

1271213

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The children's home is operated by a private company and is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to five children or young people who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The home has a registered manager who has been registered since July 2020. The registered manager has submitted her resignation notice to the provider and plans to leave the home at the end of September 2020.

Visit dates: 23 to 24 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 21 May 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Good

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We identified the following serious and widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit:

- Staff do not take sufficient action to protect children when they are at risk of harm, and when they have suffered harm as a result of child sexual exploitation.
- Management oversight and monitoring are ineffective, which means that managers and leaders cannot be assured that each child's individual needs, risks and vulnerabilities are being considered and addressed. Children's welfare, safety and well-being have been compromised.
- The registered manager has agreed placements for children without adequately identifying and assessing each child's social, physical, emotional and mental health needs together with the strategies required to keep the children safe. There has been insufficient consideration of the effect of new residents on the children already living in the home. Consequently, children's risk-taking behaviour has escalated, and children have suffered harm while in the community.
- The known risks posed to children, and the strategies for staff managing these risks, are not clear. There is little or no guidance for staff to follow in the event of an incident. This fails to ensure that staff have the appropriate understanding and information to enable them to manage children's risks safely.
- Not all social workers feel that children are safe at the home. A number of professionals raised concerns about the poor communication systems in place, which resulted in important safeguarding information being delayed, unclear and, on occasions, factually inaccurate.
- Serious safeguarding concerns are not consistently reported to Ofsted in a timely way.

The care of children

Since the last inspection, the registered manager has not taken effective action to address the shortfalls identified. Children's progress has not been consistent across all areas of their development, and for some children there has been a noticeable deterioration in their progress. Children's welfare, development and safety have been compromised.

Placements have been agreed without the registered manager clearly identifying and assessing each child's social, physical, emotional and mental health needs and the strategies required to keep the children safe. Consequently, a number of placements have ended quickly as staff have been unable to keep children safe. The registered manager told inspectors that she had not considered all historical information or the subsequent effect this may have on the children already living in the home.

There is a lack of structure and routine in the home which does not support children to make progress. A lack of planning means that there are no clear strategies for staff to support children to overcome difficulties and reach their potential. The registered manager stated that the home had been 'chaotic', staff had 'not been consistent' and 'could not keep children safe'. Staff said, 'The boundaries are not clear for us as adults.' And, 'Although we try to be consistent, everyone is doing something different.' A child said, 'The staff don't know what they are doing, one says yes, the next says no. I wish they would make their minds up.'

Some children have developed positive relationships with the staff but these have been affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. One child said, 'The only person I really liked is [Name of staff]. She worked here a couple of times and then they moved all the staff again.' There have been changes in the staff team that have meant that children have not been cared for by consistent staff. There has not always been sufficient staff to care for the children on a one-to-one basis, as agreed in the local authority care plan.

Educational outcomes for children are variable. Children have been supported by staff to attend school during the pandemic. However, records do not demonstrate that children attend regularly or whether they are making progress.

The premises are not maintained to meet the needs of each child. For example, one child's bedroom smelt strongly of damp, and mould was visible in their en-suite bathroom. The child said, 'It was like that before I moved in. I told staff, but nothing happened.' In addition, parts of the home were unclean with food and drink remnants smeared on the walls. The downstairs windows throughout the property had been nailed shut, so could not be opened. This was brought to the attention of the responsible individual, who took immediate action.

Contact with families has been consistently promoted and supported by the staff team with different forms of communication, including video phone calls, being used throughout the pandemic. This supports children to maintain important links with their families.

Children have access to specialist help according to their individual needs. A therapist is employed by the company and is readily available to support children and the staff team in times of crisis. This has provided children with opportunities to discuss their feelings and understand the support available to them. However, the strategies identified by the therapist to support children when they are in a period of crisis have not been embedded into practice and are not consistently followed by staff.

The safety of children

Safeguarding practice in this home is not robust and does not promote the safety and welfare of the children. Staff fail to take robust action to address safeguarding concerns. An example of this is when a child returned to the home and alleged that

she had been the victim of a sexual assault. The registered manager, deputy manager and staff failed to take appropriate action to report the concerns to ensure the safety and well-being of the child. Furthermore, the child's risk assessments did not contain appropriate strategies on how to minimise risks about child sexual exploitation.

