

2547837

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This home is owned by a private company. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to three children aged between eight and 17 years on admission who have social and emotional difficulties.

The registered manager is currently on maternity leave. The interim manager has applied to register as the home's manager in the registered manager's absence. The interim manager is working towards her Level 5 qualification.

Visit dates: 6 to 7 October 2020

Previous inspection date: Not previously inspected

Previous inspection judgement: Not previously inspected

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 and young people say that they like living here. They talk positively about their relationships with staff. They recognise that staff are there to help and support them. One young person described the staff as their 'care family'.

Children and young people make good progress living here. They receive help to understand their needs and how to meet these. As a result, risk-taking behaviours reduce considerably.

Children and young people access education and they see the benefits of this. They can identify their future goals and how they intend to achieve these. One young person accessed extra education during the lockdown, which they enjoyed. Furthermore, additional tuition is available to support children and young people's education.

Children and young people have had continuous specialist support during the lockdown period. Children and young people speak highly of the support that they have received. They can see how this has helped with their emotional health and well-being.

Children and young people understand the challenges and implications of the pandemic. They are clear that they need to make choices that keep them safe, while also still being able to see their family and friends.

Staff support children and young people to keep to good routines. Children and young people have also accessed various activities. This has been in the home, locally and in neighbouring areas. They have also had encouragement to continue with their hobbies and interests. Children and young people have enjoyed their activities.

The safety of children

Staff support children and young people to feel safe. They offer a warm and trusting environment. Children and young people benefit from a nurturing and consistent approach. As a result, children and young people's risk-taking and challenging behaviours reduce.

Incidents are minimal and when they do occur, staff manage these well. Staff encourage children and young people to explore their experiences and emotions.

However, staff are not always consistent in exploring children and young people's underlying thoughts and feelings and the impact these have on their choices and behaviours.

Staff are not risk averse. Instead, they take an informed and measured approach to risk-taking behaviour. This allows the children and young people to take age-appropriate risks with the required safety strategies in place. This helps them increase their independence. It empowers them to take responsibility for themselves and their safety.

An independent reviewing officer said, '[Name of child] has some behaviours which have caused concerns in the past. The staff have been able to address these behaviours in a balanced way by promoting [name of child]'s independence but also ensuring they are safe.'

Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Staff are solution focused and manage safeguarding concerns in a timely way and effectively. They work within policies and procedures to keep children safe.

Children and young people receive the help they need to address their holistic needs. However, when children smoke tobacco, staff do not have a clear assessment and plan in place to reduce this risk-taking behaviour. Staff take some steps to manage this behaviour, but these are not robust enough.

Leaders and managers

Managers lead by example. They ensure that the children and young people have a positive experience living here.

Managers and staff are passionate and committed. Children and young people are at the centre of the home. There is a good ethos in the home, which promotes good outcomes for children.

Managers and staff have followed national COVID-19 guidance. Safety measures have been clear, and everyone has adhered to these. Managers have been reflective regarding these measures and have reviewed and revised them as required.

Staff have felt supported and valued throughout the pandemic. They benefit from regular supervision and the day-to-day support has been good and effective.

Records vary. Some recording is to a good standard. However, there are areas that need improving. In these instances, records are ambiguous and unhelpful for the child or young person.

Staff receive effective training that enhances their practice. However, staff do not always get the training that would help them to understand children and young people's specific needs and interests.

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

Recommendations

- The importance of understanding who we are and where we come from is recognised in good social work practice, for example through undertaking life story work or other direct work. Staff in children's homes should play a full role in work of this kind. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards' page 16, paragraph 3.14) In particular, staff should develop their knowledge and skills to support children and young people when they are exploring their experiences and emotions, through discussions and key-work sessions.
- Children's homes staff should encourage children to take a proactive role in looking after their day-to-day health and well-being. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards, page 34, paragraph 7.10) In particular, children and young people should be continually supported and encouraged to stop smoking tobacco and helped to understand the impact that this has on their physical health.
- The registered person should ensure that staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs, and that the training available meets the needs of the children in their care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards' page 53, paragraph 10.11)
- Staff should be familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective, and clear recording. Staff should record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.5)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 2547837

Registered provider: After Care Nw Limited

Registered provider address: 45 Kensington Road, Southport, Lancashire PR9 0RT

Responsible individual: Timothy Blundell

Registered manager: Antonia Johnson

Inspector

Lisa Gregoire-Parker, Social Care Inspector

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