The children's risk-taking behaviour has significantly reduced since being at the home.
- Attendance in education has improved for the majority of the children.
- The management team has proactively used multi-agency working. This approach identifies concerns, and details the actions to reduce these.
- The home benefits from a beautiful location. This provides the children with ample space in accommodation that is well appointed, and the interior of the home is well kept.

The children's home's areas for development:

- The manager has failed to notify Ofsted of two serious incidents in the home.
- Staff have not all received supervision in line with the home's policy.
- The rear garden hardcourt area is not adequately maintained.
- The missing from home incidents have not been evaluated or used to inform the manager's review of care.
- The records are not all clear, and recruitment checks do not consistently include the verbal verification of written references.
- The staff do not meet as a team regularly or discuss the quality of the care provided.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
08/11/2016	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
The registered person must ensure that all employees receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33 (4)(a)(b))	29/09/2017
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(e))	29/09/2017

Recommendations

- Ensure the home meets children’s physical necessities. (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 15, paragraph 3.7) In particular, maintain the outdoor area to ensure it is presentable and clean.
- Evaluation of missing from home incidents should be undertaken. (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 45, paragraph 9.31) In particular, using the wide range of data available in the missing from home records, further develop the evaluation of these incidents to better inform the home’s understanding of them.
- Ensure that recruitment, supervision and performance management of staff safeguards children and minimises potential risks to them. (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 61, paragraph 13.1) This is with particular regard to ensuring that checks relating to the reasons for staff ceasing prior employment are explored effectively, and references are verified.
- Maintain records for each child that represent a significant contribution to their life history. Children and parents should be supported to understand the nature of the records kept by the home and how to access them. (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 62, paragraph 14.5) This is with particular regard to ensuring that records distinguish between the opinion of the author and fact.
- Ensure that the whole review process and the resulting report should be used as a tool for continuous improvement in the home. (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 65, paragraph 15.4) This is with particular regard to providing opportunities for the staff to meet as a team.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children receive individualised care that provides them with stability and emotional security. They have good relationships with the established staff team. These relationships are nurturing and help to develop the children's trust. One child said, 'It is great, I love it here. I like everything about it, and I see it as my home.' The staff take the time to get to know the children, and this helps the children to build fundamental attachments. The children's views are sought and listened to. Overall the children feel cared for, valued and safe, and this has enabled them to make changes to their lives and move forward.

Social workers from three placing authorities are complimentary about the level of care provided to the children. Social workers spoken to say they are kept informed about the children's progress and made aware of any incidents that occur. One social worker said, 'The child was very challenging before she came. She could have slipped back but they [the staff] have formed trusting relationships with her, and she has made good progress.'

The children are supported to build healthy routines. A specialist nurse visits the children. She said, 'I know the children are supported to have regular healthy meals, participate in social and physical activities and have a good sleep routine.' The children are supported to stop smoking. Two of the children smoke and staff have offered smoking cessation support and encourage the children to work towards healthier lifestyles. Good sleep routines and regular meals support good attendance in school and help reduce behavioural incidents.

The children have all had significant gaps in their learning before coming to the home. The staff are proactive at helping the children to engage with education. They work with the schools and the virtual school. One child has completed her GCSEs, and another has worked hard to engage with a tutor who has enabled her to reintegrate into mainstream education. One child has secured a college place for the autumn term. The staff assist with support when the schools are unable to manage the children's behaviour. Working cooperatively with the schools reduces barriers to the children's attendance and achievement. There is a clear focus on the needs of the children and improving their future life chances. Successful engagement with education has enabled all the children to make good progress from their starting points.

The staff provide ample activities for the children. These encourage better relationships between the children, and provide quality time with the staff. During the inspection, the children were on holiday with staff. The inspector spoke to the children on the telephone, and they were enjoying the swimming pool, amusements and day trips. The holiday provided new experiences, building their confidence and self-esteem. One child said, 'We are all getting on so well.' The children attend a number of activity clubs that encourage social connections outside the home and encourage them to make a positive contribution to the local community.

