

# SC478707

Registered provider: ERA Care Limited 5921904

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this children's home

This home is one of a small group run by an independent provider. This home provides care and accommodation for up to four children irrespective of gender who have behavioural and/or emotional difficulties.

**Inspection dates:** 18 to 19 September 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 requires improvement to be 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:** 05 July 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** Not judged

**Enforcement action since last inspection:**

None

## Key findings from this inspection

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

- The majority of the children do not remain living at the home long enough to make meaningful progress.
- The current children do not have a positive relationship with one another, and this has an impact on their progress.
- The strategies used by the staff to prevent the children from causing harm to one another are not consistently effective.
- The staff say that they do not feel confident that they can keep the current children safe from causing further harm to one another, and so one child is leaving.
- The efforts to prepare the children for independence do not go far enough.
- One wall board in the office has information that identifies the children, and this can be read from the outside of the front of the house.
- The children's risk assessments are not kept sufficiently up to date.
- The small number of staff in post for over one year have not had an appraisal.
- Staff records show that there is an inconsistent approach to recording the outcomes and action points from supervisions.
- There is an insufficient breadth of training available for staff.

The children's home's strengths:

- The home is outward facing, and communication with other agencies is good.
- The children say that they like their home and, for the majority of time, feel comfortable.
- The children identify staff whom they trust and talk to when they are concerned.
- The children are confident that when they raise an issue the managers take action and listen.
- The sanctions used for damage to property are implemented fairly and consistently.
- The managers take appropriate action when concerns about staff practice are raised.
- The children do make progress in some areas.
- Children do not go missing as frequently as they did in previous placements.
- The staff do a good job of supporting children with family contact and helping them to keep appointments with other professionals.

## Recent inspection history

<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>Inspection type</b>	<b>Inspection judgement</b>
05/07/2016	Interim	Requires improvement
12/04/2016	Full	Inadequate
15/02/2016	Full	Inadequate
10/12/2015	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 positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on mutual respect and trust, an understanding about acceptable behaviour and positive responses to other children and adults. (Regulation 11 (1))</p>	27/10/2017
<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 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 and help each child to manage the relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other. (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(i)(iv))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that each child's written risk assessments clearly outline the potential risks.</p>	27/10/2017
<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 helps children to aspire to their full potential and promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to 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, and ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child, and 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 the care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(a)(c)(f))</p>	27/10/2017
<p>The care planning standard is that children receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home.</p>	

(Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b))	
The registered person must ensure that all employees have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. (Regulation 33 (4)(c))	27/10/2017

## Recommendations

- Ensure that the home seeks to maintain a domestic rather than 'institutional' impression. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)  
In particular, ensure that written information inside of the house about the children cannot be seen from the outside of the front of the house
- As the home will have a day to day understanding of young people's capabilities and needs, children's homes' staff will have a valuable contribution to make to the pathway planning process. They should actively seek to make the fullest contribution, working with other relevant persons. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 18, paragraph 3.28)  
In particular, take a proactive approach and develop effective strategies to demonstrate the support children receive so as to enhance practical skills such as cooking, housework and budgeting.
- The registered person should ensure that staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs, and should understand the key role they play in training and development of staff in the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.11)
- It is good practice for a note of the content and/or outcomes of supervision to be kept consistently. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.4)

## Inspection judgements

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

The majority of children do not live in this home for long enough to experience effectively planned care and, therefore, to sustain any progress that is made.

The home accepts emergency placements and has looked after five children since February 2017. Two of the last placements ended without notice because the staff were not able to keep those children safe. On the dates of this inspection, two children were living in the home. On the first day of this inspection, the home's manager advised that one or other of the two children's placements would be ending imminently, because the

staff could not keep both of the children safe. Moving placements with little or no notice places additional stress on children who are already emotionally vulnerable.

