

1226757

Registered provider: Potton Homes Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is one of three children's homes that are privately owned by this company, which also owns a school. It is registered to care for up to three children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and/or learning disabilities. The purpose of this home is to assess the needs of the children and identify what types of long-term placement and support services are required.

Inspection dates: 15 to 16 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 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 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: Sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home requires improvement to be good because

- Some improvements to the building are required to provide children with a high-quality and safe living environment.
- Staff vetting procedures are not sufficiently robust to ensure that children are fully safeguarded from unsuitable people gaining employment in the home.
- The safeguarding ethos is not fully embedded in the home, as staff have not utilised the home's whistle-blowing procedures.
- Location and children's individual risk assessments require improvement in order to ensure that the staff fully understand and manage risk effectively.
- A child was admitted to the home without full understanding of their needs and whether staff had the particular skills to meet these. This undermined placement stability.
- The children are not always given the opportunity to talk to someone independent in order to reflect on their thoughts and feelings following the application of a sanction or when they have gone missing from home.
- Improvement in the supervision, induction and training of staff is required to enable all staff to respond effectively both to the day-to-day needs of the children and to emergency situations.
- Poor leadership and staff dynamics have the potential to have a negative impact on the confidence that staff have in their ability to raise issues of concern effectively.
- Poor record-keeping undermines the manager's ability to evidence or evaluate the quality of care and the progress that the children are making.
- The statement of purpose requires updating to reflect the current arrangements in the home.
- Consistent and competent management arrangements are required to lead the team effectively and promote improvement.

The children's home's strengths

- Staff provide individualised child-focused care.
- The children feel consulted.

- Staff are individually committed to the children and develop bonds with them which make them feel cared for, secure and nurtured.
- The children are very positive about their experience of living at the home. They feel well supported and safeguarded.
- Professionals and families have absolute confidence that the children's individual needs are well met by caring and nurturing staff.
- Staff act swiftly and appropriately when children go missing from the home or place themselves at risk through contact with unsuitable people.
- Staff work well in partnership with other agencies.

Recent inspection history

| Inspection date | Inspection type | Inspection judgement |
|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 02/12/2016 | Interim | Sustained effectiveness |
| 20/07/2016 | Full | Good |

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 quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>ensure that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed and furnished so as to meet the needs of each child and enable each child to participate in the daily life of the home. (Regulation 6(1)(a)(2)(c)(i)(ii))</p> | 03/07/2017 |
| <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—</p> <p>that staff understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person and are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies;</p> <p>that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm;</p> <p>that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed, furnished and maintained so as to protect each child from avoidable hazards. (Regulation 12(1)(2)(a)(v)(vii)(b)(d))</p> <p>In particular:</p> <p>ensure that a culture of safeguarding is embedded in the home and that all staff are aware of and implement the home's whistle-blowing procedures;</p> | 19/06/2017 |

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| <p>ensure that individual risk assessments for each child clearly identify areas of risk and the actions to be taken to reduce the risks;</p> <p>ensure that all of the staff are familiar with the content of each child's risk assessment and that staff implement any protective actions required.</p> | |
| <p>The care planning standard is that children receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home's statement of purpose. (Regulation 14(1)(a)(2)(a))</p> <p>In particular, undertake as part of the admission process a documented assessment of how the home can meet the needs of the new child and the potential impact on the existing group. Furthermore, only admit a child to the home when the staff have the information and skills to meet the child's needs effectively.</p> | 19/06/2017 |
| <p>The registered person must compile in relation to the children's home a statement ('statement of purpose') which covers the matters listed in Schedule 1. The registered person must keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it and send Ofsted a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision and ensure that a copy of the statement of purpose is published on the home's website. (Regulation 16(1)(3)(a)(b)(4))</p> | 10/07/2017 |
| <p>The registered person must ensure that the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and any regulations made under it are complied with in respect of the home. (Regulation 25(2)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the integrity of the fire doors is not compromised, that no fire door is propped open, and ensure that all staff understand their personal responsibilities in relation to fire safety and how to help children to evacuate the building safely in an emergency.</p> | 19/06/2017 |
| <p>The registered person must only employ an individual to work at the children's home if full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32(3)(d))</p> | 19/06/2017 |

