

# 1275569

Registered provider: The Mulberry Bush Organisation Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this children's home

This home was previously registered as a residential special school; this was its first inspection since it has registered as a children's home.

The home provides an integrated combination of therapeutic education, care and treatment for primary-school-aged boys and girls who have severe social, emotional and mental health difficulties. It also works with those children's families. A child's placement is for either 38 or 52 weeks per year.

The education provision is on site and runs as an independent non-maintained special school for children aged five to 13. All are resident in one of four houses in term time, but during school holidays and alternate weekends children on a 52-week placement live in a fifth house.

The head of group living was registered with Ofsted as the home's manager on 18 June 2018.

**Inspection dates:** 23 to 24 October 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

**Date of last inspection:** not applicable

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** not applicable

## 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 registered person must ensure that any limitation placed on a child's privacy or access to any area of the home's premises (i) is intended to safeguard each child accommodated in the home; (ii) is necessary and proportionate; (iii) is kept under review and, if necessary, revised; and (iv) allows children as much freedom as is possible when balanced against the need to protect them and keep them safe. (Regulation 21 (c)(i-iv))</p> <p>In particular, undertake individual risk assessments to identify whether closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras are the most appropriate way to safeguard and support children.</p>	<p>14/12/2018</p>

### Recommendations

- For children's homes to be nurturing and supportive environments that meet the needs of their children, they will, in most cases, be homely, domestic environments. Children's homes must comply with relevant health and safety legislations (alarms, food hygiene etc.); however, in doing so, homes should seek as far as possible to maintain a domestic rather than 'institutional' impression. ('Guide to children's homes regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- The responsible person must take such general fire precautions as will ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety of any employees; and in relation to relevant persons who are not employees, take such general fire precautions as may reasonably be required in the circumstances of the case to ensure that the premises are safe. (The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 8(1) and (2))

In particular, ensure that regular checks are made of emergency lighting, internal doors and other fire equipment (to ensure that they are easily accessible), and record the names of those who take part in an emergency evacuation drill.

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The process for children to be admitted to the home is extremely thorough. Sometimes, families or referrers may be over-optimistic about what can be achieved, but managers and staff help set realistic aims and are highly successful at reaching them.

Most children have attachment disorders, and much of the work they do here is to learn to trust adults who help them overcome early traumatic experiences. Inspectors saw children looking to staff for reassurance and who wanted physical proximity or contact, showing that they were developing the kind of supportive relationships in which this can happen.

The home provides therapy that is carefully assessed to meet children's needs, but the main form of treatment is the milieu in which they live. One young person said, 'I used to struggle every day, but not now. It is the little chats and one to ones that make the difference.' In this way, staff demonstrate personal interest in children and create a home that enables them to understand themselves and the world around them.

Children make significant progress emotionally and so become more open to learning and social interactions. Staff celebrate with children when they acquire new skills; comprehensive assessment records demonstrate the progress children have made since admission. Parents spoken to are extremely pleased with improvements, such as educational achievement and the reduction of serious incidents, often when there had been no progress for many years before admission.

One child said that he benefited most from 'being where they know how to help children like me and not be excluded. I was out of school for a year before I came here; now I go to classes.'

The new house for children who have 52-week placements is well designed to meet their needs; the children love having en suite facilities. They have belongings in their bedrooms, but there is little that reflects their personalities across the house. Photographs are displayed but on one large noticeboard rather than in frames around the home. The independent person, in her June Regulation 44 report, recommended that toilet seats were replaced in other houses to reduce the institutional feel of bathrooms; although managers have plans to upgrade facilities over time, this relatively simple step has not been taken.

Wherever possible, staff work with families or carers to provide holistic support. This has successfully helped transfer progress to the different settings children live in, to maintain relationships or to retain people's involvement in children's lives so that it can be resumed if and when possible. One parent said that she had experienced 'outstanding levels of support'.

Leaders and managers have very effectively combined the resources of the residential, education and therapy teams so that children's experience of life is enhanced and life chances much improved. One professional said, 'This is the whole package ... They have

got everything right for my child. I can't see anything that needs improving.'

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding**

Individual risk assessments are thorough, and staff are skilled at implementing strategies to reduce tensions between children that might lead to conflict or to emotions engulfing them. Children feel safe, although the behaviour of other children can sometimes make them insecure. They could name staff members they would speak to if they have concerns. Children are confident these would be dealt with sensitively.

