

2548571

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This home was previously owned by the local authority. It was re-registered in October 2019 when the local authority moved to be a holding company. It is registered for up to four children who have learning disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder.

The manager registered with Ofsted in October 2019 is working towards a level 5 diploma in leadership and management.

Visit dates: 22 to 23 September 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 identified the following serious concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit:

- The registered manager has failed to ensure that safeguarding procedures are followed when children report concerns about their care.
- There has been a failure to ensure that safe recruitment procedures are followed.

The care of children

Children have experienced interruption in their care following an outbreak of COVID-19 in the home. Despite significant efforts to minimise this impact, the result of most of the staff having to self-isolate has left children being cared for by less familiar staff. The unfamiliar staff have not maintained records relating to children's care. Consequently, children's lived experiences during a period of change are not formally captured.

Children have benefited from speaking to their families by using online technology. When it has become safe, staff have been quick in enabling children to physically see their families. Despite it being known that one child finds it difficult returning to the home after a family visit, managers and staff have not worked in partnership with the family and child to use agreed strategies to help reduce his anxiety. As a result, each family visit results in the child returning home distressed.

Despite the many restrictions due to COVID-19, the staff have been creative in helping children to experience new and exciting activities. For example, staff have worked with the local school to enable the children to access the school's playing field during lockdown. This has enabled the children to participate in a variety of fun activities, such as holding their own sports day. These events have given children positive memories of their summer.

The safety of children

Managers have not ensured that careful selection and vetting processes are followed for every new starter. Consequently, some staff recruitment records are missing references, fail to include accurate employment history and do not show that verification has been sought for the reason why the person has previously left a position where they have worked with children and/or vulnerable adults. This lack of oversight creates a risk to children's safety.

Children are assisted to develop socially acceptable behaviour. When sanctions are used, the oversight of these measures of control is weak. This means that the manager and staff are unclear whether the measures used are effective and appropriate. This creates a missed opportunity for staff to fully support children to change their behaviour.

Leaders and managers

The registered manager's six-month review of care has failed to consider the views of children. This creates a missed opportunity for children to contribute to the evaluation of the quality of care.

The registered manager has failed to follow procedures when significant events relating to the protection of children occur. Instead of making a referral to the designated officer the manager has first carried out her own investigation. This failure to follow the right process has compromised the effectiveness of external oversight.

Managers have made some improvements following a monitoring visit. As a result, children's bathrooms no longer have a strong unpleasant smell, staff are no longer routinely locking internal doors and staff are now receiving training to improve their knowledge and skills.

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
In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(v)(vii))	29/10/2020
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	29/10/2020

promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(h)) This refers to the senior leadership team ensuring that effective monitoring systems are in place.	
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home. (Regulation 14 (1)(a))	29/10/2020
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The requirements are that— full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1)(3)(d)) *	14/11/2020
The registered person must ensure that— within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a child in the home, a record is made which includes— the name of the child; details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of the measure; the date, time and location of the use of the measure; a description of the measure and its duration; details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure;	29/10/2020

the name of the person who used the measure ("the user"), and of any other person present when the measure was used; the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and a description of any injury to the child or any other person, and any medical treatment administered, as a result of the measure; within 48 hours of the use of the measure, the registered person, or a person who is authorised by the registered person to do so ("the authorised person")— has spoken to the user about the measure; and has signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35 (3)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(viii)(b)(i)(ii)(c)) This is refers how sanctions are given to children.	
The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children ("a quality of care review") at least once every 6 months. 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 (1)(2)(b))	29/10/2020

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- 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 14.4).

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 2548571

Registered provider: Worcestershire Children First

Registered provider address: Worcestershire Children First, County Hall Campus, Spetchley Road, Worcester, Worcestershire WR5 2NP

Responsible individual: Adam Johnston

Registered manager: Nina Kersho

Inspector

Louise Battersby, Social Care Inspector

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