

1280412

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The home is operated by a private company and is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four children or young people who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and learning disabilities.

Visit dates: 3 to 4 November 2020

Previous inspection date: 27 January 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Requires improvement to be 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

Children say that they trust and like the staff who care for them. The staff team is stable, and children benefit from consistent and predictable care. This helps children feel safe and secure.

Children say that staff spend time with them and that they are offered lots of opportunities for enjoyable activities. These activities are chosen by the children and include go-karting, trampolining, assault courses and walks in national parks.

Children are regularly supported by staff to achieve in education and children value the role this plays in their lives. When children's attendance falters, staff offer incentives and further encouragement to re-establish positive routines. However, these incentives are not always reviewed and evaluated in a timely way for their efficacy.

During periods of social restriction, children are given advice and support to manage the effect this has on their lives. Staff have promoted remote learning opportunities, offered a greater range of home-based activities and ensured that children maintain contact with their families through applications that allow face-to-face video calling. These plans have been regularly adjusted in line with government advice.

Staff and managers have a thorough understanding of children's backgrounds and how these may have an effect on their behavioural and emotional presentation. Children consider that staff are fair and clear in their expectations and that staff are understanding in their approach. One child said, 'If you do something wrong they talk to you about it, but they don't hold grudges, everything is then okay. They don't hold anything against you. My key worker is the best.'

Children have access to specialist support, including child and adolescent mental health services and other therapeutic input. These specialist services, combined with the consistent approach from staff, ensure that those children continue to make progress with their emotional and behavioral development.

The safety of children

Children spoken to say they feel safe at the home. They are able to identify staff they can talk to about any worries or concerns they might have.

Managers work with local authorities in evaluating children's placements and act appropriately when it is considered that children's risks are increasing. Staff respond appropriately to incidents of missing from home and liaise with other agencies to ensure children's safe return.

There have not been any complaints, allegations or physical interventions since April 2020. The use of sanctions is low as staff and managers take a restorative and educative approach to changing children's behaviour. Children feel that staff are fair in their approach and the rules are 'simple'.

Children are given a warm welcome when they join the home, which enables them to quickly settle into the routines and care that are offered. On the whole, risks are identified, understood and managed effectively. However, assessments that identify the impact that children may have on each other, when new placements occur, are limited in their scope.

Staff responses to incidents seek to limit the effects that some behaviours may have on the safety and welfare of other children. However, the practice of locking internal doors at night to prevent reoccurrence or ensure the safety of the building has not been reviewed or revised.

Leaders and managers

There is a suitably qualified and experienced manager in post. He registered to manage the home in May 2020. The manager was not available on site for this visit and the visit was supported by the deputy manager. The deputy was both knowledgeable and informed about all the children's plans, interests, personalities and backgrounds.

Staff receive regular supervision from managers and this is clearly recorded. However, supervision records do not evidence reflective practice as recommended in the previous inspection.

Social work professionals are complimentary about the home and say that staff offer consistent and nurturing care. Alongside regular supervision, staff benefit from annual appraisals and training in a wide variety of areas. However, not all staff have completed training in the misuse of drugs, which features as an aspect of risk for some young people.

Managers have responded positively to the requirements made at the last inspection.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'. The registered person must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The registered person must ensure that— children can access all appropriate areas of the children's home's premises; and	30/11/2020

any limitation placed on a child's privacy or access to any area of the home's premises— is intended to safeguard each child accommodated in the home; is necessary and proportionate; is kept under review and, if necessary revised; and allows children as much freedom as possible when balanced against the needs to protect and keep them safe. (Regulation 21 (b)(c)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv))	
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, the registered person should only accept placements for children where they have fully considered the effect that the placement will have on the existing group of children.	30/11/2020

Recommendations

- Ensure that staff supervision allows them to reflect on their practice and the needs of the children assigned to their care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 28, paragraph 5.15)
- Staff should understand factors that affect children's motivation to behave in a socially acceptable way. Staff should encourage an enthusiasm for positive behaviour through the use of positive behaviour strategies in line with the child's relevant plans. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.13)

In particular, ensure that incentives are regularly reviewed and updated for their efficacy.

- The registered person should ensure that staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.11)

In particular, ensure that completion of training reflects the predominant risks identified for each child.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1280412

Registered provider: Apex Children's Services Limited

Registered provider address: 6 Tower Quays, Tower Road, Birkenhead, Cheshire CH41 1BP

Responsible individual: Barry Henry

Registered manager: Adam Ruse

Inspector

Pauline Yates, Social Care Inspector

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