

1263124

Registered provider: Autonomy Plus Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is owned by a private organisation. It provides care for up to five children who have a learning disability and additional needs. At the time of the inspection, four children were living at this home.

The registered manager left on 16 April 2021 to become the responsible individual. The home has been without a registered manager since.

Inspection dates: 30 and 31 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.

Date of last inspection: 18 October 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

| Inspection date | Inspection type | Inspection judgement |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| 18/10/2021 | Full | Requires improvement to be good |
| 28/06/2021 | Full | Inadequate |
| 09/09/2019 | Full | Good |
| 06/11/2018 | Full | Good |

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

The progress and experiences of children are inadequate because safeguarding arrangements are weak, management oversight is poor and therefore children are not always fully protected.

Children can live at this home beyond their 18th birthday to support a move to adult care. At the time of this inspection, there was one young adult and three children living in the home. Care planning for the young adult to move on is slow as he has now reached his 19th birthday without a clear plan for a move from this children's home.

Care plans, put in place by children's placing local authority, are not always followed. An agreed staffing ratio of two staff to support one child is not always provided. This shortfall has the potential to deny the child the opportunity to fully take part in planned activities. Furthermore, when the child is included in outings with other children, the reduced staffing levels place all the children at greater risk of harm.

All the children attend full-time education. Staff liaise well with school professionals to promote attendance and learning. Within the home, each child has some identified aims to work towards, to develop their personal skills. Daily recording of any progress made lacks sufficient detail to evidence if children are achieving the desired outcomes.

The home has been decorated in some areas, improving the homely appearance. The departure of the employed maintenance team has led to some delays in further redecoration and repairs. Damage to the stairwell is unsightly and requires repair without waiting for new maintenance staff to be employed.

Children are supported well to keep in touch with family and friends. Visits and phone calls are further enhanced with the use of technology and video calls. Children enjoy attending a weekly youth club, where they make friendships outside the home.

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

Children experience inappropriate restraint. On at least three occasions, staff members have lifted and carried a child to move them. Each time this occurred in response to manage a child's behaviour that challenged the skills of the staff team. The physical restraint policy is not fit for purpose. The policy fails to provide suitable guidance for staff without any reference to the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015. Instead, the policy refers to the Care Quality Commission.

Leaders and managers do not understand the procedures in relation to referring poor staff practice promptly to the local authority designated officer (LADO). One incident of carrying a child in December 2021 was referred to the LADO. However, leaders and managers failed to maintain a record of the LADO's response. A second incident in January 2022 was not assessed as needing to be reported to the LADO.

A more recent incident in April 2022 was inappropriately referred to the local authority multi-agency safeguarding hub instead of the LADO. As a result of this error, the referral was three days after the incident. This is the second time that leaders and managers have failed to follow safeguarding procedures by not referring to the LADO immediately. This failing was reported on at the previous inspection in June 2021.

Leaders and managers lack appropriate curiosity in their monitoring of care practices. The independent person visited in November 2021 and reported that some unexplained marks were noted on a child's arm. Leaders and managers are unable to find any records to confirm how, or if, this matter was investigated.

Recruitment procedures do not thoroughly check the suitability of staff to care for children. Leaders and managers do not always seek verification as to why previous employment with children and/or vulnerable adults has ended. This lack of sufficient rigour in recruitment practices means that managers cannot always be assured that children will be cared for by suitable or appropriately skilled staff.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The home has been without a registered manager since April 2021. Ofsted concluded in November 2021 that the applicant proposed by the organisation was not suitable for the role. Since December 2021, the responsible individual has resumed the day-to-day role of managing the home but has not submitted an application to register with Ofsted. The absence of a full complement of effective leaders and managers has contributed to the inadequate inspection judgement.

Repeated shortfalls are evident in relation to the protection of children, recruitment of staff and the leadership and management of the home. Requirements have been made about these failings at a previous inspection in June 2021 and a compliance notice was issued. Another compliance notice has been issued due to the findings at this inspection.

Record-keeping is poor. Some progress has been made to ensure that most of the records maintained are now held electronically, avoiding the complexity of two recording systems. However, the content is often weak and at times inaccurate. Records of fire evacuation from the home in response to the alarm being activated are incomplete. The records are often illegible, full names of those present are not always recorded and the reason for the evacuation is not always listed.

Records of outings and activities do not always detail the names of all the staff present. Furthermore, a complaint was received about one of the children from a

local business in November 2021. Although the matter was dealt with appropriately and resolved, leaders and managers did not record the incident as a complaint, failing to follow the complaints procedure.

Staff report that they feel supported by the management of the home and that they enjoy their role in caring for and supporting the children. In addition, social care professionals report that they are generally satisfied with the quality of care provided.

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 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>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>help each child to understand how to keep safe;</p> <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>take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and</p> <p>are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies;</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; and</p> | 1 July 2022 |

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| <p>that the effectiveness of the home's child protection policies is monitored regularly. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(b)(e))</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—</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> <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. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(i)(ii)(h))</p> | <p>1 July 2022</p> |

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| <p>A responsible individual must—</p> <p>have the capacity, experience and skills to supervise the management of the home, or the homes, in respect of which the responsible individual is nominated. (Regulation 26 (7)(b))</p> | <p>1 July 2022</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> | <p>1 July 2022</p> |
| <p>The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety.</p> <p>The registered person may only—</p> <p>employ an individual to work at the children's home; or</p> <p>if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3).</p> <p>The requirements are that—</p> <p>the individual is of integrity and good character;</p> <p>the individual has the appropriate experience, qualification and skills for the work that the individual is to perform;</p> <p>the individual is mentally and physically fit for the purposes of the work that the individual is to perform; and</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) (2)(a)(b) (3)(a)(b)(c)(d))</p> | <p>1 July 2022</p> |
| <p>The registered person must prepare and implement a policy ("the behaviour management policy") which sets out—</p> | <p>1 July 2022</p> |

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| <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> <p>The registered person must keep the behaviour management policy under review and, where appropriate, revise it. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2))</p> | |
| <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. (Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b)(c))</p> | 1 July 2022 |
| <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;</p> <p>ensure that the records are kept up to date; and</p> <p>retain the records for at least 15 years from the date of the last entry. (Regulation 37 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c))</p> | 1 July 2022 |
| <p>Subject to paragraph (6), the registered person must establish a procedure for considering complaints made by or on behalf of children.</p> <p>The registered person must ensure that a record is made of any complaint, the action taken in response, and the outcome of any investigation. (Regulation 39 (1) (3))</p> | 1 July 2022 |

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that repairs to any damage in the home are of good quality and dealt with promptly to create a warm, welcoming environment. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)

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: 1263124

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Autonomy Plus Limited

Registered provider address: 67 Roundpond, Melksham, Wiltshire SN12 8EB

Responsible individual: Michael Evans

Registered manager: post vacant

Inspector

Clare Davies, Social Care Inspector

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