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| <p>In particular, ensure that all recruitment checks are undertaken, documented and verified for all staff, including those provided by an agency. When staff who have a conviction are employed, maintain a clear record of the suitability decision.</p> | |
| <p>The registered person must ensure that each employee completes an appropriate induction, undertakes appropriate continuing professional development and receives practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience (Regulation 33(1)(a)(4)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that all staff, including agency staff, receive appropriate and documented induction and ensure that all substantive staff undertake suitable training in safeguarding, first aid, autism awareness, restorative justice, food hygiene, preventing and managing self-harm and any other training that reflects the needs of the children placed.</p> | <p>17/07/2017</p> |
| <p>The registered person must maintain records ('case records') for each child which are kept up to date, are signed and dated by the author of each entry and include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child. (Regulation 36(1)(a)(b)(c))</p> | <p>03/07/2017</p> |

Recommendations

- When a child returns to the home after being missing from care or away from the home without permission, the responsible local authority must provide 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)
- Regulation 19(2) details sanctions that are prohibited in behaviour management. Any sanctions used to address poor behaviour should be restorative in nature, to help children recognise the impact of their behaviour on themselves, other children, the staff caring for them and the wider community. In some cases it will be important for children to make reparation in some form to anyone hurt by their behaviour and the staff in the home should be skilled to support the child to understand this and carry it out. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.38)

In particular, ensure that following each and every sanction or incident of physical restraint that there is evidence of the child having been provided with supportive opportunities to reflect upon the situation.

- Ensure that staff understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Record information on individual children in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)
- When establishing the home, the registered person must ensure that it is suitably located so that children are effectively safeguarded and can access services to meet needs identified in their relevant plans (see regulation 12(2)(c)). Under regulation 46, the registered person should review the appropriateness and suitability of the location and premises of the home at least once a year. The review should include the identification of any risks and opportunities presented by the home's location and strategies for managing these. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 64, paragraph 15.1)

In particular, review the potential strengths and the impact on children of local community relationships.

Inspection judgements

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

Although aspects of the direct care provided are good, shortfalls in safeguarding and leadership and management undermine the ability of the home as a whole to provide the good quality of support that the provider and staff aspire to. However, there are no significant failures which mean that children's safety or well-being are not adequately promoted.

The home provides time-limited assessments and bridging placements. Many of the children are placed as an emergency. As a result, the group dynamic is ever-changing and the potential for poor matching is increased. Poor placement planning has, on occasion, resulted in a placement breakdown, when the staff have been unaware of or unable to meet the child's particular needs. This has had an impact on the other children. However, most of the children settle and make progress during their stays, improving their personal safety, behaviour, self-care and engagement in education.

The children receive individualised child-focused care and support. They develop positive relationships with the staff, who they feel that they can trust. There is lots of laughter and good-natured teasing. The affection shown between everyone gives the home a warm, nurturing atmosphere. The children enjoy a wide variety of activities, from shopping and pampering sessions to theme parks and bowling. The staff are particularly skilled at listening to the children and engaging them in activities which appeal to them. They enjoy their time at the home, consistently rating the home as 10 out of 10. They said that they will take positive memories with them. The children's comments included:

- 'You'll have to drag me out of here. I want to stay here. It's a shame it's not a permanent place.'
- 'The staff help me a lot.'
- 'I love everything about it. It's brilliant.'

The children are in good health and they receive suitable guidance from staff on maintaining healthy lifestyles. However, the staff's attempts to engage resistant children in preventative health checks and education have not always been successful. Some children, despite the support and guidance provided by staff, continue to engage in unhealthy behaviours such as smoking and, on occasion, using cannabis.

Staff work closely with school staff to promote the importance of education. As a result, most of the children have had some success in education and have made progress in their engagement in a relatively short time. The staff are creative in providing opportunities for learning and personal development planning activities, which require the children to develop independent travel skills or to explore history through visits to the local fort.

Due to the short-term nature of the placements, the focus is on engaging with children and assessing their skills. All of the children are encouraged to fully integrate into the usual activities of family life, such as shopping and cooking and taking responsibility for their laundry. They are involved in all day-to-day decisions about their daily lives. They are able to talk to staff with confidence that the staff will respond to any issues of concern. The children are helped to maintain friendships and family relationships which are important to them. They have also made new friendships. For example, two of the children have a close and caring relationship, which, while becoming difficult at times, allows them to enjoy activities together and do normal peer activities, such as braiding each other's hair.

