

# SC462951

Registered provider: ERA Care Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## 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 who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

**Inspection dates:** 25 to 26 May 2017

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** requires improvement to be good

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

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:** 28 February 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** Improved effectiveness

**Enforcement action since last inspection**

None

## Key findings from this inspection

This children's home requires improvement to be good because:

- Two of the children are not making the progress as described in the last inspection report.
- The staff are not using their knowledge of the children to good enough effect.
- Attendance in education has declined for two of the children.
- The children's use of cannabis continues and is increasing.
- The staff give children a lot of freedom, and this is not necessarily helpful to them.
- The home is not routinely or actively seeking feedback from the missing-from-care interviews.
- The system for implementation and recording of sanctions or consequences is confusing.

The children's home's strengths:

- The children like living in the home.
- There is a new staff team.
- The organisation's new approach to induction and training is helping the staff to feel confident about their work.
- Agencies say that the assistant manager and registered manager are particularly responsive when any issues emerge.

## Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
28/02/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness
21/06/2016	Full	Requires improvement
26/01/2016	Full	Good
05/11/2015	Interim	Declined in effectiveness

## 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—</p> <p>that staff understand the barriers to learning that each child may face and take appropriate action to help the child to overcome any such barriers and help each child to attend education or training in accordance with the expectations in the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 8(2)(a)(iii) and (x))</p>	28/07/2017
<p>The health and well-being standard is that the health and well-being needs of children are met, children receive advice, services and support in relation to their health and well-being and children are helped to lead healthy lifestyles. (Regulation 10(1)(a)(b)(c))</p>	28/07/2017
<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; and 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 ensure that staff-</p> <p>make decisions about the day-to-day arrangements for each child, in accordance with the child's relevant plans, which give the child an appropriate degree of freedom and choice. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b)(2)(ix))</p>	28/07/2017

## Recommendations

- Ensure that staff take account of information provided following an independent return home interview 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 the behaviour management strategy is understood and applied at all times by staff and that it is kept under review and revised where appropriate. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.34). This is with specific reference to the system for recording consequences and rewarding of positive behaviour.

## Inspection judgements

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

There are three children living in the home. Two of the children have continued to live in the home since the last inspection. Their school attendance has decreased significantly. Agencies say:

- 'We have not seen him in school for two months.'
- 'Attendance has declined to 66.7%.'

The records show, and observations from this inspection demonstrate, that the staff do try to get the children who are in the building up and encourage them to go to school. For example, during this inspection one child with declined attendance and who is currently excluded, did go into school to sit GCSEs. However, overall there is limited success in ensuring that the children learn, or sustain education. One child, on his way out to meet friends, said, 'I have already told the staff that when I get to change school, then I will start to go again but until then I will not be going back.' This does not demonstrate that each child receives the right kind of support to overcome barriers to learning. The overall approach does not meaningfully communicate to all of the children the expectations written in their relevant plans. This approach leads to disadvantaged children being further marginalised. This reduces the likelihood of future employability.

Mostly the children and the staff have good relationships. The staff say that they encourage the children to be active, for example by encouraging them to go to the gym and to take out ongoing membership, but the success varies. For example, one child had started to improve his physical fitness, and this had helped him to lose some weight. However, this has not been sustained. All of the current children use cannabis, and some have had access to and have consumed alcohol. One of the children declined the home's offer of a referral to specialist services. Another child has not yet been referred to another agency for individualised help. The staff say, and some records show, that the staff do have discussions with the children about their drug use, health and well-being. However, the same records show that there have been some significant time gaps in between the discussions. In addition, some of the discussions do not go far enough to impress on the children that they are making poor choices, which have a direct impact on their overall health and well-being.

The children are given a lot of freedom, and this means that those who want to be are out of the house. One placing authority said, 'The boundary setting is quite lax.' One child is in placement for only a few weeks and has permission to be out of the home on a Saturday for up to twelve hours. He does an activity for two hours and then meets friends for up to ten hours. The staff do provide transport, they are responsive, and they do call him across the day. However, when out in the community, some of the children are becoming involved in situations that result in them placing themselves at risk and incidents that result in police activity. The decisions that the staff make about the day-to-day arrangements do not help all of the children to address their conduct and

behaviour in the local community.

