

SC463639

Registered provider: Aston Children's Care Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is operated by a private company. It is registered to provide care for up to five children with learning and/or physical disabilities.

This home has not had a registered manager since May 2021. The current manager has not submitted an application to register with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 May 2022

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 and widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor.

Date of last inspection: 25 May 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
25/05/2021	Full	Good
08/01/2020	Full	Requires improvement to be good
13/02/2019	Full	Good
10/10/2017	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Four children live in this home. Three children have lived in the home for more than two years and one child has more recently moved in. Since the last inspection, one child has moved out of the home.

The child who moved out did not experience a well-planned move. They were not informed of their move until staff took them to their new home. As a result, the child had no time to process the move, pack belongings or say goodbye to children and staff. Consequently, this had a negative impact on the quality of care and experiences they received.

Managers and staff do not adequately support children to express themselves when children communicate non-verbally. The inspector observed staff failing to use any communication tools to help children to communicate. The manager and staff were observed repeatedly misunderstanding a child and guessing what the child was trying to tell them. They did not use any communication aids or alternative communication methods to help the child's views, wishes and feelings to be understood. In other examples, one child communicates using an electronic tablet at school, however, this method is not replicated in the home. The manager does not use any communication aids to help a child's understanding of the incident. Due to the significant failure to communicate with children, Ofsted has issued a compliance notice.

Before the new manager took up the post, there was a lack of organisation and clarity regarding children's health appointments. Consequently, children have missed scheduled health and assessment appointments. These have since been rescheduled and attended.

Staff support children to attend their education settings. Education professionals report positive communication with the staff, and children are making good progress. One child is being educated in the home due to concerns regarding his safety at his education setting. As a result of significant improvement in his progress, this arrangement is due to continue for the remainder of the summer term.

Staff support children to participate in a range of activities that are aimed at providing them with opportunities to relax and to enjoy their leisure time. This also promotes their independence and social skills. Recent outings included trips to a Sea Life Centre and Cadbury World. One child's social worker reported their child had come on 'leaps and bounds' since moving into the home and he is now engaged in social activities that have made a positive difference to him.

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

Managers and staff fail to protect and safeguard children they are caring for. Since the previous inspection, a significant safeguarding incident has occurred as a result of staff failing to supervise children according to their known risks and vulnerabilities. This resulted in two children being harmed.

The new manager was not in charge when this serious incident occurred. However, they have not applied learning from this incident to prevent the possibility of further incidents occurring due to a lack of staff supervision. For example, when the inspector arrived at the home, one member of staff was caring for two children. This was not in line with children's known risks and vulnerabilities.

As a result of insufficient staffing, children are left at risk of potential harm. Due to the significant concerns regarding the lack of staff and potential impact on the safeguarding of children, Ofsted has raised a compliance notice.

When appointing new staff, managers and senior managers do not follow safe recruitment practices. As a result, they are unable to demonstrate that they know that all the people who work in the home are safe to do so.

Though there has been some redecoration of the home, some areas of the home need improving. For example, poorly hung curtains fail to provide one child with privacy in their bedroom. One particular area of the home was unclean, with an unpleasant smell. Staff were quick to address this during the inspection once it was raised by the inspector. The garden offers little recreational space for children. The manager has a plan for this to be remodelled soon. These shortfalls impact negatively on a homely, welcoming and safe environment for children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

This home has not had a registered manager since May 2021. Two managers have been appointed since then but did not register with Ofsted. A third manager has been appointed but has not submitted an application to register.

Managers are not providing children with the staffing levels as stated in their plans to keep them safe. On 13 occasions in April 2022 children did not have the required one-to-one staffing in line with their care plans. This demonstrates a lack of learning by leaders and managers from previous incidents and of understanding in how to provide safe care to children.

The manager does not have previous experience of working with children with learning disabilities. As a result of this, her understanding of children's needs and her skills in communicating with children who are non-verbal are limited. This is demonstrated by the implementation of a questionnaire for children's meetings which has not been devised to meet the individual learning and communication needs of children.

The manager does not enable or ensure staff use communication aids that children require to empower them and ensure their voice is heard. Staff training in the use of the Picture Exchange Communication System has not been carried out; this was raised at the previous inspection. Consequently, staff do not have the appropriate training to communicate effectively with children and understand their wishes and feelings.

Management of the home has been inconsistent. Senior managers have not ensured that staff receive regular supervision. Since the new manager has been in post, there has been an improvement in the regularity of supervision. However, some staff have still not received their annual appraisals. This leaves staff and managers without opportunities to reflect on their practice, performance and areas for development.

