

SC057718

Registered provider: The Together Trust

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The children's home is one of a number of homes operated by an independent organisation. The home provides care for up to five children who may have EBD (social and emotional difficulties), physical disabilities or learning disabilities.

The registered manager post has been vacant since July 2019. A new permanent manager has been appointed. She is not yet registered with Ofsted.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this setting on 24 September 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on our website.

Inspection dates: 21 to 22 April 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **requires improvement to be good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

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

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.

Date of last inspection: 14 May 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/05/2019	Full	Good
26/11/2018	Full	Outstanding
20/04/2017	Full	Outstanding
05/01/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Children's day-to-day experience of living in the home has been adversely affected by the poor practice of some staff. A number of staff have acted in a way which does not promote the dignity of children or put the children's well-being at the centre of staff practice. The necessary response from the organisation to this poor practice has meant an increase in the use of agency and bank staff who do not have established relationships with the children or fully understand their individual needs.

Some children have made good progress in the home. One child who has come to live in the home more recently has begun to make progress. His communication has improved. He is eating a wider variety of foods, leading to better health outcomes and he has formed good relationships with staff. His parent told the inspector: 'They have really got to know him like his family. It seems like a home from home for him.'

The implementation of shared care arrangements for one child has not been positive and his behaviour and his emotional well-being have declined. A review of the appropriateness of continuing with these arrangements has not yet taken place and he continues to show signs of being distressed and unhappy. His experiences of care have also been negatively affected by the number of agency and bank staff on duty at weekends when he is present in the home. This has led to a lack of consistency in his care from staff, with whom he has not had an opportunity to build trusting relationships.

All the children have complex health needs which are well understood by the permanent staff team. There are good links between the home and both universal and specialist health services. The key worker of one child who has epilepsy has worked tenaciously to ensure that the child receives a timely and appropriate response from health services which meets his changing needs.

All the children are in education which meets their needs. Staff contribute to regular reviews of plans and support each child's educational development. There is effective sharing of information between the staff team and schools on a day-to-day basis which contributes to children having as much consistency of care as possible between their home and schools.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Children have not always been safeguarded effectively in the home. An assurance visit was undertaken by Ofsted in September 2020, prompted by the notification of two whistle-blowing complaints raising concerns about practice in the home. Since this assurance visit, three further whistle-blowing complaints have been made in relation to the malpractice of several staff.

The manager and senior leaders in the organisation acted quickly to remove staff from the home and safeguard children while these allegations were investigated. All appropriate procedures were followed once the allegations were made. This does not detract from the actual or potential harm caused to vulnerable, non-verbal children by adults who are employed to help and protect them.

The manager does not ensure that the feelings and wishes of non-verbal children are obtained and understood, particularly after incidents have occurred in the home. This is of particular importance given the ongoing safeguarding concerns. A requirement is made in relation to this.

The home swiftly initiates communication with families, local authorities and the designated officer when safeguarding incidents arise. It was a requirement of the last assurance visit that the manager notify Ofsted in relation to these incidents in a timely manner. This requirement has been met.

The manager has failed to escalate concerns around a lack of response from a placing authority. This is in relation to placing authority staff failing to fulfil their role in the care of a child at the home. As a result, there has been delay in gaining information and progressing plans.

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

The registered manager post has been vacant since July 2019. A number of interim arrangements have been in place pending the recruitment of a permanent manager. A permanent manager was appointed in December 2020. She is not yet registered with Ofsted.

Staff told the inspector of the challenges presented by the lack of stability in the management arrangements and the differing management styles and expectations of each interim manager. The appointment of a new permanent manager provides the opportunity for the staff team to rebuild and gain some consistency.

The manager receives good support from her line manager. She has regular formal supervision as well as frequent informal contact. This line management support from a senior manager has also benefited the wider staff team at a time of uncertainty and instability.

It was a requirement of the last assurance visit that staff receive regular supervision. Staff are now receiving supervision on a regular basis. Records show that while staff are being supervised, this is not effective in supporting them to undertake their roles. Supervision meetings are not child-centred. They do not provide staff with a forum to reflect on their practice. Staff are not receiving professional support and challenge from managers in supervision that helps them to understand and promote the needs of children.

As a result of whistle-blowing complaints, the manager and senior leaders in the organisation have identified problems with the culture of the staff team. While this is being addressed, the learning from these whistle-blowing incidents has not been shared with the wider staff team. As a result, the manager does not ensure that staff understand the standards of professional practice expected of them when looking after the children in their care.

Scrutiny of practice by the independent person lacks rigour and is not evaluative. During visits conducted off site due to COVID-19 restrictions, the independent person has not requested to see any documents and has therefore relied on the manager's and staff's opinions and views. The independent person has not regularly sought the views of family members and professionals external to the home. Reports do not provide effective challenge that makes a meaningful contribution to continuous improvement within the home.

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>The registered person must ensure that an independent person visits the children’s home at least once each month.</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>The independent person’s report may recommend actions that the registered person may take in relation to the home and timescales within which the registered person must consider whether or not to take those actions.</p> <p>(Regulation 44 (1) (4)(a)(b)(c))</p> <p>This particularly refers to improvement in the quality of scrutiny by the independent person, improvement in the quality of written reports and clarity about the sources of information considered in making safeguarding statements about the home.</p> <p>This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.</p>	<p>31 May 2021</p>
<p>The quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who—</p> <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>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p>	<p>30 June 2021</p>

<p>understand and apply the home’s statement of purpose;</p> <p>ensure that staff—</p> <p>understand and apply the home’s statement of purpose;</p> <p>protect and promote each child’s welfare;</p> <p>treat each child with dignity and respect.</p> <p>(Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iii))</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 the home’s day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(b))</p>	30 June 2021
<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—</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 has sufficient staff to provide care for each child;</p> <p>ensure that the home’s workforce provides continuity of care to each child.</p>	30 June 2021

<p>(Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e))</p>	
<p>The children’s views, wishes and feelings standard is that children receive care from staff who—</p> <p>develop positive relationships with them;</p> <p>engage with them; and</p> <p>take their views, wishes and feelings into account in relation to matters affecting the children’s care and welfare and their lives.</p> <p>(Regulation 7 (1)(a)(b)(c))</p> <p>This specifically refers to the registered person ensuring that staff gain children’s views and feelings following incidents in the home and that this information is used to improve the quality of care experienced by children.</p>	<p>31/05/2021</p>
<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> <p>This specifically refers to supervision being child-centred and focusing on the employee’s ability to understand and meet the needs of each child.</p>	<p>30/06/2021</p>
<p>In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff—</p> <p>if they consider a placing authority’s or relevant person’s performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child’s needs are met in accordance with the child’s relevant plans.</p> <p>(Regulation 5 (c))</p> <p>This specifically refers to ensuring that concerns are escalated to the local authority without delay.</p>	<p>30/06/2021</p>

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the local authority regularly consults the child and the home about the child's relevant plans. If the child raises concerns about the content of any of their plans, their implementation or the process of review, staff should advocate for the child and seek to ensure that their concerns are addressed. This specifically relates to a review of the effectiveness of shared care arrangements for one child and ensuring that the wishes and feelings of non-verbal children are understood and contribute to care planning. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 57, paragraph 11.11)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, 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: SC057718

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: The Together Trust

Registered provider address: The Together Trust Centre, Schools Hill, Cheadle
SK8 1JE

Responsible individual: Jill Sheldrake

Registered manager: post vacant

Inspector

Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector

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, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding 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 1231, or email 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, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

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 1231
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021