Several children strongly dislike staff restraining them but know they have done so to keep them safe. Others think that being held is good as it means they can be close to an adult and helped to feel safe. The introduction of the role of a 'critical friend' (who observes a physical intervention, advocating for the child) is an excellent way of further safeguarding all involved. The overall number of prone restrains has since reduced.

The provider's policy, and staff practice, is to check for possible injuries to a child who has been held and to provide medical assistance if required. However, staff do not universally record when they have done this, nor are body maps used to show the site of any marks. Managers have plans to improve computer records to rectify the issue.

Children learn that adults can contain uncontrolled behaviour and help manage the emotions that lie behind them. This leads them to understand that such feelings need not be devastating. As a result, some children talk about experiences they may not have told anyone else about or that were previously not believed if they did.

Managers and staff respond to safeguarding concerns promptly and effectively. They work hard to make sure that children who make allegations (and the staff concerned) are safe. Regular meetings are held with the designated officer of the local authority to discuss incidents – an admirable additional layer of scrutiny.

Managers and staff put strategies in place to protect particularly vulnerable children. These are thorough and, as one professional said, 'They think about it from every angle.' Non-care staff are included in information sharing, as appropriate, so that they too are part of the support and safeguarding network for children.

Fire checks had not found some oversights, such as a fire blanket not being fixed to a wall, but these were rectified during the inspection. Records of emergency evacuation drills in at least one of the houses did not identify the children, staff or visitors that took part, so that it is not possible to know who is now familiar with the procedure.

Door alarms, audio alarms and CCTV cameras alert staff when children may need help at night or to prevent inappropriate behaviour. Measures are in place to regulate its use, but CCTV is in operation without individual assessments that might show that it is a proportionate intrusion into privacy. This means that managers and staff are not critically evaluating the impact on each child or seeking to minimise it whenever possible.

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

Leaders and managers have been extremely thorough in preparing to change registration from that of a residential special school to a children's home. This has enabled residential provision to be extended beyond term time for up to six children. The children who have so far been admitted for 52-week placements have benefited greatly. Staff help them manage the transition from the houses lived in during term time to the new house without difficulty. They follow the same pattern as their peers of living on the main site in term time and going elsewhere every third weekend and for holidays.

Staff are well versed in the children's home regulations, although thinking about residential provision in terms of being a home rather than somewhere children live when they attend school is still developing. Some institutional aspects have been hard for staff or managers to 'see' in the original four houses, such as the school-style noticeboards.

In addition to adjusting to a new regulatory framework, leaders and managers have introduced a new computerised recording system, which has proved to be an even greater challenge. Staff are using an unfamiliar system to record compliance with unfamiliar regulations, and the process for doing so is cumbersome. Therefore, there are gaps in records that monitoring has not found, and auditing for these oversights is not systematic. Managers are aware of the difficulties and are sufficiently aware of day-to-day practice to be able to identify areas of weakness through other processes, such as supervision.

Nevertheless, case files clearly set out all necessary information received, while assessments and plans in place are based on information known and guide staff well.

Leaders and managers have fully addressed the recommendations made at the last inspection under the registration as a residential special school. They have plans to develop residential provision, making the four houses used in term time more like the new house. However, the time scales have not been set out and are dependent on raising the funds.

The emotional impact of the work staff do is enormous, but there are very effective systems in place to ensure that the provider supports them exceptionally well to manage it. Several workers commented that they feel better supported than in any previous employment or that this is the best job they have had. Induction, supervision and appraisal processes are all more than satisfactory, and ongoing training far exceeds regulatory requirements.

Relationships with other professionals promote effective liaison to meet children's needs. This includes convening network meetings when behaviours become concerning to make changes across the system and improve outcomes. Evidence, such as a reduction in the number of physical interventions, shows that this can be very effective.

## **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:** 1275569

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

**Registered provider:** The Mulberry Bush Organisation Ltd

**Registered provider address:** Critchleys Llp, 23–38 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX1 2EP

**Responsible individual:** Lee Wright

**Registered manager:** Claire McCarthy

## Inspectors

Chris Peel, social care inspector

Teri Peck, regional inspection manager

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