

## Children's homes inspection – Full

<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>20 June 2016</b>
<b>Unique reference number</b>	<b>SC462951</b>
<b>Type of inspection</b>	<b>Full</b>
<b>Provision subtype</b>	<b>Children's home</b>
<b>Registered provider</b>	<b>Era Care Limited</b>
<b>Registered provider address</b>	<b>Unit G22 Allen House, The Maltings, Station Road, Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire CM21 9JX</b>

<b>Responsible individual</b>	<b>Stephen Milton</b>
<b>Registered manager</b>	<b>Francis Williams</b>
<b>Inspector</b>	<b>Rosie Davie</b>

<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>20 June 2016</b>
<b>Previous inspection judgement</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Enforcement action since last inspection</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>This inspection</b>	
<b>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
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.	
<b>How well children and young people are helped and protected</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
<b>The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>

## SC462951

### Summary of findings

#### **The children's home provision requires improvement because:**

- The content of one complaint made by a child directly to the responsible individual had not been shared with the registered manager.
- Ofsted was not notified about a significant incident in the home.
- The emotional well-being of one child living in the home has not improved.
- Staff do not take effective action when children tell them that they have experienced bullying.
- Risk assessments are not robust. The information is not kept up to date. There is no evidence to show that all staff read the assessments.
- The statement of purpose does not accurately reflect the therapeutic service provided or changes to staffing.
- When children return to the home from incidents of missing, the approach to ensuring that the placing local authority completes independent interviews varies. There is no evidence of the home seeking to take into account any information gathered from any interviews held.
- Supervision does not facilitate staff reflection of their practice.
- Consequences for challenging behaviours are few and do not reflect a restorative approach.
- The manager has failed to ensure that fire drills are held in line with the organisational policy.

## The children's home strengths

- Agencies working with the home provide positive feedback and say communication is good.
- Children subject to youth offending orders meet the requirements of the order.
- One child sat GCSE exams when this seemed unlikely.
- Families and those who are important to the child are welcome to visit.
- Children receive opportunities to practise independent living skills.
- Staff encourage the children to take up offers to improve health.

## What does the children's home need to do to improve?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person(s) meets 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>10: The health and well-being standard</p> <p>In order to meet the health and well-being standard, with specific reference to gender identity, the registered person must ensure that staff help each child to:</p> <p>(2)(iv) understand and develop skills to promote the child's well-being.</p>	<p>31 August 2016</p>
<p>11: The positive relationships standard</p> <p>In order to meet the positive relationships standard, with specific reference to incidents of bullying in the home, the registered person must ensure that staff:</p> <p>(2)(viii) strive to gain each child's respect and trust;            (xii) understand and communicate to children that bullying is unacceptable;            (xiii) have the skills to recognise incidents or indications of bullying and how to deal with them.</p>	<p>31 August 2016</p>
<p>12: The protection of children standard</p> <p>In order to meet the protection of children standard, with specific reference to risk assessments, the registered person must ensure that staff:</p> <p>(2)(a)(i) actively 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>31 August 2016</p>
<p>The registered person must keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it and notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (3)(a)(b))</p>	<p>31 August 2016</p>

The registered person must ensure that the requirements for the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) order 2005 are complied with in respect of the home, with specific reference to the frequency of fire drills. (Regulation 25 (2)(b))	31 August 2016
The registered person must fully implement the home's policy for considering complaints made by children. (Regulation 39 (1))	31 August 2016
The registered person must notify HMCI without delay if there is an incident relating to a child, which the registered person considers to be serious, specifically acts consistent with attempts of suicide. (Regulation 40 (4)(e))	31 August 2016

## Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Ensure that staff support children to try activities that are 'new' for them, where appropriate. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 31, paragraph 6.4)
- Ensure that when a child returns to the home after being missing from care or away from the home without permission, that the responsible local authority provides an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. Homes should take account of information provided by such interviews when assessing risks and putting arrangements in place to protect each child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30)
- Ensure that any sanctions used to address poor behaviour are restorative in nature, to help children to recognise the impact of their behaviour on themselves, other children, the staff caring for them and the wider community. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.38)
- Ensure that all staff receive supervision which allows them to reflect on their practice and the individual needs of the children assigned to their care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2)

