

SC030967

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This home provides care and accommodation for children and/or young people who have learning disabilities. The home offers short-break care for up to six children and/or young people, and care and accommodation for two long-term placements. It is owned and operated by a local authority.

There is a new manager in post who has yet to apply to Ofsted for registration. The previous registered manager has not yet cancelled her registration as required.

Visit dates: 3 to 4 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 30 July 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Outstanding

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 benefit from good-quality and personalised care provided by a skilled staff team. The children have trusting relationships with the staff, and the staff are responsive to the individual needs of children. Children enjoy coming to the home and feel safe in the care of staff.

Where children are not able to verbally express themselves, staff make use of sign languages, pictorial references and visual cues to communicate with children. Parents say that they have 'absolute confidence' in the staff's ability to care for their children and that they know the children 'inside out'. The staff's knowledge of the children and their skills in non-verbal communication allow children to express their wishes and feelings effectively and be understood.

Education has remained a priority during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Where children have been unable to attend school due to their complex health needs, staff have continued to promote their learning. This has involved liaising with schools to provide suitable school work, monitor progress and set targets. This means that children have continued to learn throughout this period.

Some children have not been able to access the service due to the COVID-19 pandemic and their own complex health needs. The manager and staff have maintained excellent communication with those families and continued to offer support. One family has benefited from staff visiting their home to offer short-break care. This has offered children and their families much needed practical support at a time of increased stress, without putting children at an increased risk of contracting COVID-19.

Children who move on from the home are well supported. Staff are creative in developing clear plans for introductions to their new home. Children complete individualised key work to prepare them for the move. Children are supported to remain in touch and maintain their relationships with staff.

Staff have supported the children to continue taking part in a range of activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photographs of the children enjoying these events are collated into personal memory books as a record of their experiences. Children also participate in cultural events, such as Diwali and Halloween. This encourages children to learn about other cultures and encourages them to try new experiences.

The safety of children

Staff have a good understanding of the needs and risks of each child in their care and are able to anticipate some common behaviours. Effective risk assessments and care plans ensure that there is a clear and consistent response to meet their complex needs. This helps to manage and de-escalate unsafe behaviours and this reduces the risks to children's safety.

At times, physical intervention is required as a last resort to keep children safe and protect them from harm. Interventions are well documented and a clear rationale for any restraint is provided. The manager reviews all physical restraints and helps staff to reflect on and learn from each incident. However, not all restraints are reviewed within appropriate timescales and this may result in delays in addressing any concerns related to the use of a restraint.

The manager responds effectively to safeguarding concerns. An error in relation to medication recently occurred and there is an independent investigation currently ongoing. The manager has been proactive in accessing additional training for all staff and new procedures have been implemented prior to the outcome of this investigation. This ensures additional levels of safety and protection for children.

Leaders and managers

The registered manager has recently left the home and a new manager is in post. However, she has yet to submit a complete application to register with Ofsted. The manager has overseen the completion of the redecoration of the home and is implementing positive changes. Staff said that the new manager is approachable and supportive, and that staff morale is good.

The manager has adapted the service provision to adhere to government guidance regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, also balancing the changing needs of families. This has been achieved through good communication with other professionals and robust planning. The manager has introduced staffing 'bubbles' to reduce the number of people that staff or children are in contact with. With the introduction of additional cleaning routines, this has meant that the care of children has not been compromised during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staff receive regular supervision and training, which supports their ongoing professional development. Group supervision allows for reflection and discussion to develop a greater insight into meeting the needs of the children. As a result, children receive high-quality care from a skilled workforce.

Monitoring and audit processes are good and the manager has a range of resources to track progress. However, the manager's review of the quality of care report has not been sent to Ofsted. This diminishes the effectiveness of independent scrutiny of the services provided to children and young people.

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 registered person must ensure that— 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. (Regulation 35 (3)(b)(i)(ii))	22 January 2021

Recommendations

- The processes the registered person puts in place to enable such a review to take place, should allow for a report to be generated at least once every six months. The generated report should be sent to Ofsted and the placing local authority of all children in the home who are looked-after children. ('Guide to the children's home regulations including the quality standards', page 65, paragraph 15.3)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC030967

Registered provider: Hartlepool Borough Council

Registered provider address: Civic Centre, Victoria Road, Hartlepool, Durham TS24 8AY

Responsible individual: Jane Young

Registered manager: Sylvia Lowe

Inspector

Deb Duffy, Social Care Inspector

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