

SC470513

Registered provider: Wandsworth Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This is a local authority-run service which provides care and accommodation for up to 56 children with autism spectrum disorder, learning disabilities and associated conditions. The registered children's home is on the same site as the organisation's school and is comprised of separate individual houses so that children live in smaller groups. It accommodates children for short breaks and for placements of 38 and 52 weeks of the year.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 10 June 2020.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this setting on 24 February 2021 to carry out a monitoring visit. The report is published on our website.

Inspection dates: 21 to 22 April 2021

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 **inadequate**

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: 2 December 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: Good

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Recent inspection history

| Inspection date | Inspection type | Inspection judgement |
|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 02/12/2019 | Full | Good |
| 11/03/2019 | Full | Good |
| 27/11/2018 | Full | Inadequate |
| 29/11/2017 | Full | Good |

Inspection judgements

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

During this inspection period, observations made of children's experiences and progress present a mixed picture. Good leadership and positive staff responses have mitigated the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, at times, have been substantial for many of the children. A flexible, creative and sensitive approach by staff has helped the children to adapt to unexpected changes to their basic routines and care arrangements as restriction, lockdown, and quarantine requirements have changed

The impact of the pandemic aside, there have been some long-standing issues, unrelated to the pandemic, or at least not having their origins in the pandemic, that have undermined the progress and positive experiences of the children. These include unnecessary and harmful restrictive practices, such as confining children to their rooms against their will, for which a compliance notice has been served. In addition, there are staffing shortfalls, and insufficient support is given to staff from managers through regular individual supervision. Staff are under strain because of staff shortages, and they are insufficiently supported. They are unable to respond fully at all times to the needs and vulnerabilities of the children. This limits the children's progress, increases risks and detracts from their positive care experience.

The children have been well supported to remain engaged in their learning and to maintain best possible contact with their families as restrictions have changed. The members of the multi-disciplinary staff team understand the needs and vulnerabilities of the children well and respond to these with care and sensitivity. This helps the children to feel settled and secure.

The well-maintained site and buildings provide the children with a rich range of stimulating and fun opportunities, as well as an abundance of space in which to safely express their feelings. However, some of the indoor spaces and children's bedrooms are lacking in a homely and personalised feel, and for some children, there is inadequate privacy due to having no window blinds or curtains.

Significant progress has been achieved in improving how the opinions, wishes and feelings of the children are sought, understood and responded to. This enables the children to have a greater say in improvements in the quality of care provided and in the running of the home, as well as contributing to further developments in the service. The requirement set at the previous monitoring visit in this regard has been met.

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

Although significantly reduced, the use of disproportionate and unnecessary restrictive measures for some children has continued. The response to the requirement set at the last monitoring visit in this regard has been lacklustre and insufficient.

The responses to some incidents where children were exposed to the risk of harm have been weak and insufficient. Policies and procedures in place to ensure that immediate and appropriate action is taken to safeguard children are found wanting. Further, procedures to ensure that incidents are rigorously reviewed, and all necessary lessons learned, are insufficient and do not meet requirements. This leaves children at risk, and the necessary improvements to practice are not made.

The individual risks and vulnerabilities of the children are well understood and, for most children, the plans to guide staff to keep them safe are effective. Staff display a caring and protective attitude towards the children, and there is a discernible warmth in their interactions. Significant improvement has been made in reducing the use of restrictive measures in preventing and reducing harm.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The manager displays insight and experience and a passion to achieve the best possible care and outcomes for the children. His knowledge and understanding of all the children, as well as the staff team, are noteworthy. However, given the current demands of the provision, he is no longer able to maintain effective day-to-day control over the care and well-being of the children. He is also unable to take decisive actions to ensure that the service maintains compliance with regulations. He is also unable to effectively monitor the quality of care and take timely and appropriate actions to improve this.

The failure by the manager to swiftly end the use of the unacceptable restrictive practices that were identified at the last monitoring visit, and meet the requirement set, is regarded as a serious shortfall.

A large senior management team has had the effect of diluting the house manager's ability to manage effectively. The house managers, who are responsible for the direct care of up to eight children in the seven separate houses, do not have sufficient authority to make decisions and take actions to uphold the standards required for the children in their charge.

The positive outcomes for children are due to the commitment and dedication of individual members of the care staff, rather than as a result of effective leadership and management of the home.

Current practice around staff supervision and annual appraisals does not meet requirements. The policies and arrangements for achieving good supervision

outcomes are weak. These shortfalls leave staff inadequately supported and vulnerable to making mistakes. Opportunities to improve and develop staff practice are missed, and staff retention is undermined. All these factors weaken the efforts of leaders to maintain continuity of care for the children and achieve their best possible quality of care.

Currently, there are a significant number of staff vacancies. This is being addressed by an increased recruitment effort, use of agency staff and the offer of overtime for permanent staff. These measures are, however, not yet effectively addressing the problem, and there are clear signs that staffing levels are currently insufficient.

There is a general drop in staff morale and satisfaction, as measured in a September 2020 survey, and several incidents in which levels of supervision of children were either insufficient or levels of vigilance poor. There are also several direct expressions from staff in this regard. The shortfalls in staff supervisions and appraisals are exacerbated by the fact that staff do not always have time to attend these meetings.

These identified shortfalls and failures in effective leadership and management are viewed against the backdrop of much good staff practice, some excellent assessment and specialised interventions, and many sound and thorough procedures. It is also recognised that the pandemic may have exacerbated some of the problems. Although the identified shortfalls and failures are concerning and must be addressed, there are, however, currently no identified serious failures that leave the children at immediate risk of harm.

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 |
|---|--------------|
| *Restraint in relation to a child must be necessary and proportionate. (Regulation 20 (2)) | 20 May 2021 |
| <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 promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child; and</p> <p>ensure that the home’s workforce provides continuity of care to each child. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(d))</p> | 20 July 2021 |
| <p>The registered person must operate a disciplinary procedure which, in particular—</p> <p>provides for the suspension from work of an employee if necessary in the interests of the safety or welfare of children; and</p> <p>provides that the failure on the part of an employee to report an incident of abuse, or suspected abuse, whether past or present, in relation to a child to the appropriate person is a ground on which disciplinary proceedings may be instituted. (Regulation 33 (2)(a)(b))</p> | 20 July 2021 |
| <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>have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. (Regulation 33 (4)(a)(b))</p> | 20 July 2021 |

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| <p>The registered person must prepare and implement a policy which—</p> <p>is intended to safeguard children accommodated in the children’s home from abuse or neglect; and</p> <p>sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>The procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect must, in particular—</p> <p>describe the measures which may be necessary to protect children following an allegation of abuse or neglect; and</p> <p>describe how and to whom staff are to report, without delay, any concern about abuse or neglect of a child. (Regulation 34 (1)(a)(b) (2)(e)(f))</p> | <p>20 May 2021</p> |
| <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>use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(h))</p> | <p>20 July 2021</p> |

* This requirement is subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendation

- 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 the children’s homes regulations, including the quality standards’, page 15, paragraph 3.9)

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: SC470513

Provision sub-type: Residential special school

Registered provider address: London Borough of Wandsworth, Early Years Centre, 1 Siward Road, London SW17 0LA

Responsible individual: Sarah Dunn

Registered manager: Gregory Edwards

Inspectors:

John Pledger, Social Care Inspector

Mark Newington, Social Care Inspector

Rebecca Fisher, Social Care Inspector

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