

2495375

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This is a privately owned children's home. The home provides care and accommodation for up to nine children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

A new manager has been in post since August 2020 and her application for registration has recently been received by Ofsted.

Visit dates: 29 to 30 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 12 December 2019

Previous inspection judgement: improved effectiveness

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 have positive relationships with staff members, even when they are only admitted for a short stay. Simple routines have helped to develop these relationships, for example, by preparing food together and sitting down to eat with staff as a family. The leaders and managers know the children well and support the team to think about trauma-informed practice within team meetings.

Important and challenging issues have been discussed during mealtimes. These routines have provided opportunities for children to meet and share views on real-life events, such as the Black Lives Matter marches and the impact of COVID-19.

Children have been supported to maintain contact with their family, friends and social workers throughout lockdown and this remains the case as the pandemic continues. The home has worked within the government health guidelines and agreed with staff and young people how to keep everyone safe. The provider purchased an additional laptop during lockdown to ensure children could maintain virtual contact with their families, friends and social workers.

Children are encouraged to participate in weekly children's meetings and they help to choose activities and plan menus for the week ahead. There is good attendance by children, with one incentive of being at the meetings a takeaway meal with staff. Children can also book slots to attend the staff team meetings to raise important issues if they wish.

Regular activities are organised for children, often including children who have returned home to their families. During lockdown a gym room was set up at the home following a request from children.

A strong focus on education ensures most children attend their specific school or college. Simple structures, such as not allowing the television on until after 4pm (on school days) and ensuring children are engaged in educational activities, support this ethos. Where children are not attending as required, staff take prompt actions to ensure that children re-engage with their learning.

The safety of children

Children are being kept safe by positive staff actions, support and engagement. Risk assessments are thorough, simple to understand and give staff clear strategies to respond appropriately to the challenges that children's risky behaviour may present.

The manager and staff have a good understanding of how to respond to child protection matters and wider safeguarding issues. The designated officer for the local authority confirmed that appropriate and prompt referrals and actions are taken following any child protection/safeguarding incidents. The manager has made good links with the local police team, who are planning to come to talk to children at the home about risks in the community.

The manager and staff team have a positive approach and response to managing complex needs and risk-taking behaviours. This was seen in the signs of safety plans and daily management plans, which are developed and agreed with children.

Key-work sessions are based on relevant issues for individual children, such as the risk of criminal or sexual exploitation. Staff ensure these sessions take place, even if they are done virtually with children who may be away from the home. Following key-work sessions, staff write a carefully worded letter to children with a summary of what they have talked about and what they have agreed.

The home recruited two additional workers who have been available throughout lockdown and the ongoing pandemic to give children 1:1 support for everyday living skills and art therapy. Art therapy has also included some group sessions and has helped children to think about their anxieties about COVID-19.

All child protection, safeguarding and missing from home incidents are carefully reported and recorded. The home creates 'staying close' plans for children, to support them in a safe place. This approach has often supported children to continue living in their own community, living at their family home and having regular overnight stays at the home.

Leaders and managers

Staff interviewed said the staff are more of a team and better resourced than previously and are working well together. The manager is checking in with everyone in the team and is setting up regular supervisions, which have made staff feel more settled. Staff were involved in the interview process for the new manager and they welcomed and felt valued by being given this opportunity.

Staff said they have had good access to training throughout lockdown, except for restraint training which involves physical touching and holding. The provider is starting an academy for staff which will have mandatory training and also further courses for psychotherapy.

There is clear guidance from leaders and managers about COVID-19 government guidelines to ensure that children, staff and visitors to the home are kept as safe as possible.

Throughout lockdown admissions to the home have mainly been emergency or short-term placements. This included the admission of children under some short-break arrangements to support children to remain within their family home. Some children have edge of care workers supporting them to try and remain at home and within their own communities during this difficult time.

The staff team works closely in partnership with the virtual school, the edge of care team, the children and adolescent mental health services, and many others to ensure children's needs are consistently met.

In general, there is good oversight of records by the manager and also monthly audits of children's files. External monitoring of the home is regular and is helping the service to improve. Internal monitoring of the quality of care provides details of areas for improvement. However, it does not yet take into account the views of children, parents or external care professionals.

One requirement was made at the last full inspection in December 2019. This was in relation to children receiving regular dental checks. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, dental checks have not been taking place, hence this requirement is repeated.

The home's statement of purpose is a helpful document, however, it requires updating to reflect new staff and new 'Working together to safeguard children' updates.

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 health and well-being standard is that— the health and well-being needs of children are met; children receive advice, services and support in relation to their health and well-being. (Regulation 10 (1)(a)(b)) In particular, ensure that children attend their dental appointments.	01/04/2021
In order to complete a quality of care review the registered person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating— the feedback and opinions of children about the children's home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it. (Regulation 45 (2)(b)) In particular, ensure that children's feedback informs the quality of care review.	01/04/2021

Recommendations

- Ensure that the provider keeps under review the home's statement of purpose. (Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards, page 14, paragraph 3.5)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 2495375

Registered provider: St Christopher's Fellowship

Registered provider address: 1 Putney High Street, Wandsworth, London SW15 1SZ

Responsible individual: Philip Townsend

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Christine Kennet, Social Care Inspector

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