The registered manager, deputy manager and staff are unable to identify, manage or minimise the risks posed to children. Risk assessments are poor quality and do not include consideration of the children's previous known risks. Consequently, staff do not have a clear understanding of children's needs and vulnerabilities. In addition, the assessments do not provide staff with effective strategies to keep children safe.

Behaviour management at the home is poor. Staff lack the knowledge and skills to manage the challenging behaviour of the children and are unable to de-escalate situations consistently and safely. As a result, children have caused damage to the home and have threatened members of staff. On occasions, police assistance has been requested to manage children's behaviour. This does not protect children from any unnecessary involvement in the criminal justice system.

When children have been restrained, records do not always provide a clear overview of the behaviour that led to the measure, nor do they provide evidence of an individual debrief with both the child and staff member. The registered manager does not evaluate the appropriateness or effectiveness of all measures used. Consequently, staff continue to use ineffective behaviour management strategies, and children are not consistently learning to reflect on and improve their behaviour.

Leaders and managers

The manager registered with Ofsted in July 2020 and has managed the home since 2019. However, her lack of action to ensure that effective care planning is in place for each child, and to ensure that the staff team strictly adheres to the safeguarding procedures to protect children, has led to the serious failings found during this visit.

The children live in a home that is poorly managed and maintained. The poor leadership means that the home is unable to fulfil its aims and objectives. The registered manager is unclear about the philosophy of the home as described in the statement of purpose. Given the serious shortfalls highlighted in this visit, the home is not delivering care as outlined in the statement of purpose.

There have been failings in the management oversight and monitoring of the home to identify areas of weakness and to act to resolve these. The manager has not reviewed some records in the home, or evaluated incidents that have occurred, in order to identify shortfalls in staff practice. Consequently, areas for development are not clearly highlighted and there is no plan to address areas of concern. This means that leaders and managers are not acting to improve the experiences, care and safety of children.

Staff report that they feel supported by the registered manager. However, staff do not have access to regular supervision that should give them the opportunity to discuss matters, such as the children, training, development or any concerns and identify improvements required in care practices.

Staff duty rosters fail to accurately account for the staff on duty. In addition, when changes are required to the rota, due to staff sickness, records do not consistently include the full name of the staff member or any other information to indicate whether the shift was covered and by whom. This prevents a clear audit trail of who is working in the home. The lack of transparency showing who is on duty potentially places children at risk and compromises the continuity of care.

Some social workers raised concerns about the safety and welfare of children living in the home and reported that communication is poor. Not all social workers feel that children are safe at the home. A number of professionals raised concerns about the poor communication systems in place, which resulted in the sharing of important safeguarding information being delayed.

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, the 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>In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff—</p> <p>seek to involve each child's placing authority effectively in the child's care, in accordance with the child's relevant plans;</p> <p>seek to secure the input and services required to meet each child's needs; and</p> <p>seek to develop and maintain effective professional relationships with such persons, bodies or organisations as the registered person considers appropriate having regard to the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the children's home is to provide care and accommodation.</p> <p>(Regulation 5 (a)(b)(d))</p>	27/11/2020
The quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who—	27/11/2020

<p>understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children;</p> <p>use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential.</p> <p>(Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b))</p>	
<p>The health and well-being standard is that—</p> <p>the health and well-being needs of children are met;</p> <p>children receive advice, services and support in relation to their health and well-being; and</p> <p>children are helped to lead healthy lifestyles.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that each child has access to such dental, medical, nursing, psychiatric and psychological advice, treatment and other services as the child may require.</p> <p>(Regulation 10 (1)(a)(b)(c)(2)(c))</p>	<p>27/11/2020</p>
<p>The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure that staff—</p> <p>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;</p> <p>understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person;</p> <p>take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare;</p> <p>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; and</p> <p>that the effectiveness of the home's child protection policies is monitored regularly.</p>	<p>30/10/2020</p>

(Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(i)(v)(vi)(d)(e)) *	
<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</p> <p>promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose;</p> <p>ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate;</p> <p>ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child;</p> <p>ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child;</p> <p>understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home;</p> <p>demonstrate that practice in the home is informed and improved by taking into account and acting on—</p> <p>research and developments in relation to the ways in which the needs of children are best met; and</p> <p>feedback on the experiences of children, including complaints received; and</p> <p>use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home.</p>	30/10/2020
<p>(Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(a)(b)(c)(e)(f)(g)(i)(ii)(h)) *</p> <p>The care planning standard is that children—</p> <p>receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home.</p>	30/10/2020

<p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that arrangements are in place to—</p> <p>manage and review the placement of each child in the home; and</p> <p>that each child’s relevant plans are followed.</p> <p>(Regulation 14 (1)(a)(2)(b)(ii)(c)) *</p>	
<p>The registered person must ensure that—</p> <p>the privacy of children is appropriately protected;</p> <p>children can access all appropriate areas of the children’s home’s premises; and</p> <p>any limitation placed on a child’s privacy or access to any area of the home’s premises—</p> <p>is intended to safeguard each child accommodated in the home;</p> <p>is necessary and proportionate;</p> <p>is kept under review and, if necessary, revised; and</p> <p>allows children as much freedom as is possible when balanced against the need to protect them and keep them safe.</p> <p>(Regulation 21 (a)(b)(c)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv))</p>	27/11/2020
<p>The registered person must ensure that all employees—</p> <p>receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience.</p> <p>(Regulation 33 (4)(b))</p>	27/11/2020
<p>The registered person must prepare and implement a policy (“the behaviour management policy”) which sets out—</p> <p>how appropriate behaviour is to be promoted in the children’s home; and</p> <p>the measures of control, discipline and restraint which may be used in relation to children in the home.</p>	27/11/2020

The registered person must keep the behaviour management policy under review and, where appropriate, revise it.

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—

the name of the child;

details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of the measure;

the date, time and location of the use of the measure;

a description of the measure and its duration;

details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure;

the name of the person who used the measure ('the user'), and of any other person present when the measure was used;

the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and

a description of any injury to the child or any other person, and any medical treatment administered, as a result of the measure;

within 48 hours of the use of the measure, the registered person, or a person who is authorised by the registered person to do so ("the authorised person")—

has spoken to the user about the measure; and

has signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and

within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure.

(Regulation 35

(1)(a)(b)(2)(3)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(viii)(b)(i)

(ii)(c))

<p>The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which—</p> <p>include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child;</p> <p>are kept up to date: and</p> <p>are signed and dated by the author of each entry.</p> <p>(Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b)(c))</p>	<p>27/11/2020</p>
<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: and</p> <p>ensure that the records are kept up to date.</p> <p>(Regulation 37 (1)(2)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the records include a copy of the staff duty roster of persons working at the home, a record of the actual rotas worked and a record of any person who works at any time at the home, including the registered manager.</p>	<p>27/11/2020</p>
<p>The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if—</p> <p>a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation;</p> <p>an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious;</p> <p>there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there;</p> <p>a child protection enquiry involving a child—</p> <p>is instigated; or</p> <p>concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or</p> <p>there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious.</p>	<p>27/11/2020</p>

(Regulation 40 (4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(i)(ii)(e))	
<p>The registered person must use reasonable endeavours to ensure that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month.</p> <p>When the independent person is carrying out a visit, the registered person must help the independent person—</p> <p>if they consent, to interview in private such of the children, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as the independent person requires.</p> <p>The independent person must produce a report about a visit ("the independent person's report") which sets out, in particular, the independent person's opinion as to whether—</p> <p>children are effectively safeguarded; and</p> <p>the conduct of the home promotes children's well-being.</p> <p>(Regulation 44 (1)(2)(a)(4)(a)(b))</p>	27/11/2020

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1271213

Registered provider: Care 4 Children Residential Services Limited

Registered provider address: 1 Stuart Road, Bredbury Park Industrial Estate, Bredbury, Stockport SK6 2SR

Responsible individual: Amy Moulton

Registered manager: Louise Arrowsmith

Inspectors

Michelle Edge, Social Care Regulatory Inspection Manager
Jessica Forshaw, Social Care Inspector

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