

SC023746

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The home is owned and run by a private organisation. It provides care and accommodation for up to three children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The home has been without a registered manager since 7 March 2019.

Visit dates: 8 to 9 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 10 December 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

Staff and children in the home have been significantly affected by the pandemic due to some contracting COVID-19, which has also had an impact on management arrangements and staff deployment. The acting manager of the home took prompt action to address some of the immediate concerns highlighted during the inspection. In making the findings on this inspection, the inspectors took these factors into account with regard to the shortfalls identified in relation to the care provided to children.

The children and the staff have experienced an extraordinary and, for some, a difficult period relating to COVID-19. The actions of the staff and the manager during the recent self-isolation period in the home show their dedication and commitment to the children. The manager and the staff acted with good intention to minimise the spread of COVID-19. However, in trying to protect children's physical health their emotional well-being needs were not given sufficient priority.

During the self-isolation period, leaders and staff confined two of the children to their bedrooms for 24 hours a day for 14 days, with no access to other parts of the home other than their bathrooms. The children were not allowed to spend time in the home's private garden. This practice denied the children appropriate access to fresh air and space to exercise.

One child became upset during the assurance visit when he was told he had to self-isolate for a further 14 days. An agreement was made by the area manager that the child would now have access to the garden. However, she believed that she was not correctly following the guidance in permitting this. The organisation's interpretation of the government's COVID-19 guidance, and subsequent staff practice, has had the potential to have an adverse impact on the children's emotional well-being. Allowing the children out of their bedrooms while self-isolating or having tested positive for COVID-19 is within the pandemic guidelines.

Staff routinely interacted with the children while they self-isolated. But some practice was not child centred, for instance, leaving meals on the floor outside bedroom doors. One child did not have a desk or table in his bedroom. The inspector observed him eating a meal on his lap. Furthermore, he had no space to complete schoolwork. The area manager purchased a desk for the child during the assurance visit. While leaders and the staff show care towards the children, they have failed to consider their practice from the children's lived experience.

Staff have not provided all the children with appropriate online resources to support their learning. One child has no laptop and, therefore, he has not been able to access online educational resources during his period of self-isolation. The manager and the staff had not been proactive in advocating for a laptop for the child before the assurance visit. This is now being addressed by the area manager, school and the placing authority.

Most of the children are making steady progress with their education and are supported well by the staff. However, for one child, the staff have been ineffective in progressing his educational attainment since the last inspection. The child's poor attendance at school and lack of engagement in learning has continued to drift. This reduces the chances that he will reach his full potential and may limit his future choices in relation to work and study.

The safety of children

The inspector was made aware during the assurance visit of a child's concern about a member of staff. A similar concern was raised at the previous inspection. The inspector considered the actions taken by the setting in response to the concerns raised, alongside other evidence available at the time of the assurance visit.

A supervision record revealed a staff member raising concerns about another member of staff's practice. The manager and the staff member did not follow the organisation's safeguarding policy and procedures or escalate concerns. As a result, the children have been put at risk. This was addressed during the assurance visit. An internal investigation has been instigated by the area manager.

The home has internal wireless broadband set up with an appropriate level of filtering. However, staff were unaware that a child had regular access to his own data allowance to use on his phone. There were no risk assessments or plans that showed that staff were aware of the risk and benefits around this. This means the child's internet access is not managed in a way that ensures a reasonable duty of care in providing age-appropriate online safeguarding.

Children speak positively about their relationships with staff. One child described how staff have helped him better manage his feelings and behaviour. Another child described how he felt staff had reassured and comforted him when he was unwell.

Feedback from other professionals is positive about the safety and care of the children. Children spoken to said they felt safe living at the home. Interactions observed between the staff and the children were open, warm and friendly.

Leaders and managers

The previous manager has withdrawn his application to register with Ofsted. This has left the home without a registered manager since March 2019. The number of shortfalls identified indicate leaders have not actively used the findings from internal and external monitoring to improve the experience of the children. The area manager and leaders recognise the urgent need for a permanent manager to be appointed, and they have plans in hand to address this. The current area manager has taken steps to address some of the immediate concerns identified by the inspector at this inspection.

Management arrangements have not been robust since the last inspection. Supervision records concerning the support and development of the staff are often

of poor quality. As a result, the staff are not sufficiently helped to understand and manage their own feelings and responses to the behaviour and emotions of the children.

The children's files show an improvement in staff record-keeping, with the use of child-focused language. However, the written accounts of direct work that the staff undertake with the children do not consistently evidence meaningful dialogue. This runs the risk that opportunities to support children to learn and develop are being missed.

The independent visitor has repeatedly highlighted concern about the staff practice in his monthly reports, for instance, staff disagreeing with each other about the care and approach to children. Tensions in the team dynamics were reported on at the last inspection, but these have not been addressed effectively. Problematic team dynamics and lack of leadership have the potential to have a negative impact on the consistency and quality of care the children receive. This undermines the good work that the staff have done in supporting the children to make progress.

The requirement and recommendations made at the last inspection have been met.

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 education standard is that children make measurable progress towards achieving their educational potential and are helped to do so. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— help each child to achieve the child's education and training targets, as recorded in the child's relevant plans; that each child has access to appropriate equipment, facilities and resources to support the child's learning. (Regulation 8 (1) (2)(a)(i)(b)) This specifically relates to the provider ensuring that the necessary support is given to children to enable them to	30 January 2021

access their education, and that they have access to a desk to support their learning.	
The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate; use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(h)) This specifically relates to managers leading a team which provides consistent high-quality care for all children living in the home, alongside ensuring that the staff work as a team.	30 January 2021
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— are provided with supervision and support to enable them to understand and manage their own feelings and responses to the behaviour and emotions of children, and to help children to do the same. (Regulation 11 (1)(a) (2)(x)) This specifically relates to managers providing high-quality supervision to ensure that staff understand and can meet each child's needs.	30 January 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 staff— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if	30 January 2021

necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(vi)) This relates to staff's understanding and implementation of each individual child's risk assessment, and their role in keeping children safe, particularly with regards to online use. This also relates to the provider ensuring prompt referral of safeguarding concerns and allegations to the appropriate designated officer, alongside effective action to ensure that children are protected.	
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. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that staff— protect and promote each child's welfare. (Regulation 6 (1)(a) (2)(b)(ii)) This relates to the provider and staff meeting the children's basic day-to-day needs in the way that a good parent would, specifically in relation to the children's isolation period due to COVID-19.	30 January 2021

Recommendations

- The registered manager should ensure that children have access to a computer and the internet to support their education and learning, unless there are specific safeguarding reasons why this would be inappropriate. In such cases, the home should consider whether and how it can support the child to access a computer and the internet safely. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 29, paragraph 5.19)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC023746

Registered provider: Ethelbert Specialist Homes Limited

Registered provider address: 17 Leigh Road, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 5EU

Responsible individual: Leslie Davenport

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Anne-Marie Davies, Social Care Inspector

Amanda Harvey, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2020