The current children were admitted from the same placing authority within one week of each other. Records show that the previous registered manager did complete an assessment to consider the suitability of the match, so it was known that, for example, both children have experience of witnessing violence. A written log shows that soon into the placement the staff were aware of potential issues of bullying. The staff routinely kept the placing local authority informed of the events in the home, and began to tackle name calling and racist insults. One social worker said, 'Communication is good and a strength is that the home are outward facing.' As the placements have continued, the intensity of response between the children when disagreements emerge has escalated. One child said, 'We just don't get on.' The other child said, 'Sometimes things are not very nice between us.' The staff identify and try to use strategies and safeguards to protect both children. More than one member of staff said, 'We keep the children separate and we do not allow them to be alone together.' Another member of staff said, 'I have got in between the children more than once.' Nonetheless, some staff members' bold efforts to help these children to manage their respective behaviours have failed and, as a result, one of the children received a blow to the head from the other child. This means that the staff are not effective in de-escalating all confrontations between the children or encouraging the children to take responsibility for their behaviour. When one child was asked what she had learned from living in this home, she said, 'I have learned to keep my room locked and not to leave things lying around.'

The communal areas provide enough space for these two children. The home can promptly access a handy person to repair damage, and this helps to re-establish the homely ambience after incidents. The staff office is on the ground floor and located at the front of the building. On the wall board used by the staff to quickly reference appointments, the names of the children are clearly visible from outside the front door of the home. This does not safeguard the children's right to confidentiality and creates an institutionalised impression. This has no ongoing impact for these children because the acting manager took steps during this inspection to remove the information from the board.

The children accessing this service tend to be older and nearing the age where independent living is the next step. There is effort from some of the staff to encourage the children to become involved in activities to promote independence skills, such as meal planning and preparation. However, when children resist the staff's collective efforts do not go far enough to motivate and encourage the children to make progress in this area. The result is that the children pick and choose what they do around the home. One child said, 'I can't be bothered so I don't.' This does not help to encourage the children to develop an effective range of skills for leaving care.

The staff are good at supporting the children with contact with and visits to their family. The staff routinely register the children with local services such as the GP, dentist and optician, all of which are conveniently located in the nearby town. The staff are very good at ensuring that the children keep all appointments, and work well with other

services such as the youth offending team. This support ensures that the children have some structure to their week and have access to a range of different professionals.

The majority of the children come to this home without school placements, and some have missed significant time in the classroom. One child has a tutor who comes to the home after school, and this provides a small amount of education for that child. The majority of children do have a named school, and so the provider's approach to prioritising education has improved. The staff have got better at delivering the message that attendance at school is expected. For example, when children refuse to attend school or are sent home they are not permitted to go into the living room to watch television or to go out with their friends during school hours. This boundary helps these children to a certain extent. While the children require a significant amount of support to sustain education and therefore have poor attendance, they do recognise that the staff help them to think about their future. One child said, 'I have a tutor every day and he helps me with maths. I am going to be an architect.'

The staff do most of the cooking and share mealtimes with the children, who tend to eat separately from one another. The children like to chat to the staff, and that helps them to form warm relationships with them quickly. There has been recent staff sickness but these children say that they like to meet a variety of adults and so don't mind that there is change. One child said, 'I like it when the staff and I sit and watch a film together.' The staff also meet with the children to seek their views and ideas about how to improve their individual experience of living in the home, and this helps the children to feel listened to.

Purchased as a reward for one child who had been attending school, the addition of a pool table kept undercover in the garden helps the children to relax. The children receive additional money from the provider to personalise, decorate and make improvements to their bedrooms. This helps the children who are motivated to take ownership of their environment. During this inspection, one child proudly showed the inspector his newly decorated room. The staff on shift were helping him to add the finishing touches.

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

One of the previous registered managers completed the risk assessments for the current children. These are well written, and the assessments include the initial reason for accepting the placement. The assessments of potential risk are reviewed and updated. The input into the assessments from the current acting manager shows that as the risks have become clearer, additional information is added. This includes concerns such as going missing or the use of alcohol. However, as incidents between the children have escalated the details of the information about the increased risk and the strategies to reduce risk are not documented well enough, for example when the children's behaviour escalates to physical assault. This does not help staff to prepare for keeping children safe. More than one member of staff said, 'We cannot keep these children safe.'

