

SC037454

Registered provider: West Sussex County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is operated by the local authority. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to five children. The overall aim of the home is to provide high-quality care in a warm and caring environment where the children are supported to come to terms with their past and current difficulties and begin to prepare for their future.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since November 2020.

Inspection dates: 2 and 3 August 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded.

Date of last inspection: 25 May 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
25/05/2021	Full	Outstanding
28/11/2018	Full	Good
09/01/2018	Full	Outstanding
09/03/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

High levels of disruptive behaviour at the home have had a negative impact on the children's day-to-day experiences. Leaders and managers have failed to take effective action in a timely manner to safeguard children. Children's emotional well-being has suffered as a result of harmful peer relationships and the disruptive behaviour. One child has disengaged from many of the staff and professionals who were previously working with them.

Some children have made progress in some aspects of their lives. One child has become more confident in talking about historic traumas and another is now managing their emotions more effectively. This progress can be attributed to the skills of the more experienced members of staff who have been able to build positive relationships with some children; these staff adopt a caring, sensitive approach to meeting the children's needs.

At the time of this inspection, only one of the four children had definite arrangements in place to continue their education, training or career ambitions in the next academic year. Some of the children lack motivation; plans to encourage them to take up the opportunities available to them remain unclear. Some children have refused to attend school or college and one child significantly withdrew from education after becoming involved in a harmful relationship with a peer.

The children's weekly activity plans lack detail and do not demonstrate high levels of aspiration. Children's engagement in the planned activities with the staff is variable. One child has lost interest and another child spends several hours of the day in their bedroom. Other children have responded positively to being taken on regular short breaks to provide some respite from difficult peer relationships in the home.

The health needs of the children are known and understood by the staff team and the staff encourage the children to adopt a healthy lifestyle. However, some children have increased their levels of substance misuse, although action has been taken in recent weeks to address this. Some of these children have been reluctant to engage with external health professionals such as substance misuse workers and mental health support workers.

Some maintenance tasks in the home have not been completed in a timely way. The inspector observed screws protruding from a wall in a communal hallway and a cracked picture frame on the wall. Some of the children's bedrooms are not well furnished. For example, net curtains are used to cover recesses in the wall which are being used as wardrobes. Some of the furniture in other parts of the home appears worn and there are areas in need of redecoration. Parts of the home do not provide a homely, welcoming environment.

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

In recent months, some of the children have not consistently been protected from harm. The managers and staff did not take timely and effective action to prevent two children, who had entered into a personal relationship, from harming each other. Over time, this became an abusive and controlling relationship and, on one occasion, one of the children physically assaulted the other. Both children suffered emotional trauma during this relationship, resulting in aggressive and violent behaviours and increased levels of substance misuse.

The behaviour support plan for one of the children involved in this situation was not reviewed and updated, despite there being significant changes in the behaviours being exhibited. The risk management strategies in relation to this situation were weak. The children were not always adequately supervised by the staff. This meant that, on more than one occasion, the children were alone together in bedrooms. Some of the staff did not have the skills to manage volatile situations and, on one occasion, the staff failed to initiate the management on-call system when the safety of the children was clearly at risk.

Some of the children have increased their level of substance misuse. Despite efforts being made to address this situation, the response from some staff has not always been effective. A member of staff failed to remove an illegal substance from a child's bedroom, despite there being clear indications that some of the children were at risk from drug-related criminal exploitation.

The recent high levels of disruption in the home have had a negative impact on all the children living there. One child described feeling 'petrified' during the loud and aggressive arguments that other children engaged in. This child feared that the staff would not be able to contain these confrontational situations safely.

Other aspects of safeguarding practice have been more robust. There has been a coordinated response to children who go missing from the home, and liaison with the police has been effective. There has also been a sensitive and skilled approach taken to support a child who has demonstrated self-harming behaviours.

The staff are familiar with the home's whistle-blowing procedures. Two of the staff made their concerns for the safety of the children known to the home's independent visitor. The independent visitor's subsequent report was one of the triggers that led to leaders and managers taking decisive action to address the practice issues that had resulted in children becoming unsafe in the home.

In recent weeks, leaders and managers have taken steps to end the abusive relationship between two children at the home. Other steps have also been taken to ensure that the staff are more confident in dealing with challenging situations and that they follow procedures that are in place to protect the children's safety. This has resulted in a reduction in serious incidents and decreased levels of substance misuse.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Management arrangements at the home have been disrupted in recent weeks. This has been caused by sickness and changes to the assistant manager posts. An interim manager has recently been appointed to oversee the day-to-day management of the home. The interim manager has focused on addressing the shortfalls related to the children becoming unsafe in the home.