Children benefit from contact where this fits with the local authority plan. The staff are good at taking the children to visit their families and supporting the plans for reunification. One representative from a placing authority said, 'The staff are very fond of our child and supportive of the work that we are doing with his family.' This helps the children to maintain their identity.

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

Overall, incidents of the children going missing have increased. For one of the children, the frequency and duration of missing incidents have significantly intensified. The staff follow the required protocol by notifying the relevant agencies. They are good at contacting the children to ask them when they plan to return to the home. One agency said, 'They are responsive when the child is missing, but they could do more at the time when the child leaves the building, for example, follow him to see where he is going.' The home enables other agencies to undertake a missing-from-home interview, which is good; however, the home is not proactively using the information from these discussions to strengthen the arrangements to protect individual children. One agency said, 'Our child has continued to go missing.'

There are no recorded incidents of bullying. The current children say that their relationships with one another are okay. They say that they like the home and that the staff are kind and do a good job. One child said, 'This home is fine. I have what I need and I have been in places that are a lot worse.'

Since the last inspection, the staff have not used any physical intervention. Sometimes the children swear and threaten the staff. When a child singles out a member of staff and behaves aggressively the staff work together and try to de-escalate situation, which become volatile. One agency said, 'The staff work hard not to criminalise the children.'

There is a system in place that allows the children to earn extra pocket money. This can be an effective incentive for the children, who are either motivated by money or need more money to spend on items of their choosing. The staff attempt to use sanctions or consequences to make an impact on challenging behaviours, for example when children cause damage around the home or in their bedroom. However, the system lacks creativity and is confusing. One child had been told by another agency that there would be a financial penalty for causing some damage, but it was not clear how this sanction would be effectively implemented, monitored or reviewed. This does not help children to learn from their behaviour. This shortfall is repeated from the last inspection.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The registered manager has been in post for over four years. He has the required level 5 diploma in leadership and management. He has a good relationship with the children, who respect and trust him. The assistant manager continues in the post. He is working with the registered manager to improve the overall effectiveness of the home. One agency said, 'The staff are responsive when things happen and good at coming prepared to all meetings.'

Those staff who should have the required level 3 qualification do have it. Recent additions to the team mean that some staff are completing the qualification, or have just completed probation. The managers and leaders are working steadily together to build the staff team's confidence and to embed the ethos described in the statement of purpose. For example, they want to ensure a consistent and collaborative approach so they continue to use team meetings to test out staff's knowledge and understanding of their role. The staff receive regular supervision designed to encourage them to think about the impact of their work with the children and other agencies. One member of the team said, 'The manager will tell me what I have done well and also what I need to improve on.' Where clear shortfalls in staff practice emerge the managers do act to address issues and identify with the staff what needs to change. For example, the records show how the managers responded when one member of staff did not act sufficiently effectively when a child produced a bottle of alcohol. A clear response from the managers helps the staff to understand the expectations and responsibilities associated with their role. The assistant manager says, 'We have a very good staff team. I could not be happier with the team; they all want to be here and they enjoy their jobs.'

The regulation raised from the last inspection is raised again for a different reason. This is because the overall health and well-being for each child are not improving sufficiently. There are signs around the communal areas discouraging the children from smoking in the building, but as stated earlier in this report, this alone is not reducing the children's involvement with, for example, the use of cannabis.

A clearer approach to induction and an improved system for training help to build staff confidence about their work. Radicalisation and child sexual exploitation have become core training for all of the staff. This training helps them to understand more complex risks in relation to safeguarding and empowers the staff to challenge inappropriate remarks from the children about members of society perceived by them to be different.

The responsible individual takes an active role in supervising the registered manager and overseeing the home. There have been no complaints, or referrals to the designated officer. External monitoring continues to provide feedback to the registered manager about the impact of the service. This helps to inform the development plan for the home and the approach to internal monitoring.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and 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 whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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:** SC462951

**Provision sub-type:** Children's home

**Registered provider:** ERA Care Limited

**Registered provider address:** Unit G22 Allen House, The Maltings, Station Road, Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire CM21 9JX

**Responsible individual:** Stephen Milton

**Registered manager:** Francis Williams

## Inspector

Rosie Davie, social care inspector

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