The children are supported to see their families and important adults in their lives. The

staff support the children to telephone family members and provide the transport for contact arrangements. Families are welcomed to the home. The house is in a desirable location that affords sea views and has ample space to host comfortable contact visits.

The staff support the children to take responsibility in looking after their rooms and helping around the home. They assist with daily household chores, such as tidying the home and shopping. The staff support the children to cook their own meals and take an active part in choosing menus. The children benefit from healthy, balanced diets and home-cooked food. The children say that the food is 'lovely' and 'great'. One child said, 'I bake cakes with the staff all of the time.' These activities help the children to develop valuable independence skills, which will help them prepare for the future.

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

The children say that they feel safe in the home. They acknowledge that they do not always agree with those around them and that they say things to one another and staff they do not mean. Although there are differences in personalities and the children argue at times, there are no recorded bullying incidents. The staff support the children to live alongside one another amicably. One child said that the staff help them to get on with each other, and acknowledged that at times this is not easy. A child said, 'We feel safe with the staff, they keep us safe. They will move us to another room if stuff is going on. They check how we are every day.' The levels of supervision and effective deployment of staff prevent any situations from escalating. There is a calm equilibrium in the home, and all the children feel safe.

Behaviour in the home is good. The children respect the staff and the environment. The staff encourage the children to consider their actions. Time to reflect with staff on incidents helps the children to think about the impact of their behaviours. The staff provide fair interventions that work for the individual child. Incidents include follow-up work and debrief sessions that help the children learn to empathise.

The staff receive training in how to provide safe holds for incidents when a child or member of staff is at risk of harm. These recognised holds are used proportionately and meet the required criteria. There have been four holds in eight months. Managerial debriefs allow staff time to consider the intervention. The records reflect that on each occasion the children have had an opportunity to discuss their feelings about the incident.

The missing procedures work well to locate the children's whereabouts and ensure their safety. The staff actively try to find the children and make repeated attempts to contact them when they are away. Generally, the children do not go missing from the home. However, one child has a significant number of missing incidents from the home. These are when the child has left the home without consent to return to his home address. The staff always liaise with the child's family and other agencies to locate him and make sure he is safe. Regular welfare checks are completed when the child refuses to return to the home. The child's location is always known, and welfare checks incorporate visits to the address. The staff and the manager continue to review and discuss this as part of the child's care plan. The family is working towards reunification. The continual missing from home is balanced by the staff and professionals who provide safeguards while the child is absent. These agreed actions minimise the risks, and safeguard the child effectively.

However, the data from the missing from home incidents is not analysed effectively to help review the overall number of incidents and to work preventatively to reduce these.

The staff understand the risks presented to each child and use risk assessments to mitigate known risks. The assessments are up to date and reflect recent incidents. There has been a successful reduction in risk-taking behaviour for all the children. Two of the children have had a 100% reduction in their specific risk-taking behaviour since coming to the home. There are children in the home who are highly vulnerable and were at significant risk of child sexual exploitation. The staff are trained in how to recognise the signs of child sexual exploitation. Prevention work is successful. The staff educate the children, build self-esteem and instil personal safety awareness. This support has reduced the risks to these children.

The staff understand the home's safeguarding procedures. They talk confidently about whistle-blowing procedures and the management and reporting of disclosures. The manager has links with the local children safeguarding board. The staff team remains vigilant and aware, which protects the children from potentially harmful situations.

The location risk assessment has been amended after the last inspection, and a review of some dangerous areas in the location has been added. The missing person liaison officer and community police officer visit the home regularly and speak positively about the children and the staff. A police officer described the home as, 'Absolutely brilliant. We have a good working relationship and communication is very good. We often pop in and they [the staff] are always happy to see us.' This encourages the children to view the police positively. This multi-agency approach has successfully reduced police involvement. Since the last inspection, there have been no incidents within the locality and no anti-social or criminal behaviours.