## Full report

### Information about this children's home

This privately owned children's home is one of a small group run by the organisation. It provides care and support for up to three children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

### Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
26 January 2016	Full	Good
5 November 2015	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
14 January 2015	Full	Good
3 September 2014	Interim	Sustained effectiveness

## Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
<p><b>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home</b></p>	<p><b>Requires improvement</b></p>
<p>Children receive individualised care, in that staff recognise the uniqueness of their respective circumstances. However, as a staff team they are unable to influence the children and this means that they are unable to bring about meaningful change.</p> <p>The children showed minimal interest in speaking with inspectors about their experiences and progress in the home. However, they did say that they did not like the home and that they were keen to move.</p> <p>One placing social worker said: 'My child is saying that he is not happy in the home because he wants to go into foster care. The staff work well with what can be extreme behaviour and are doing a good job. They have really shown commitment to him remaining in the placement in different ways.' The staff receive therapeutic advice intended to help them to support the children. However, the strategies they use to help children understand their own emotional wellbeing are largely ineffective. The result is an increase in incidents of self-harm, and the messages from children feeling helpless intensify. For example, one child had written on their bedroom wall, 'My life is broken'.</p> <p>The quality of relationships between staff and the children varies. One child had written to a member of staff to thank them for all that they had attempted to do. The same child had also raised a complaint, saying that the same member of staff treats children unfairly. As a result, staff are concerned about being subject to allegations, which has an impact on how meaningfully many are able to help some children and gain their respect and trust. The staff have an opportunity to discuss their feelings in team meetings and supervision. However, they are not fully confident in helping some children.</p> <p>Staff provide opportunities for children to be healthy. They talk to them about the dangers of smoking and using drugs. They offer alternatives and suggest referring them on to other agencies. They encourage children to go to the gym, to go for a walk or to play football. However, the children more frequently than not, decline these options, preferring to go out into the wider community. Lack of persistent motivation and encouragement from some staff means that children are increasingly detaching from what the home has to offer.</p> <p>Progress in education fluctuates. One child had begun to attend school from a starting point of not attending. The child did not maintain attendance, despite</p>	



efforts from the staff to promote education and to engage quickly with the wider network of services. While the child has now stopped attending, he did, with support from the staff, present for and sit GCSE exams, which reflects a positive achievement for that individual. Another child has arrived at the home without an education placement and waits for home tutoring to start. The result is continued disengagement from structured learning for this child. The staff have challenged relevant agencies to progress this.

Parents and those who are important to the child are welcomed and are encouraged to visit the home, as reflected in care planning. This helps children to maintain their identity and retain key relationships.

The interior of the home has been changed. The hall and the living room have been separated, offering improved space for children to relax. There are opportunities for bedrooms to be personalised, for example through decoration. The children have helped to improve the garden. This helps them to acquire new skills and encourages them to invest time in the space outside.

Some children have significant and powerful emotional and psychological needs, which have been unmet for many years. Staff do a good job to ensure that other agencies, such as the children looked after nurse and mental health services, are kept up to date about children. This helps to ensure that the right support is on hand from external agencies, such as in relation to gender identity.

Where children show some willingness, staff cajole and praise them for taking responsibility for domestic tasks in and around the home, such as room cleaning, laundry and some cooking. This promotes and enhances some independent living skills.

	Judgement grade
<b>How well children and young people are helped and protected</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
<p>There are no records of physical intervention taking place in the home, and staff say that this is not used. Staff praise children when they make good choices. They look out for the small things that happen day to day to recognise achievement, and use financial incentives to encourage positive contributions from children. This is done with some success for some of the time. However, incidents are many and sanctions are few. Of those sampled, the sanctions reflected a financial penalty, rather than a restorative approach. This means the approach in the home does not effectively help children to make connections between their behaviour and the impact on others.</p> <p>Staff try to de-escalate situations between children. Some children tell staff that</p>	

they feel bullied and on one occasion, one child was advised to stay in his room out of the way. Some staff do not recognise bullying because they say and central records show that there are no recorded incidents of bullying happening in the home. They do not understand or communicate to children that bullying is unacceptable.

