

2561501

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This is a privately owned children's home. The home's statement of purpose states that the home cares for up to four children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The home was registered by Ofsted in April 2020.

The home does not currently have a registered manager. The previous registered manager resigned from the post in July 2020.

Visit dates: 2 to 3 December 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 spoken with report that they feel happy at the home. They get on well with most staff members. They like their rooms and the food that is available. A child said, 'I feel good. Staff are really supportive and kind.'

Children report having good relationships with staff. However, recently some staff have resigned at short notice. Children who had developed good relationships with these members of staff suffered instability. The changes created some distrust about the reasons staff were leaving at short notice.

Children understand how to complain. They say they trust the manager and can share their concerns. Staff manage complaints effectively, ensuring that children's views are heard and their concerns addressed. One complaint from a parent was responded to and managed appropriately.

Children are supported to attend education and to access virtual education. Children reported engaging in fun activities over the summer period.

Professionals state that children are made to feel welcome when they arrive at the home. Children are supported exceptionally well with their identity and diversity needs. One child reported feeling accepted for who they were. The social worker stated, 'The home tries to create a family environment for children.'

The staff have supported children in understanding the changing guidance in relation to the pandemic. The staff ensure that they allow visitors to the home in line with the government guidelines. Children continue to be supported to access specialist support virtually during the pandemic.

Key-work sessions are specific and targeted to children's needs. Children are encouraged to develop new skills and coping mechanisms and are supported in keeping safe.

The safety of children

Children and young people say they feel safe living at the home.

There is one recorded incident where physical restraint was used. The restraint record did not contain accurate dates and was not overseen or signed by the manager. Any allegations against staff are appropriately referred to the local authority designating officer to be investigated. This ensures that children feel listened to and that correct processes are followed.

Although there is an extremely high level of incidents of children going missing from the home, staff do all they can to keep children safe. Staff regularly keep in contact with children when they are missing and debrief children when they return. However, staff do not routinely challenge safeguarding partners when return home interviews are not offered to children.

There have been several serious incidents since the home opened in April 2020, which have been managed appropriately. However, incidents requiring emergency services, threats of harm to a child and one allegation of abuse were not reported to Ofsted.

Children's health needs are met. Children are supported to attend their health appointments. Medication is administered and recorded effectively.

The recruitment of staff is not always in line with safe recruitment procedures. Shortfalls were found in relation to recruitment of permanent and agency staff. Leaders and managers could not evidence recruitment records effectively.

New starters have not received core safeguarding training to enable them to work safely with vulnerable children. The ongoing pandemic has had an impact on training delivery as there have been limited opportunities to have face-to-face training. However, online training has not been used effectively to skill staff in working with children.

Not all staff are trained in restraint and the staff rota included new staff members on duty together who had not had restraint or safeguarding training. Some staff do not demonstrate a good understanding of what action to take if a child makes an allegation against a senior member of staff. This does not help to keep children safe.

The physical environment is clean and safe. Children are supported to stay safe during the pandemic. When children need to self-isolate, this is facilitated in a way that keeps staff and children safe.

Leaders and managers

The leadership and management of the home is not effective. The registered manager left the service a few months after the home was registered with Ofsted. One of the deputies has recently been appointed as the home's interim manager.

Managers were unable to produce a quality of care review report as required by regulation. The failure to do so is a missed opportunity to review the quality of the service overall and to make any necessary improvements.

Managers and staff receive supervision. However, the frequency of supervision is not in line with the home's statement of purpose. New staff members do not receive supervision every two weeks, and the manager has only had one supervision session in almost three months of working in the home.

The home currently employs one permanent staff member and relies heavily on temporary staff such as agency and bank staff. Agency staff demonstrated a good understanding of the children's needs. They report that they enjoy working with children and would welcome working permanently.

Children ordinarily benefit from staff's close working relationships with other professionals. However, the change of information recording systems and recent staff instability has impacted negatively on communication with professionals.

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 registered provider must appoint a person to manage the children's home if— there is no registered manager in respect of the home; and the registered provider— - is an organisation or a partnership; - does not satisfy regulation 28; or - is not, or does not intend to be, in day-to-day charge of the home. If the registered provider appoints a person to manage the home, the registered provider must, without delay, give HMCI notice of— - the name of the person so appointed; and - the date on which the appointment takes effect. (Regulation 27 (1)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iii) (2)(a)(b))	4 March 2021
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation; an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious; there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there;	4 March 2021

a child protection enquiry involving a child — is instigated; or concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(i)(ii)(e))	
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; 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	4 March 2021

measure. (Regulation 35 (3)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(viii)(b)(i)(ii)(c))	
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The registered person may only— - employ an individual to work at the children's home; or - if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). The requirements are that— - the individual is of integrity and good character; - the individual has the appropriate experience, qualification and skills for the work that the individual is to perform; - the individual is mentally and physically fit for the purposes of the work that the individual is to perform; and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1) (2)(a)(b) (3)(a)(b)(c)(d)) Specifically, this relates to demonstrating safe recruitment of all staff and maintaining satisfactory information relating to staff files.	4 March 2021
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 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)(b)) This in particular relates to ensuring that the staff rota includes a member of staff who is trained in restraint.	4 March 2021
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—	4 March 2021

that staff— have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; 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 are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(iii)(v)(vi)(vii)) In particular, this refers to new staff receiving core safeguarding training and for all staff to be effective in reporting allegations in line with the home's child protection policies.	
The registered person must ensure that the employment of any person on a temporary basis at the children's home does not prevent children from receiving such continuity of care as is reasonable to meet their needs. (Regulation 31 (1)) This relates specifically to the routine use of temporary staff to staff the children's home. This does not allow children the stability to develop relationships and have planned endings when temporary staff leave at short notice.	4 March 2021
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 promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a))	4 March 2021

In particular, that the registered person ensures that staff receive supervision and training in line with the home's statement of purpose.	
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 quality of care provided for children; the feedback and opinions of children about the children's home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it; and any actions that the registered person considers necessary in order to improve or maintain the quality of care provided for children. After completing a quality of care review, the registered person must produce a written report about the quality of care review and the actions which the registered person intends to take as a result of the quality of care review ("the quality of care review report"). The registered person must— supply to HMCI a copy of the quality of care review report within 28 days of the date on which the quality of care review is completed; and make a copy of the quality of care review report available on request to a placing authority, if the placing authority is not the parent of a child accommodated in the home. The system referred to in paragraph (2) must provide for ascertaining and considering the opinions of children, their parents, placing authorities and staff. (Regulation 45 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c) (3) (4)(a)(b) (5))	4 March 2021

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that no more than half the staff on duty at any one time, by day or night at the home should be from an external agency. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.17)

- Ensure that when a child returns to the home after being missing from care or away from the home without permission, the responsible local authority must provide an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. Homes should take account of information provided by such interviews when assessing risks and putting arrangements in place to protect each child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 2561501

Registered provider: Smartcare Services

Registered provider address: 10 Watermark Way, Foxholes Business Park, Hertford, Hertfordshire SG13 7TZ

Responsible individual: Gamila Higgins

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Jayshree Pillay, Social Care Inspector

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