The home has an effective system to ensure that in the event of a child going missing,

the local police are made aware and the staff are clear that it is their responsibility to go out and search for the child. Records show that when a child goes missing the staff make contact with the child by phone. The incidents of going missing are few, which represents a significant reduction and improvement for these children, some of whom are at risk of child sexual exploitation. One child said, 'Before I came here I would go missing quite a lot from my other placements, but there are much worse places than this home. I like it here so I have decided not to go missing.'

There are few physical interventions. The record of the most recent incident shows that staff held one child for a short time to prevent further damage to property. The children receive pocket money and know that there is the option to earn additional money, for example by completing tasks around the home. The staff use sanctions to help the children to learn from some behaviours such as breaking things or causing damage, and this provides the children with some consequences for some of their behaviours. One child said, 'I threw food, plates and chairs in the kitchen, and as a consequence I had to pay back some money each week from my pocket money. I think that was fair and it has made me think twice about doing that again.'

The staff do a good job of making sure that one of the team meets with each child after every incident that causes concern. There are regular key-work sessions with the children, and these provide an opportunity for the staff to give advice in the hope that the children might take on some of the messages given. One placing social worker said, 'Although for our child incidents continue, the frequency and intensity of these has reduced a lot. In other placements we got phone calls every day about the behaviours.'

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

In July 2016, a new team began working in the home. Ofsted has accepted the voluntary de-registration of two managers and so the home is without a registered manager. The last registered manager left the company in August 2017.

From within the existing staff team, the responsible individual has identified the assistant manager as the person to take on the role of the home's acting manager. The acting manager is ambitious to drive improvement in the home. For example, she encourages the staff to develop their practice and to think actively about how their work relates to the regulations and quality standards. This approach is an improvement for this home. Alongside this, she has good individual relationships with the current children and has good creative ideas about how to improve the quality of children's experiences. She is motivated to build good professional relationships with other agencies. She carries out key-working sessions with the children and will ensure that following every incident a manager does have a discussion with the children. However, changes to the assistant manager role means a period of uncertainty about who has overall day-to-day responsibility for shaping and influencing the quality of service delivery.

In light of the registered manager's resignation, the responsible individual works from the home for three days every week. A spate of staff sickness and resignations has resulted in some other changes to the core staff team. For example, there are two new

staff members, and two other members will soon come to work at the home. This means that few of the core team have the level 3 diploma in residential childcare and the staff have little experience of working together. While the provider has been robustly recruiting and vetting new staff, staff from other homes have come to work on shift in this home. The responsible individual says, 'As much as we possibly can, we use staff from other homes.' The responsible individual has covered at least one shift and has slept over in the home. These arrangements provide an element of continuity for the current children who say that they can approach the responsible individual and they like the staff group.

Staff ask for regular discussion and meetings with other agencies including schools. At regular team meetings, the current issues for each child are discussed. This helps the staff to have an overview of what is happening for the children. Staff do receive regular supervision. Records show that because of the changes in management, the quality of the supervision varies. For example, some of the records of supervision are a checklist and others are a more detailed account of reflection and support given. This difference in approach does not help the staff, some of whom who are new to working in a children's home, to receive consistent messages about their role in working with the children.

The movement of staff in between homes means that not all of the staff working in this home receive an annual appraisal. This is an oversight which has minimal impact for the current children, but the practice does not demonstrate that the provider ensures that every member of the team remains fit to perform their role.

All of the staff have access to training courses. Mandatory training includes safeguarding, pathways to radicalisation and extremism. Yet, many of the courses the staff complete are on line and so this limits the opportunity for learning from others through discussion. In addition not all staff have received sufficient training in attachment or sufficient training in behaviour management and this does not equip staff with the necessary skills to care for children who have witnessed violence and experienced loss and rejection.

A recent change to the arrangements for the external monitoring of this home means an improvement in the level of objective scrutiny. The designated officer for the local authority is notified of any safeguarding matters, and the provider works transparently with the relevant agencies to ensure that investigations take place. The children are aware of the complaints policy, and the presence of the responsible individual in the home means that any issues that the children raise are dealt with quickly.

## **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:** SC478707

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

**Registered provider:** ERA Care Limited 5921904

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

**Responsible individual:** Stephen Milton

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

## Inspector

Rosie Davie, social care inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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