

SC011972

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This privately operated home is registered to provide care for up to six young people. Currently, only boys are accommodated. The home specialises in caring for young people who have experienced trauma in their lives and may exhibit some behavioural difficulties.

The manager registered with Ofsted on 29 November 2011.

Visit dates: 3 to 4 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 19 November 2019

Previous inspection judgement: 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

Children are doing well at the home. They benefit from being cared for by a core staff team that knows their needs, aspirations and vulnerabilities. The impact of COVID-19 has been minimised by the well-thought-through support they have received during the pandemic.

Children have been kept busy and active during lockdown. Staff make considerable efforts to ensure that they have been able to take part in interesting and enriching activities while keeping within the constraints of national guidance. Staff use opportunities to educate children and raise their awareness of others in their community. For example, they donate food to a local food bank and learn that some people may be having a difficult time, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A significant strength of the home is how education is promoted. Children benefit from support with their learning. Children have maintained excellent levels of attendance at their schools. Teachers speak very positively about the communication and sensitive support which staff provide. This approach has enabled children to benefit from continuity and stability in an important part of their lives.

Children receive regular therapy which helps them to reflect on their pasts, their behaviours and coping strategies. Additionally, staff know the children in their care well and understand their individual plans and how to support them if they are worried or upset. Their knowledge and understanding are underpinned by strong, caring relationships which help the children to feel safe and secure.

Children's views are promoted and valued. They have numerous opportunities to voice their opinions and can influence their day-to-day lives, especially when making choices and decisions in areas such as activities, décor and menus.

Children have been supported to maintain contact with their families during COVID-19. While physical contact has been restricted, they have been able to stay in touch with their families with the use of technology. Staff are very aware of the emotional impact of restrictions and have helped the children to understand why these measures have been imposed. Once visits and face-to-face contact were allowed again, staff have made sure that visits have been reintroduced.

The safety of children

Each child's individual character is known and understood. As a result, behaviour support is tailored to their own specific needs and characteristics. Consequently, children make significant progress, especially in areas such as self-regulation, coping with frustration and understanding others' points of view. Tolerance is promoted and

valued. This has led to a marked reduction in incidents and a feeling of pride in the children in how they have learned new skills and self-control.

The use of physical restraint is proportionate. Managers review incidents promptly to ensure that practice is safe and that the children's views are sought. Members of staff ensure that they reflect with the children and each other after physical restraint has been used so that the event is seen as a learning opportunity for all concerned.

On occasion, sanctions are imposed. While these are proportionate and fair, the staff are inconsistent in recording these in a timely manner. This can delay monitoring of their effectiveness by managers within the timescales required under regulation.

Staff know what to do and who to inform if they have any concerns about a child's well-being. External professionals, including safeguarding staff and social workers, are confident that the staff report issues appropriately and in a timely manner.

Use of the internet is closely monitored to ensure that children are kept safe and educated about the risks of the cyber world. This approach considers the young ages of the children and their vulnerabilities. On one occasion, a child newly admitted was able to bring a laptop into the home which already contained inappropriate content. Members of staff did not check the device and consequently he was able to view this content until a member of staff noticed it. There has been ongoing support and reflection with the child as a result of this incident. The content has been deleted and the child's social worker has been informed. Managers have reflected on the learning of this incident and are introducing checks on any new technology brought into the home from now on.

Leaders and managers

The home has had four managers in 12 months. However, the return of the registered manager has provided stability to the staff team. Despite this period of change, a core group of staff has remained focused in providing nurturing care to the children. This has in turn given children the stability they need to make significant progress.

At the last inspection, a requirement was made in relation to ensuring that all members of staff, including bank and agency staff, receive regular supervision. Due to the changes in management and attempting to minimise footfall in the home because of the impact of COVID-19, this has not been fully addressed. Other members of staff report good levels of support from managers and effective teamwork.

A requirement was also made at the last inspection in relation to updating the fire risk assessment and having it endorsed by the local fire authority. This has been addressed. There are clear evacuation plans in place for the children, regular fire drills take place and the fire risk assessment has been reviewed and kept up to date.

The impact of COVID-19 on both children and staff has been understood by all members of staff and managers. Clear protocols are in place with regards to managing visitors to the home and all the children understand why wider restrictions are in place for the whole population. This approach has reassured the children and helped to keep everyone safe.

Training has continued for all staff; the majority of this being virtual training online. The registered manager has monitored this to ensure that staff are up to date, especially with key training in areas such as safeguarding and administration of medication. Consequently, the staff have the skills and knowledge to provide a good standard of care.

External professionals speak positively about how children benefit from their placement at this home. They compliment the levels of communication and promptness of the staff to inform them of any significant events.

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 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; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other;	31 January 2021

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)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)) This is with reference to ensuring that, on their admission to the home, children's electronic devices, such as laptops, are checked to ensure that they do not contain inappropriate material.	
The registered person must ensure that all employees— undertake appropriate continuing professional development; receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience; and have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. (Regulation 33 (4)(a)(b)(c)) This particularly refers to agency members of staff and others who may work at the home as bank staff.	31 March 2021
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;	31 January 2021

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 with reference to ensuring that staff record sanctions promptly so that they can be reviewed in a timely manner by managers.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC011972

Registered provider: Hillcrest Children's Services Limited

Registered provider address: Hillcrest Children's Services Limited, Turnpike Gate House, Alcester Heath, Alcester, Warwickshire B49 5JG.

Responsible individual: Clifford James

Registered manager: Rachel Burgess

Inspector

Paul Taylor, Social Care Inspector

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