

2569358

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The children's home is operated and managed by a private provider. The home provides care and accommodation for up to three children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The manager has been in post since the home registered in May 2020.

Ofsted issued a restriction notice following this visit, which restricts the accommodation of children being admitted to the home.

Visit dates: 13 to 14 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 identified the following serious and widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit:

- Children's risk-taking behaviours are not fully recognised or responded to by staff. This means that children are not sufficiently helped and protected.
- Children's complaints about their care and experiences are not taken seriously by leaders and managers.
- Leaders and managers do not take effective action to safeguard children when they make allegations against staff.
- Children's records demonstrate that unsafe practice is taking place in the home.
- Leaders and managers do not monitor staff practice. This has led to serious and widespread failings being identified during this visit.

The care of children

There are serious and widespread concerns in several areas of practice relating to the care and protection of the children. Children's care plans and risk assessments are poor. They do not have sufficient information about the children's individual needs and risks. This results in staff providing the children with inconsistent care.

Staff do not support the children to help them understand their risk-taking behaviours. Staff do not help the children to develop strategies that aim to reduce or eradicate these behaviours. Key-working sessions are poorly planned and are reactive following incidents. A lack of planning in this area means that children's risks do not sufficiently reduce to help them make progress.

Staff have ensured that family time has continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, following government guidance. This has been either face-to-face or virtual contact with people who are important to them. This supports the children's well-being and their sense of identity.

The children enjoy spending time with staff doing the activities that they like. Outings are well planned to ensure that appropriate staffing levels can accommodate a range of activities out in the community. This promotes opportunities for the children to have fun, enjoy themselves and socialise.

The safety of children

Children are not adequately safeguarded. Staff do not identify the link between missing-from-home incidents and the increased risk of exploitation or criminalisation. Children who return from missing-from-home episodes are not always offered the opportunity to speak with someone independent of the home. This limits the opportunity to learn from the children's experiences about the risks they face, or how to reduce the risk.

When children make allegations against staff, the managers do not follow safeguarding procedures, which leaves children at risk of harm. Some children report that staff do not help them to understand what happens next when they have shared a concern. This leaves the children feeling worried and confused.

Despite training in safeguarding, staff have failed to recognise and respond to the children's risk-taking behaviours effectively. The manager has not identified this as a shortfall, which has resulted in the children being harmed or being at risk of harm.

Children sometimes need physical intervention when they are in crisis and need support to manage their feelings. However, staff are not trained in all the techniques that they use. Records completed following physical interventions have contradictions and inaccuracies. Debriefs with the children following physical interventions are poor or in some cases have not happened at all. These issues expose children to a risk of harm.

Leaders and managers

Management oversight of the home is ineffective. The manager registered with Ofsted in May 2020. She understands that the knowledge required to successfully fulfil the role is an area for her development. She has established a support network of professionals to assist her with this.

There are discrepancies throughout the recordings in the children's documents. Records often contradict one another. Some recordings are not factually correct, and can therefore be misleading. This means that for some children, their records have inaccurate information about their lives and this prevents them from fully understanding their experiences of living in the home.

The manager provides her staff team with supervision to discuss their practice and development. However, the manager does not sufficiently scrutinise the practice of staff. For example, when staff use sanctions to help children learn that there are consequences for their actions, the manager does not evaluate the effectiveness of this practice. This demonstrates a lack of oversight of the quality of care that children receive.

The manager has been ineffective in ensuring that staff fulfil all their roles and responsibilities, as set out in the home's statement of purpose. Ineffective monitoring of care plans and risk assessments has meant that the children are unable to see the areas where they are making progress. Additionally, where the children are not making progress there has been a lack of management oversight to address shortfalls.

Not all serious incidents are reported to Ofsted. This means that there has been no regulatory oversight to ensure that staff and leaders take appropriate steps to safeguard children.

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 quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children; use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that staff— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose; help each child to understand and manage the impact of any experience of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 6 (1)(2)(b)(i)(v))*	22/11/2020
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; help each child to understand how to keep safe; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm;	22/11/2020

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; are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies; 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)(ii)(iii)(v)(vi)(vii)(b))*	
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; ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate; ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home; demonstrate that practice in the home is informed and improved by taking into account and acting on— feedback on the experiences of children, including complaints received; use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home.	22/11/2020

(Regulation 13 (1)(2)(a)(b)(c)(f)(g)(ii)(h))*	
If the registered provider is an individual, the individual must undertake such continuing professional development as is necessary to ensure that the individual has the skills needed for carrying on the children's home. If the registered provider is a partnership, the partnership must ensure that one of the partners undertakes such continuing professional development as is necessary to ensure that the partner has the skills needed for carrying on the home. (Regulation 29 (1)(3))	22/11/2020
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy ("the missing child policy") setting out— the steps taken, and to be taken, to prevent children from being absent without permission; and the procedures to be followed, and the roles and responsibilities of persons working at the home, in relation to a child who is, or has been, so absent. Before implementing, or making an amendment which the registered person considers to be substantive to, the missing child policy, the registered person must— have regard to any relevant local authority or police protocols on missing children. (Regulation 34 (4)(5)(b)) In particular, that children have an opportunity to speak with someone independent of the home on their return from episodes of going missing.	22/11/2020
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;	22/11/2020

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 measure. (Regulation 35 (3))	
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; 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.	22/11/2020

A notification made under this regulation— must include details of— the matter; the other persons, bodies or organisations (if any) who or which have been notified; and any actions taken by the registered person as a result of the matter; must be made or confirmed in writing. (Regulation 40 (4)(5))	
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*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- 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)
- Supervision of staff practice should ensure that individual adults in the home are engaged in the safeguarding culture of the home so they understand what they would need to do if they found other staff misusing or abusing their position to the detriment of the safety of a child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 43, paragraph 9.14)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 2569358

Registered provider: HMO NE Ltd

Responsible individual: Neville Rodgers

Registered manager: Karen Hudson

Inspectors

Jacqueline Tate, Social Care Inspector
Paula Kelly, Social Care Inspector

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