

SC013598

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The staff at this home provide short breaks for children who have a wide range of learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities as well as sensory impairments. The aims of the organisation are to enhance children's lives and to support parents and carers to look after their children well.

The current manager has been registered with Ofsted since 10 May 2019.

Visit dates: 15 to 16 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 29 January 2020

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

Staff support has a significant and positive impact on children's safety, well-being and progress. One child said that he liked coming to the home and it was clear that all the children enjoyed the staff's company during this visit. During the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders and managers have put in place a number of measures to support children and their families. These actions range from providing emergency care to children if families are in difficulty, to developing a COVID-19-safe grotto for children to meet Santa before Christmas.

The staff have a caring approach to children's care and know them well. They are attuned to how children express themselves and they use this information to plan children's care. The staff recognise and celebrate children's achievements.

One parent reported that many services that support her family had closed during the period of COVID-19 restrictions. She confirmed that the support provided by this home was therefore a much appreciated lifeline during this time.

The staff have excellent links with education providers and this ensures that children experience consistency in their care. A headteacher said that the staff work with him very well, and that he has never known a child to be distressed when going to the home. He said, '[The home's staff] stand out as the best I have ever worked with.'

Children's healthcare needs are prioritised by staff. Physical activity is encouraged and there are plans to increase the size of the garden and improve its facilities this year. Meals are homecooked and cater for different children's physical and cultural needs well. Children were clearly enjoying their meals on the day of the visit. Leaders and managers are currently developing a mental health strategy. The aim of this strategy is to promote good mental health during the pandemic.

Care plans generally meet children's needs. However, managers do not have a systematic way of reviewing the quality of these plans. As a result, managers have not always identified that a child's support plan does not reflect the most up-to-date practice. In response to this assurance visit, managers changed their staff supervision format to include a review of children's plans.

The safety of children

Children's safety is prioritised. Staff talk ably about how they manage difficult situations and how they work together to learn from these situations. Risk assessments and behaviour management plans help to guide staff on how to reduce or manage risks. Children are rarely physically restrained and do not go missing. Nevertheless, clear plans are in place should these events occur.

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of safeguarding issues and act quickly on any safeguarding concerns that they identify. A recent investigation into how staff managed a potential safeguarding concern was commended by the local authority designated officer. The review comprehensively considered the concern

from a variety of angles and this resulted in positive change to staff practice. For example, a monthly senior management safeguarding meeting is now in place.

Staff talk confidently about certain safeguarding aspects of their work, such as spotting bruising and how to refer safeguarding concerns. The staff struggle to talk confidently about other safeguarding concerns, such as internet safety and self-harm. Leaders and managers hold regular safeguarding training that covers such areas and they intend to use supervision meetings to check staff's understanding and development needs.

The management of health and safety has improved since the last inspection. A recently appointed health and safety manager has implemented a clearer system for reporting health and safety issues. Records confirm what action is being taken and when each issue is likely to be resolved. Managers also undertake regular health and safety checks to check that the premises remain in good order.

Leaders and managers

Leaders and managers ensure that the service lives up to the aims stated in the home's statement of purpose. They advocate strongly for children with disabilities and their families. A social worker said that he has found, over many years, that the staff consistently meet children's complex and challenging needs well. A parent described the registered manager as 'excellent', saying 'the manager is always there to talk to me' and 'helps me to find solutions to any difficulties which affect my children'.

The manager's monitoring and reviewing processes have improved. The manager's six-monthly reports on the quality of the home comprehensively review what has gone well and plan effectively for what needs to improve. The home's COVID-19 risk assessment is regularly reviewed and updated. It is published on the home's website.

Leaders continually look for ways to improve the services provided for children with a disability, both internally and nationally. They are currently undertaking a review to support children's nutrition and healthy eating. The organisation has also supported parents to be part of national research into the pandemic's effects on children with disabilities.

Managers assist the staff to work together well. Daily staff handover meetings help the staff to prepare thoroughly for each different group of children who attend for a short break. Staffing levels have been increased so that children have one-to-one staffing during the pandemic. This change assists the staff in maintaining social distancing. Regular online team meetings are held, and the staff say that these are helpful for sharing ways of supporting children and keeping in touch with each other.

Leaders and managers have maintained regular supervision meetings and training events for the staff during the pandemic. Nevertheless, the quality of supervision records remains variable. For example, not all supervision records provide clear

evidence of how supervisors use reflective practice to assist staff to develop. Leaders and managers are aware of this deficit and are taking steps to improve supervision practice and record keeping.

Staff speak very highly of the support provided by leaders and managers. They feel that this is supporting them to get through the challenges of the pandemic. One member of staff said that at the beginning of the pandemic, he was really worried about the home remaining open. However, now he is very proud of what they have achieved for children and their families at a time when many other services have been unavailable to them.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should review whether the staff have the necessary skills and knowledge to identify the full range of safeguarding concerns. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 43, paragraph 9.12)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC013598

Registered provider: Cherry Trees Limited

Responsible individual: Mark Clement

Registered manager: Paula Rankin

Inspector

Ruth Coler, Social Care Inspector

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