

SC023744

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This children's home provides care and accommodation for up to three children with social, emotional and/or mental health needs. It is privately owned and part of a larger company, which has a number of similar homes in the area. Children may attend one of the schools that are run by the company.

The manager was registered with Ofsted on 5 March 2012.

Visit dates: 3 to 4 November 2020

Previous inspection date: 10 March 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

This has been a settled period for the home, despite the restrictions and challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. A stable staff team has provided the children with consistent, good-quality care that has enabled the children to continue to engage with their learning. The children continue to feel settled despite the many changes in routines and activities.

Relationships between staff and the children have deepened during this period. The children are positive about the staff and their experience of care during the period of restrictions. The staff speak highly of the way that children have coped, with one member of staff saying, 'They have been an absolute credit to themselves.'

The children have felt increasingly able to talk about things that worry and frustrate them, as well as plans about their futures. Some of the children who are experiencing frustration and uncertainty about how their next steps are being managed require the additional support of an independent advocate.

A proactive and thoughtful approach by staff has enabled the children to maintain meaningful contact with the people who are important to them during the COVID-19 restrictions. Staff have also ensured that the children have been able to continue accessing specialist services during this time. The children have been prepared by the staff for the second period of restrictions.

The safety of children

The children talk about the clear routines and structure that staff maintain in the home, as well as how settled the staff team has become. The children express feelings of attachment and belonging and say that they feel safe.

There has been a substantial reduction in disruptive incidents in the home during the period of COVID-19 restrictions. For more than three months, there has been no need for staff to use any restrictive measures to ensure the children's safety or to prevent harm.

No children have gone missing during this period. Clear and current assessments and plans provide the staff with meaningful guidance in how to best manage the children's strong emotions and how to keep them safe.

Leaders and managers

The manager displays a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the running of the home. This includes the progress and well-being of the children and the

performance of the staff. She expresses confidence in the staff and their capacity to provide consistency and continuity of care for the children.

The manager is clear, proactive and reflective in her leadership. Senior staff in the home express confidence in the manager, and pride in the progress the children have made.

The disruption caused by COVID-19 to the planned refurbishment and redecoration of the home is being well managed and the children made no mention of this being an issue for them.

Effective communication within the staff team and between leaders and managers has been maintained during the period of restrictions. The leadership of the wider organisation has been effective in providing support and direction to the home in the response to all aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The manager has maintained the standards of regular staff supervision throughout the lockdown period and this, together with effective communication, has contributed significantly to the consistency and continuity of the children's care.

The manager closely monitors the running of the home and the progress and well-being of the children. However, effective use is not being made of this information in children's care reviews, to further improve the quality of care being provided by staff.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person is responsible for deciding what each review should focus on, based on the specific circumstances of the home at that particular time and any areas of high risk to the children that the home is designed to care for, such as missing or exploitation. They will also consider what information or data recorded in the home will form part of the evidence base for their analysis and conclusions. There is no expectation that the registered person will review the home against every part of the Quality Standards every six months – registered persons should use their professional judgement to decide which factors to focus on. The review should enable the registered person to identify areas of strength and possible weakness in the home's care, which will be captured in the written report. The report should clearly identify any actions required for the next six months of delivery within the home and how those actions will be addressed. The whole review process and the resulting report should be used as a tool for continuous improvement in the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations, including the quality standards', page 65, paragraph 15.4)

- Where the placing authority or another relevant person does not provide the input and services needed to meet a child's needs during their time in the home or in preparation for leaving the home, the home must challenge them to meet the child's needs (see regulations 5 (c)). Staff should act as champions for their children, expecting nothing less than a good parent would. The registered person should consider the use of an independent advocate (see paragraph 4.16) if the child's needs are not being met. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 12, paragraph 2.8)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC023744

Registered provider: Ethelbert Specialist Homes Limited

Registered provider address: Ethelbert Specialist Homes Limited, 17 Leigh Road, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 5EU

Responsible individual: Leslie Davenport

Registered manager: Donna Gallagher

Inspector:

John Pledger, Social Care Inspector

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