Some young people smoke in the building. Staff challenge them about this behaviour and the associated dangers. However, staff have not followed the provider's policy in relation to the frequency of fire drills. In the context of several incidents of smoking inside the building, the failure to undertake drills at regular intervals means some children and some staff are at risk of not knowing what action to take in the event of a fire emergency occurring.

Staff help children to meet the requirements of youth offending orders by ensuring that they keep appointments. Staff create risk assessments to help to show that they have considered the likely risk factors arising from different scenarios, such as working with children known to assault or verbally abuse others. The assessments sampled were not up to date. This means that they do not reflect some significant events that have happened in the home and therefore do not identify the specific actions required by staff to safeguard each individual child living there. Additionally, there is no evidence to show that any risk assessments are shared with all members of the staff team. This practice fails to recognise the potential risk of harm to children living in the home from one another.

Episodes of children going missing continues and the frequency of incidents has increased for some children. External agencies say that staff are responsive, follow protocols well, and communicate effectively. All of these actions ensure that children know that when they go missing, the adults will work together to take action and will be looking for them. The result is that some children negotiate their own return to the home. However, the arrangements for return home interviews are inconsistent. For one child living far from their placing authority, the arrangements were not made at the beginning of the placement. Additionally, for other children, managers do not seek feedback from the interviews and this does not enable the staff to learn from each incident of missing.

	Judgement grade
<b>The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
<p>The registered manager has led the home for over three years, and is appropriately qualified with the level 5 diploma in leadership and management. The children seek him out and benefit from his approach and experience. They have respect for him. He has the skills to develop good relationships with them and with the other adults from the range of agencies also working with the children,</p>	

thus enhancing the quality of those professional relationships.

The system for making a complaint is clear. The children know, from written information available within the home and from the children's guide, how to complain. One child wrote a complaint for the attention of the responsible individual. At the time of this inspection, over 28 days had passed from the date that the complaint had been written. While the responsible individual had been to the home to meet the child, there was no written information about the complaint available at the home. Furthermore, the registered manager was not aware of the content of the complaint. Notwithstanding the failure to meet timescales outlined in the provider's complaints policy, this example demonstrates a failure by the provider to implement an effective process to consider complaints made by children. A shortfall in this area was identified at the last inspection in January 2016, which means that this is a repeat shortfall.

There has been an increase in the number of incidents in the home. Services are informed and kept up to date. Agencies such as the youth offending team and the police say that communication is good. However, on one occasion the registered manager failed to notify Ofsted of a serious incident. A child wrote a note to staff stating that his intention was to kill himself, and then took action as if to carry this threat through. This means that Ofsted, as the regulator, did not have the opportunity to ensure the appropriate safeguards were in place to protect this child.

Staff receive appraisals, and records sampled show that supervision takes place regularly with the deputy manager. In supervision, staff discuss the children's behaviour. However, records show that opportunities for practice reflection are not in depth or happening regularly. This does not help staff to consider the impact and effectiveness of their direct work with children.

The statement of purpose does not accurately reflect the current staffing. In addition, the information provided about the nature of therapeutic services does not reflect clearly enough what is happening in the home. There is a lack of active evaluation of the effectiveness of any strategies identified. Staff are not sufficiently clear about the approach for working with each child. This has a direct impact on overall progress because the team are unable to effect meaningful change.

Staff working in the home for over two years hold the required level 3 qualification. New staff have been enrolled onto the course. They access a range of training, such as safeguarding and managing challenging behaviour. This helps to equip them with some of the skills that they need to work with the children.

The registered manager has a development plan and a system for evaluating the progress of the home. He seeks feedback from stakeholders, and external monitoring helps him to identify areas for development. As a result of feedback from services visiting the home, improvements were made to some communal

areas.

## What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of children looked after is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place. However, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service 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'.

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