The majority of the children experience positive and well-planned transitions during which they receive effective emotional support. This helps to reduce their anxieties as they move into their new home. The staff work well in partnership with parents and professionals, whose comments included:

- 'It's a very good home and she's been quite happy there.'
- 'She seems very comfortable with the carers and is getting good support.'
- 'She speaks very fondly of staff.'
- 'The staff are really good at supporting her. It's been a really good placement. They've done really well with her. Staff have been very proportionate in their response and have a good sense of her.'

The building provides sufficient space for the number of children for whom it is registered, but it can become rather crowded when all of the children and staff are on site. The building, while homely, does require maintenance and repair to provide a high-quality living environment. The internal porch has a broken letterbox and a visible taped-up electric wire, a kitchen cupboard is missing a door and the mirror is missing from the wall in the ground-floor toilet. The frontage presents as unkempt with an unmown lawn and a decorative plinth broken off. As a result, the home does not blend in with other houses in the street.

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

The children feel safe and well supported by the staff. Their comments included:

- 'It's a very good place.'
- 'I like all of the staff.'
- 'Yes, it feels really safe.'
- 'I wouldn't change anything.'

The children have developed positive peer relationships and staff help them to repair these relationships when conflict occurs. One child said, 'There's no bullying here. We all get on well together. We do have fights, but the staff sort it out.'

The children receive supportive, caring responses from individual staff in relation to any safeguarding disclosures. Staff act robustly and in partnership with other agencies to ensure that the children are safeguarded when there are any concerns in relation to contact with unsafe people or potential child sexual exploitation. One social worker described how staff were able to access information about unsafe contacts which had previously never been shared. The social worker said that this was as a result of the very positive relationships that the child has with the staff. The social worker reflected that the child is much safer because they live in this home. However, not all of the staff have fully understood their pivotal safeguarding role in the home. Potential concerns regarding staff practice and suitability were not raised with the responsible individual or senior managers through the home's whistle-blowing procedures. This meant that senior managers were not immediately alerted and were therefore unable to act effectively to safeguard children who were at potential risk.

Individual risk assessments and safety plans are not sufficiently detailed. They fail to give staff effective guidance on how to respond to all areas of risk. The guidance for staff is unclear regarding the closely located railway crossing and what to do in the event of a child accessing the crossing, and key historical information is sometimes not included in the assessments. The staff do not always implement the protective actions that are identified in the plans. For example, one child's plan stated that room searches

will be conducted regularly, however, only one room search has been documented in the past two months. These shortfalls mean that staff are not always familiar with the potential for harm and do not understand risk comprehensively. Staff do not share these plans with the children, therefore the children are unable to contribute to, understand or agree to their plans.

The majority of the children have a history of going missing from home prior to residing in this home. The high staffing levels and success in providing an environment in which the children choose to be means that the number of missing-from-home incidents is very low. When an incident does occur, the staff's responses are well coordinated, robust and effective, demonstrating a commitment to safeguarding and protecting the children in respect of this high-risk area. However, the staff are not always fully aware of particular associated risk factors and there is no system to request that placing authorities conduct a return from missing interview. As a result, few of these interviews occur and opportunities to gain a greater understanding of how to keep the children safe are potentially missed.

Staff are encouraged to use a restorative approach to behaviour management. However, they have not received training or clear guidance, which does not support the staff to provide a consistent approach. There has been success in helping most of the children to develop more socially acceptable behaviour. However, on one occasion, staff did not have the knowledge, skills and equipment to successfully support a child who has an autistic spectrum disorder, in order to prevent the escalation of highly unsafe behaviour. As a result, the child's placement ended.

Documented incidents of restraint demonstrate that physical intervention is used only when the child is presenting a risk to themselves or others. The individual records of restraints and sanctions contain appropriate information, but they do not evidence that children always receive the opportunity to reflect upon the situation. On one occasion, staff deducted a financial sanction by way of a lump sum from the child's savings. This was not in accordance with the manager's instructions and there is no evidence that the child's views were sought in respect of this.

Safe recruitment procedures are not consistently sufficiently robust to ensure that children are fully safeguarded from unsuitable people gaining employment in the home. Confirmation is gained from the staffing agency that suitability checks have taken place in respect of relief/agency staff. However, the references and criminal records checks are not consistently reviewed by the provider, nor is a full employment history clearly established. There is no record maintained to demonstrate how the employment suitability decision was reached when staff have committed an offence. References are not always verified to ensure their validity. This means that there is insufficient scrutiny of information which may have a bearing on staff's suitability.

