

1263120

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This is a privately owned children's home. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four children who have emotional and/or behavioural needs and/or learning disabilities.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 1 November 2018.

Children were spoken to as part of this visit.

Visit dates: 15 to 16 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 1 May 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Good

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

The quality of care provided by the staff is very nurturing and focused on the needs of the children. Children said, 'I would change absolutely nothing about my home, it's great' and 'The staff are funny, and I know I can go to them if I'm worried or unhappy.'

Relationships between the children and staff are trusting and nurturing. The children know that the staff care about them, and this makes them feel valued. One child said one member of staff put 'her arms around me and made me feel ok'.

A key strength of the home is the consultation that takes place with children about their lives and their care. Children were clear about their care plan and the plans for their futures. One child said, 'Staff do talk to me about my life and I always know what's happening next.'

During the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have been creative with activities for children. Children understand the risks that they may face during the pandemic and could clearly explain the safety measures that staff had discussed with them including the use of hand sanitisers and masks and other preventive measures put in place to protect them.

The home environment is warm and welcoming and was decorated throughout for Christmas. Children are proud of their home and talked excitedly about the activities and plans in place around the Christmas period. Throughout the pandemic, children have been supported to maintain contact with family members. This is important to children, and when face-to-face contact has not been possible due to the pandemic the staff have been proactive in looking at other ways that contact can still take place.

The registered manager has not completed a detailed compatibility risk assessment or a thorough appraisal of children's needs. The registered manager offered placements to children without clearly assessing, or planning how to address, their full range of needs or considering the impact of other children living in the home. This does not demonstrate that matching is appropriate, or placements are only provided when children's needs can be met.

Children are supported with their education placements. However, when children are not in formal education or refuse to attend school there are no clear routines or expectations around attendance and children will remain in their bedrooms until late in the afternoon. This does not consistently promote the importance of education. This was a requirement at the previous inspection and will be repeated.

Children are supported to attend planned health appointments. However, when children refuse to take their prescribed medication, which impacts on their health and well-being, the manager has not escalated this sufficiently to healthcare providers.

The safety of children

Children confirmed that they feel safe in the home and direct work sessions have been completed with children to help them understand how to keep safe when out in the community. Throughout the national lockdown, staff helped children understand why they needed to listen to government guidance and not go out of the home. Despite this work, some children still left the home. However, staff were proportionate in their responses and followed strict measures when children returned to ensure the safety of everyone.

When children are missing from home, the registered manager and staff do their utmost to ensure their prompt and safe return home. The missing from home procedures ensure that children receive an independent return home interview to allow them to talk about the reasons why they were missing and the risks that they may have been exposed to. Consequently, action can then be taken to help and protect children.

Consequences used in the home are not clear and do not consistently support the children to present with age-appropriate, positive and safe behaviour. The management team has not reviewed the effectiveness of measures used and the appropriateness. This is a missed opportunity to support children to learn from negative behaviours and understand the consequence of their actions. A requirement is made to address this shortfall.

Medication is not safely administered to children. When children take their prescribed controlled drugs on an ad hoc basis, limited action is taken to raise this with the prescribing doctor to understand the consequences of how this can impact on a child's health. In addition, when staff have not given children medication due to concerns around alcohol or drug misuse, this is not recorded appropriately. A requirement is made to address this shortfall.

Risk assessments are not sufficiently detailed to demonstrate the required actions for staff or all strategies to minimise risks to children. It is also unclear when risk management plans and missing from care plans have been updated and by whom. This does not demonstrate that documents are updated and reviewed as risks occur, to enable staff to take appropriate action to consistently keep children safe. This was a requirement at the previous inspection and will be repeated.

Leaders and managers

The registered manager has high aspirations for children and is supported by a deputy manager who is very child centred. Staff are motivated to provide a good

quality of care and improve outcomes for the children. Staff feel valued and supported by the registered manager and the deputy manager.

The registered manager does not record her review and evaluation in children's plans. This is necessary to ensure that she regularly reviews children's plans so that she can make improvements in the quality of care that the children receive. A requirement is made to address this shortfall.

Some staff have had training in relevant areas, for example child sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation, although this is not consistent across the team. One staff member confirmed he had not had training to support a child with a nut allergy. A requirement is made to address this shortfall.

The registered manager has not sent the statement of purpose to Ofsted in line with regulation. This is necessary to ensure that Ofsted has the most up-to-date information about the children's home. A requirement is made to reflect this shortfall.

Staff rosters do not record the actual hours that the registered manager works at the home. This is necessary to ensure that there is an accurate record of staff working in the children's home. A requirement is made to address this shortfall.

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
The education standard is that children make measurable progress towards achieving their educational potential and are helped to do so. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— 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; help each child to understand the importance and value of education, learning, training and employment; promote opportunities for each child to learn informally; maintain regular contact with each child's education and training provider, including engaging with the provider and	2 March 2021

the placing authority to support the child's education and training and to maximise the child's achievement. (Regulation 8 (1)(2)(a)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)) This is in relation to children's individual education plans. The registered manager needs to ensure that children attend education in line with their individual needs.	
The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. 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. (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(i)) In particular, ensure that risk assessment are sufficiently detailed and include clear strategies for staff to reduce the risks to children.	2 March 2021
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 aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. 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; ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(c)(h)) This is to ensure that all staff have the necessary training to meet children's individual needs. The registered manager needs to ensure that she develops effective monitoring and review systems to continually evaluate the care that children receive.	2 March 2021
The registered person must compile in relation to the children's home a statement ("the statement of purpose") which covers the matters listed in Schedule 1.	2 March 2021

The registered person must— keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it; and notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (1)(3))	
The registered person must make arrangements for the handling, recording, safekeeping, safe administration and disposal of medicines received in the children's home. In particular the registered person must ensure that— medicine which is prescribed for the child is administered as prescribed to the child for whom it is prescribed and no other child; and a record is kept of the administration of medicine to each child. (Regulation 23 (1)(2)(b)(c))	2 March 2021
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy ("the behaviour management policy") which sets out— how appropriate behaviour is to be promoted in the children's home; and the measures of control, discipline and restraint which may be used in relation to children in the home. The registered person must keep the behaviour management policy under review and, where appropriate, revise it. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b)(2)) This is in relation to sanctions used in the home. The registered manager needs to ensure that she reviews and evaluates all sanctions for children.	2 March 2021
The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which— include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child; are kept up to date; and are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b)(c)) The registered manager needs to ensure that staff date and sign all records in relation to children.	2 March 2021
Schedule 4 sets out the other information that the registered person must keep in relation to a children's home. The registered person must—	2 March 2021

maintain in the home the records in Schedule 4; ensure that the records are kept up to date; and retain the records or at least 15 years from the date of the last entry. (Regulation 37(1)(2)(a)(b)(c)) This is in relation to the registered manager ensuring that she records her actual hours on the staff duty roster.	
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Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1263120

Registered provider: Apex Children's Services Ltd

Registered provider address: Apex Children's Services, 6 Tower Quays, Tower Road, Birkenhead, Cheshire CH41 1BP

Responsible individual: Barry Henry

Registered manager: Jennifer Savage

Inspectors

Catherine Fargin, Social Care Inspector
Michelle Edge, Regulatory Inspection Manager

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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: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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