Senior managers in the organisation failed to ensure that a decision to move a child from the home was acted upon in a timely way. Consequently, the abusive relationship between two children became entrenched over a period of months. The registered manager had alerted senior managers to the deteriorating situation, but decisive action to safeguard the children was not taken until late July 2022.

The staff have not consistently felt supported in managing challenging situations. On some days, there have not been sufficient numbers of experienced staff to maintain appropriate boundaries within the home. On one occasion, three children barricaded themselves in a bedroom overnight and the situation was not resolved until the following afternoon when a more experienced member of staff intervened. Some staff described feeling 'powerless' when trying to maintain good order in the home.

The admissions process is not robust. An assessment of the likely impact one child would have on the children already living in the home was not completed until after the child had been admitted. This assessment failed to identify the potential for unhealthy peer relationships to develop, despite there being clear indications of this possibility in the referral information that had been received. Another impact risk assessment failed to consider how the child might be affected by other children's substance misuse.

Managers have not consistently made effective use of the children's complaints process. Some children told the staff how scared and uncomfortable they had been when another child caused significant damage in the home. However, these concerns were not deemed to be complaints. Consequently, there was a missed opportunity to use the formal complaints process to demonstrate to the children that their views were being investigated and taken seriously.

There has been one occasion when the managers failed to notify Ofsted of a significant concern. In June 2022, the independent visitor's report highlighted significant concerns for the safety and well-being of the children in the home. This was not notified to Ofsted and consequently there was a delay in the regulator becoming aware that the safety of the children was being compromised.

The actions taken by the management team in recent weeks have had a positive impact on the confidence of the staff. Clearer guidance has been issued on responding to substance misuse concerns and maintaining appropriate boundaries. The responsible individual has had a greater presence in the home, and this has helped to improve the morale of the staff team. The responsible individual has also

overseen investigations into some of the serious incidents that have occurred in recent months. There are indications that learning has taken place, and this is beginning to drive forward improvements in practice.

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 education standard is that children make measurable progress towards achieving their educational potential and are helped to do so.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure that staff—</p> <p>help each child who is above compulsory school age to participate in further education, training or employment and to prepare for future care, education or employment. (Regulation 8 (1) (2)(a)(ix))</p>	11 September 2022
<p>The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on—</p> <p>mutual respect and trust;</p> <p>an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and</p> <p>positive responses to other children and adults.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure that staff—</p> <p>meet each child's behavioural and emotional needs, as set out in the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(i))</p>	11 September 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 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>	11 September 2022

<p>manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other;</p> <p>take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare;</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)(a)(i)(iv)(vi)(b))*</p> <p>This is with specific reference to ensuring that children's individual risks are identified and effective strategies are used to mitigate against the risk, ensuring there are effective strategies, which are implemented in practice, to prevent children harming one another, and ensuring that the staff have the necessary skills to safeguard the children.</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 that staff—</p> <p>are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(vii))</p> <p>This is with particular reference to ensuring that staff notify managers when they are responding to a serious incident where children's safety is at risk.</p>	<p>11 September 2022</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 have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child;</p>	<p>11 September 2022</p>

<p>ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for 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>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)(c)(d)(f)(h))</p>	
<p>The care planning standard is that children—</p> <p>receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and</p> <p>have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home's statement of purpose. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a))</p> <p>This is with specific reference to ensuring that impact risk assessments are always undertaken before a child moves into the home and that the assessment considers the likely impact on the children already living at the home and the child who will be moving in.</p>	<p>11 September 2022</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 (3))</p>	<p>11 September 2022</p>
<p>The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if—</p> <p>there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(e))</p>	<p>11 September 2022</p>

* This requirement is subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the home provides a homely, domestic environment. This is with specific reference to ensuring that the home is well decorated and maintained. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15 paragraph 3.9)
- The registered person should ensure that the staff identify and provide appropriate opportunities for children to develop themselves in accordance with their wishes and feelings and as part of the home's plan for their care. This is with specific reference to ensuring that children's weekly activity plans provide for a range of activities that will support the child's needs and development. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 31 paragraph 6.4)
- The registered person should ensure that the staff take a proactive role in supporting children to manage their well-being and health needs. This is with specific reference to supporting children to engage with relevant healthcare providers, such as substance misuse workers and counselling services. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 34 paragraph 7.10)

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: SC037454

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: West Sussex County Council

Registered provider address: County Hall, West Street, Chichester, West Sussex
PO19 1RG

Responsible individual: Julian Skeates

Registered manager: Mark Davies

Inspector

Stephen Collett, Social Care Inspector

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