Some maintenance improvements to the building are required in order to provide a safe environment. An unused bracket was left on a wall, presenting a risk if someone should fall or is pushed against it. An unused lighting cable has not been suitably capped off. Fire safety arrangements fail to protect children and staff effectively against

the risk of fire. During the inspection, the kitchen fire door was wedged open and a large hole in the office fire door compromised the door's effectiveness. Agency staff do not receive suitable fire safety instruction at the beginning of their shifts. These shortfalls do not promote good fire prevention and safety.

Although there are a number of areas for improvement, the children do feel safe and partner agencies have confidence in the staff team. One social worker said, 'She [child] definitely feels safe and well cared for. She shows that she does like the placement and feels safe. A family member said, 'I've been really pleased to see the type of people looking after her [child]. They take their [children's] views into account and seem very caring people.'

The provider, once aware of the shortfalls, acted on the concerns swiftly and appropriately. The provider is implementing improved monitoring and management arrangements to better promote safeguarding.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The previous registered manager left four months ago and the interim manager has recently left. As a result, the home has not experienced consistent, effective leadership for an extended period of time. The difficulties previously identified at inspection have continued and have been compounded by significant staffing changes. The home has not consistently been able to deliver the caring experience to children as set out in the statement of purpose. The newly appointed director of care has now stepped into the role of interim manager, with aspirations to improve the service. During her extremely short tenure, she has identified areas of concern and has developed an action plan to address the shortfalls.

It is difficult to measure children's individual progress because the placements are short term. All of the children receive individualised care which prioritises their needs. They are very positive about their experiences of living at the home. They like the staff and feel consulted about their care and support. One child said, 'There's a lot different staff, but they are all nice.' One family member said, 'All of the carers seem to be there because they want to be there.'

The high staffing levels enable staff to deliver responsive support and a tailored and varied programme of activities. The staff are individually caring, supportive and motivated to learn and to deliver a high-quality service to children. However, the organisation's systems for supporting staff have not been implemented consistently or effectively. As result, staff have mixed feelings about the level of support that they have received. Individual supervision arrangements are weak. One staff member referred to being 'left to it' when dealing with a complex situation. Another member of staff who has been working at the home for five months has had only one formal recorded supervision, the documentation of which was extremely poor. Staff do not receive consistently effective professional support and challenge.

Induction systems for agency staff are poor. Agency staff are not always given

information about the children's needs, how to evacuate the building safely in an emergency or who to contact with any safeguarding concerns. Most, but not all, substantive staff have completed training in safeguarding, first aid, food hygiene and preventing and managing self-harm. The staff are not trained in the home's restorative practice model of work. This does not offer children the opportunity to strengthen their community living by addressing the impact of negative behaviour. The home has provided care to a child who has an autistic spectrum disorder. However, there is no documentation to show that the staff have received training in working with children who have an autistic spectrum disorder. The staff's lack of knowledge of this child's needs undermined their ability to anticipate and intervene in order to prevent significant incidents from escalating. This was compounded by poor placement planning, contributing to this child's placement breaking down very quickly.

The home has some strained relationships with some local residents. The location risk assessment does not, however, review the potential strengths and concerns regarding local community relationships and their likely impact on children's well-being.

The home's statement of purpose is not an accurate document as it provides out-of-date information in respect of the home's management arrangements. Although the home provides a clear assessment of each child's needs at the end of their stay, other recording systems in the home are failing to clearly demonstrate the support that staff provide on a day-to-day basis. Children's case records are, on occasion, missing essential documentation; risk assessments are not always accurate; and central monitoring logs for restraint and missing-from-home incidents are not consistently completed. Such lack of clarity means that required information is sometimes missing or not easily accessible. This has an impact on the provider's ability to have effective overview of the quality of care in the home.

The promotion of equality and diversity is embedded in the service. The home has provided Polish-speaking staff to facilitate better communication with a parent. The provider has clear aspirations and plans for improvement. The provider has been responsive to issues raised during the inspection and had some understanding prior to the inspection of the decline in the home. A number of requirements and recommendations have been set and a number remain from the previous inspection. However, there are no significant failures that significantly compromise children's safety and well-being.

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 difference 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 who 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: 1226757

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Potton Homes Ltd

Registered provider address: Potton Homes, 1 Cresswell Park, Blackheath, London SE3 9RD

Responsible individual: Susan Potton

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Joanna Heller: 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
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

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