

2525774

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This is a privately operated children's home which is registered for up to four children or young people who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since May 2020.

Visit dates: 6 to 7 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 24 September 2019

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

Young people have good relationships with staff and feel comfortable talking to them about their worries and feelings. About one young person, a family member said: 'Moving to the home has changed his life. He has turned a corner, and he is a different person.'

Young people have found the COVID-19 restrictions difficult, particularly when time with their families has been affected. Staff have been creative in relation to enabling contact with family and friends. Staff have learned how to use technology and have promoted social distancing when necessary to support young people.

Young people's views are central to the decisions made in the home. Staff encourage young people to express their true opinions and develop their own identity. One independent reviewing officer said, 'They fully accept [name of young person] and as a result he is starting to accept himself.'

Throughout the period of COVID-19, plans have been put in place to ensure that young people's needs are met. Bikes have been purchased for all young people. A virtual appointment took place with a nutritionist. As a result, the young people have remained fit and healthy.

Staff understand that young people are finding this period increasingly difficult. The staff spend quality time with young people and plan activities to keep them focused. Young people have enjoyed activities which have included going go-karting and trampolining together. As a result, peer relationships have improved.

Young people have been supported to continue with their education. One young person has a tutor coming to the home to support their transition to a mainstream school. This is huge progress for him and has built his self-esteem. The manager has worked with the virtual school to ensure that appropriate school placements are found.

The home works closely with a clinical psychologist. A referral has been made to seek mental health support for one young person who has struggled more during in this period. Overall, young people's risk-taking behaviours have reduced since moving to the home.

The safety of children

Staff understand young people's risks. The staff communicate well with each other and notice when young people need more support. Young people are encouraged to talk about their feelings or write them down. As a result, young people's self-injurious behaviours have reduced since moving into the home.

During the pandemic, there has been one occasion when a young person appeared to be trying to seriously hurt themselves. Staff were able to react and the young person was not injured. Plans were put in place to remove risk and monitor the

young person through the night. Although the young person was taken to hospital there was a delay in this happening.

In response to the incident, staff were able to reflect on their own practice and debrief with the manager. Risk management plans relating to self-injury and ligatures were updated, but lack clear, practical steps for staff to take. Actions identified in the young person's mental health assessment were not included in the risk assessment in the home.

Admissions to the home have been planned. The impact of a new young person moving in was well considered and discussed as a team. For one young person, negative influences from peers in the area have led to a decision by the manager to serve notice to end the placement. The placing authority agreed with this decision.

Young people's risk-taking behaviours have reduced since moving into the home. One young person who was previously involved in knife crime has changed their behaviour. An independent reviewing officer said: '[Name of young person] has commented on not even feeling like the same person any more. The home has put in place routines, boundaries, consistency and emotional space and complete acceptance of him.'

No complaints have been made. Restraint has only been used when absolutely necessary and is appropriate. Consequences implemented are reviewed by the manager and have been effective in changing behaviour.

Leaders and managers

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since May 2020. He has made several improvements to the home and has met all but one of the previous requirements and recommendations. Due to being newly registered, he has been supported by an experienced manager and the responsible individual.

The staff team has remained stable throughout the pandemic. Managers and staff have remained up to date about the changes to restrictions in place due to COVID-19. Staff have taken steps to help prevent the spread of the virus including using hand sanitiser and limiting visitors to the home.

Reflective supervisions, team meetings and appraisals have all continued to take place. Staff appreciate the time the manager spends with them to increase their skills and knowledge. As a result, staff say they feel supported and enjoy their roles.

The manager has good oversight of the home and knows the young people very well. However, records lack analysis and evaluation by the manager. This is a missed opportunity to evidence thought processes around any changes made and lessons learned.

The manager has appropriately challenged others when necessary. An example relates to an incomplete external assessment about whether a young person could

return to his family. Historical information had been used which did not appropriately reflect the progress he had made. As a result of this challenge, the assessment is being started again.

Independent visits take place monthly. Information is recorded about the plans in place to keep young people safe and promote well-being. However, the visitor has not clearly recorded their opinion whether children are effectively safeguarded, and that the conduct of the home promotes children's well-being.

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, the 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 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; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and 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. (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(i)(v)(vi)(b))	30/11/2020

In particular, ensure that risk assessments provide clear steps for staff to take in the event of threats of self-harm or attempts of suicide, and that staff adhere to them. Ensure that risk assessments include seeking medical attention if necessary.	
The independent person must produce a report about a visit ("the independent person's report") which sets out, in particular, the independent person's opinion as to whether— children are effectively safeguarded; and the conduct of the home promotes children's well-being. (Regulation 44 (4)(a)(b))	30/11/2020

Recommendations

- The registered person should actively seek independent scrutiny of the home and make best use of information from independent and internal monitoring (including under regulations 44 and 45) to ensure continuous improvement. They should be skilled in anticipating difficulties and reviewing incidents, such as learning from disruptions and placement breakdowns. They are responsible for proactively implementing lessons learned and sustaining good practice. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 55, paragraph 10.24)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 2525774

Registered provider: Stepping Stones Children's Homes Limited

Registered provider address: 34 Church Street, Hyde, Cheshire SK14 1JJ

Responsible individual: Ahtesham-UI Haque

Registered manager: Douglas Loney

Inspectors

Sylvia Eboigbe, Social Care Inspector

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