Weaknesses in management oversight mean there has been a failure to ensure that the regulator receives reports from the independent visits carried out to the home on a monthly basis. At the inspection, the manager was unable to find two of seven reports that had not been submitted.

Managers have continually failed to complete and submit a quality of care report to the regulator. A previous requirement in relation to this remains unmet and means that the regulator still does not have oversight of the service between inspections as required.

The inspector did not review the allegation policy at this visit. This will be reviewed at a later inspection and therefore the requirement is restated.

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 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>ensure that staff—</p> <p>provide to children living in the home the physical necessities they need in order to live there comfortably. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(vii))</p> <p>This specifically relates to ensuring the registered person provides a homely and welcoming environment for children to live in.</p>	13 July 2022
<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>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure that staff—</p> <p>help each child to express views, wishes and feelings;</p>	19 June 2022

<p>help each child to understand how the child's views, wishes and feelings have been taken into account and give the child reasons for decisions in relation to the child;</p> <p>regularly consult children, and seek their feedback, about the quality of the home's care;</p> <p>help each child to prepare for any review of the child's care relevant plans and to make the child view's, wishes and feelings known for the purposes of that review. (Regulation 7 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(ii)(iii)(iv)(vi))</p> <p>This specifically relates to the registered person ensuring that managers and staff have the training and skills to communicate effectively with children and develop positive relationships with them.</p> <p>It also relates to ensuring that managers and staff use effective communication tools to support children's views, wishes and feelings to be understood.</p>	
<p>The health and well-being standard is that—</p> <p>the health and well-being needs of children are met;</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that staff help each child to—</p> <p>take part in activities, and attend any appointments, for the purpose of meeting the child's health and well-being needs. (Regulation 10 (1)(a) (2)(iii))</p> <p>This specifically relates to the registered person ensuring that children attend all required health appointments.</p>	13 July 2022
<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—</p> <p>help each child to understand how to keep safe;</p>	19 June 2022

<p>have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm;</p> <p>manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other;</p> <p>understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person;</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)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(b))</p> <p>This specifically relates to the registered person ensuring that they follow children's care plans and provide children with sufficient staff to meet their needs and protect them from harm.</p> <p>It also relates to the registered person ensuring that managers and staff understand potential risk to children and that they follow risk assessments.</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</p> <p>promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c))</p> <p>This specifically relates to the registered person ensuring that staff receive training in the use of Picture Exchange Communication System, and in the prevention of radicalisation and child criminal exploitation.</p>	13 July 2022
<p>The care planning standard is that children—</p> <p>receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and</p>	13 July 2022

<p>have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>This specifically relates to ensuring children are informed of moving from the home.</p>	
<p>The registered provider must appoint a person to manage the children's home if—</p> <p>there is no registered manager in respect of the home. (Regulation 27 (1)(a))</p>	13 July 2022
<p>A person may only manage a children's home if—</p> <p>full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the person in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 28 (1)(c))</p>	19 June 2022
<p>The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety.</p> <p>The requirements are that—</p> <p>full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1)(3)(d))</p>	19 June 2022
<p>The registered person must ensure that all employees—</p> <p>undertake appropriate continuing professional development;</p> <p>receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience; and</p> <p>have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. (Regulation 33 (4)(a)(b))</p> <p>This specially relates to staff having supervision and appraisals as per the company policy.</p>	13 July 2022
<p>The registered person must prepare and implement a policy which—</p> <p>is intended to safeguard children accommodated in the children's home from abuse or</p>	13 July 2022

<p>neglect; and</p> <p>sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>The procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect must, in particular—</p> <p>describe how and to whom staff are to report, without delay, any concern about abuse or neglect of a child. (Regulation 34 (1)(a)(b) (2)(f))</p> <p>This specifically relates to the policy clearly detailing when the designated officer must be informed.</p> <p>This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.</p>	
<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 provide a copy of the independent person's report to—</p> <p>HMCI;</p> <p>the registered provider and, if applicable, the registered manager; and</p> <p>the responsible individual. (Regulation 44 (1) (7)(a)(d))</p> <p>This specifically relates to the provider receiving a monthly report from the independent visitor and this being shared with HMCI.</p>	13 July 2022
<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. (Regulation 45 (1))</p>	13 July 2022

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

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: SC463639

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Aston Children's Care Limited

Registered provider address: Aston Children's Care Ltd, 181 Penn Road,
Wolverhampton WV3 0EQ

Responsible individual: Mahesh Mehan

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Jodie Lewis, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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