

1249326

Registered provider: Unity Residential Care Services Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

A private provider operates this home. It provides care for up to four children with social and emotional difficulties due to past trauma.

The home has not had a registered manager since March 2023. There is a manager in post who has submitted their application to register with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 July 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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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: 25 May 2022

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
25/05/2022	Full	Requires improvement to be good
18/08/2021	Full	Good
11/02/2020	Full	Outstanding
05/12/2018	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

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

Three children currently live in the home. Since the last inspection, one child has moved in and two children have moved on.

Children have experienced restrictive measures in relation to accessing activities and time in the community. This has affected the quality of their day-to-day experiences. The current management team has identified this and made changes to children's plans. Children now say they have more freedom and feel happy in the home.

Staff do not always support children's identity and cultural needs. There are limited opportunities in the home for children to learn about and maintain links with their cultural heritage. There have been missed opportunities for staff to support children to maintain their cultural identity.

Children now enjoy increased levels of freedom and independence. However, plans to prepare children for their futures are not clear and children are not being provided with the support to develop the skills they need for a successful transition to adulthood. One child who is approaching independence has no pathway plan, leaving their future plans unclear.

Children's views are sought through conversations with staff and key-work sessions. However, it is only more recently that meaningful consultation with children has had a positive impact on their life. For example, one child has started to have more control over their personal spending money, and another child is enjoying learning how to prepare and cook their own meals.

Children are supported to make good educational progress. One child proudly told inspectors they were moving on to a higher-level college course in the next academic year as a result of the progress they had made.

Staff support children to maintain relationships with their families and other people who are important to them.

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

The previous registered manager withheld food from children as part of the home's rules and day-to-day routine. This went unchallenged by staff working at the home and children did not feel able to voice their feelings around this punitive practice. The new manager has stopped this immediately and plans to hold learning sessions with the staff to enable their understanding of what is acceptable and what is harmful to children.

Consequences have not been recorded, despite staff removing children's access to technology and mobile phones and limiting their access to rooms in the home at certain times of the day. The recording and monitoring of these measures have not been effective. Managerial oversight of incidents, when these measures have been detailed, has failed to recognise them as consequences. Therefore, the intended safeguards for children of ensuring fairness, consistency and proportionality are not fully realised.

Children told inspectors that they now feel safe after recent changes in the management team and staff working at the home. This is reflected in the low number of incidents of restraint and that children have not gone missing from the home since the last inspection.

Despite regular focused work with children, staff do not routinely evaluate the effectiveness of this work. The manager has a plan to review the staff approach to direct work to ensure that this is having a positive impact on children.

Staff recruitment is effective and helps to prevent the employment of unsuitable staff. Leaders and managers carry out all necessary employment checks and verify these checks before staff start work in the home.

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

A new manager is in post and has applied to register with Ofsted. The previous manager left the organisation in March 2023. The manager has a clear vision for the home and a good improvement plan. However, this is not yet fully embedded to enable its impact to be evaluated.

The current staff team provides consistency for the children. Most members of staff have worked in the home for a relatively short period. Staff are working towards the required qualification.

Team meeting records have improved significantly under the new manager. There is now evidence of research being used to inform and improve practice. This improvement means that staff are starting to receive positive guidance from managers.

Staff are trained in a range of subjects that enhance their skills. However, gaps in training mean that some staff do not have the necessary skills to understand and safely respond to all the children's needs. It is also recognised that children's records are written in a way that will be unhelpful for children when they read them in the future.

Systems for notifying Ofsted of serious incidents are usually effective. However, on one occasion, a serious incident when a child was at risk online was not notified and an allegation about a member of staff was not notified in a timely way. As a result, Ofsted's capacity to monitor safeguarding arrangements has been reduced.

Not all staff receive formal supervision in line with the organisation's policy. New members of staff have not received good-quality supervision since they started. The previous registered manager did not sufficiently monitor or review staff performance. As a result, managers are unable to quickly identify shortfalls in staff practice that may impact children's progress.

The internal monitoring of care has not been effective. As a result, leaders and managers have not escalated concerns when local authorities have not provided necessary plans for children. The objectives identified for improvement by the new manager are not specific or measurable at present. This limits the effectiveness of quality assurance measures in the home and does not contribute to continuous developments in practice.

The manager understands the improvements that need to be made and has taken some immediate steps to address the shortfalls identified.

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 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>protect and promote each child's welfare;</p> <p>provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background.</p> <p>(Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(ii)(iv))</p> <p>This specifically relates to ensuring that behaviour management approaches follow the home's ethos of positive behaviour management support for children.</p>	13 September 2023
<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>understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each</p>	13 September 2023

<p>child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(f))</p> <p>This specifically relates to ensuring that local authority documents are requested.</p>	
<p>No measure of control or discipline which is excessive, unreasonable or contrary to paragraph (2) may be used in relation to any child.</p> <p>The following measures may not be used to discipline any child—</p> <p>any punishment involving the consumption or deprivation of food or drink. (Regulation 19 (1) (2)(b))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must make sure this is discussed with staff to ensure they understand this practice may not be used.</p>	13 September 2023
<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>their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. (Regulation 33 (4)(a)(b)(c))</p> <p>In addition, that staff have the required training to meet children's individual needs.</p>	13 September 2023
<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> <p>The registered person must keep the behaviour management policy under review and, where appropriate, revise it. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2))</p>	13 September 2023

<p>This specifically relates to ensuring that consequences are recorded in line with regulation and are subject to management oversight.</p>	
<p>The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if—</p> <p>there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there;</p> <p>there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(c)(e))</p>	<p>13 September 2023</p>

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that staff support children to understand and maintain their cultural identity. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 31, paragraph 6.6)
- The registered person should ensure that staff record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that is helpful to the child. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

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: 1249326

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Unity Residential Care Services Limited

Registered provider address: 2 Lymevale Court, Lyme Drive, Parklands, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 6NW

Responsible individual: Sarah Knapper

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Mark Dickinson, Social Care Inspector
Tara Lovatt, Social Care Inspector

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