There are a number of strategies deployed by the staff to maintain a safe environment for all the children. This includes searching rooms, and this is detailed in the children's behaviour management plans. The record of room searches generally includes the child's written consent. On occasion when consent has not been provided by the child, there are clear reasons why the staff have conducted the search. The staff respect the children's privacy and views, unless there is an overriding reason that makes safeguarding the child a priority.

A recent recruitment campaign has resulted in newly appointed staff. The pre-employment checks include obtaining two written references for each new member of staff. There is no record of two of these references being discussed, and therefore the reasons for leaving previous posts may not have been explored. This could result in important information being missed and could impact negatively on the children's care.

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

This home is managed by an experienced manager who has the national vocational qualification level 5 and is registered with Ofsted. The manager has been in post since the home opened in 2014 and has retained most of the original staff team.

The manager supports a practice that focuses on the children in a nurturing environment. This approach helps the children to build their confidence and improve their future life opportunities. The manager has a good knowledge of each child. She

works in the centre of the home and covers some shifts. This active involvement enables her to see the children's progress and monitor the staff's practice. Despite this, there are several aspects of management that are inefficient and unclear. Some systems are not embedded, and others are not in place. Three of the recommendations raised at the last inspection have been raised again. There are areas of practice that are not evidenced and other areas in which recording is not clear or professional. Overall improvement in leadership and management is not evident. The managerial oversight is poor. However, this does not currently detract from the children's positive progress.

Some of the records are not impartial. The progress reports and the measure of control log are not recorded in a clear and professional style. The staff use informal language and personal value statements rather than factual description. Some statements are not supported by clear evidence. The reports do not distinguish between fact and the opinion of the author. These records do not contribute positively to a child's life history.

Notification of significant events is not always made to Ofsted. For example, an incident in which the police were called to the home and a child was handcuffed was not notified. There are two other incidents that the manager notified late after being prompted. Failure to notify means that overview of the home monitored by Ofsted is not accurate.

The staff are sufficient in number and provide adequate levels of supervision for the children. The staff work well together, and morale is good. Although staff say that they feel supported, there continue to be gaps in the supervision provided, despite this being raised at the last inspection. Failure to provide all staff with regular support means that staff may not receive enough guidance and support for the emotional impact of their roles.

The home benefits from an external monitoring visitor each month. Actions following these visits contribute to the manager's six-monthly review of care and inform the future action plan. The manager is aware of the areas that require improving but has no forum to share these areas with the staff. The last staff meeting was five months ago, and there are no systems in place for the staff to meet regularly as a team. Therefore, opportunities to share good practice or discuss how to improve the quality of the care provided are very limited.

Oversight of the accommodation and reporting of maintenance work is overseen by the manager, who monitors the general building upkeep. However, the rear garden and patio have not been included. At the time of the inspection, there was litter, smoking debris and household items scattered around. The hardcourt area is cracked and uneven, and the rendering is in need of attention. This does not provide the children with a pleasant or well-maintained outdoor area.

The relationships with external professionals, parents and schools are good. All of the professionals contacted during the inspection cite communication as good and say that staff advocate strongly for the children. This includes facilitating the children's views and ensuring that their feelings about their care planning and education are heard. The staff are tenacious and persistent in sourcing the right resources for the child. They are genuine in their care, which helps the children trust the staff. The children know that the manager and staff have the children's best interests at heart. A social worker said, 'They provide a safe space for the children and have coordinated key meetings for the children, such as strategy meetings, and are very involved. They provide good care, and

you feel this when you visit.'

Overall the staff team tries hard to make sure that the children have an environment that fully supports all of their individual needs and nurtures their emotions. This care enables the children to make progress in all areas of their development.

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 differences 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 whom 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: 1230725

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Pathways Care Group Limited

Registered provider address: Minton Place, Victoria Street, Windsor, Berkshire SL4 1EG

Responsible individual: Lisa Deane

Registered manager: Julie Woraker

Inspectors

Deirdra Keating, social care inspector

Debbie Young, social care inspector

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