

SC031698

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This is a local authority children's home providing short breaks for up to eight children who have severe learning difficulties and who may also have physical disabilities. The home's statement of purpose states that the age range of the children is between seven and 19 years old.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since June 2017.

Visit dates: 8 to 9 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 16 January 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Declined in effectiveness

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

The children experience care from adults who know them well. When agency staff are used, every effort is made to ensure that only staff who are sufficiently qualified are used. However, a recent increase in staffing was required for one child and this has resulted in agency staff being used that are not yet suitably qualified.

The staff have communicated the changes due to COVID-19 to the children, using methods suited to children's needs, such as social stories. During the lockdowns, the staff have been creative in finding ways to occupy the children. Additional soft play areas, computer rooms and separate spaces for learning have been created. As a result, the children have been able to use different environments to learn and play.

Education continues to be promoted by the staff. Plans for home education are child focused, and frequently child led. This demonstrates that the staff are responsive to the children's needs and adaptive in their approach.

Short breaks have been impacted by COVID-19 and children living at the home for longer periods of time. Although short breaks were able to resume in between the lockdowns, they are currently on hold again. One parent described the service as a 'life saver, and an essential service'. Consequently, the impact of children's short breaks continuing to be disrupted has yet to be assessed.

The safety of children

The permanent staff understand the children's needs. They have a good understanding of the children's risks and have developed clear strategies to use when risky behaviours occur. They work collaboratively with the agency staff to keep the children safe.

Staff from a particular agency are working with core staff to meet the complex needs of a child. Where physical restraint is used, the agency staff take the lead with core staff observing. All restrictive measures are scrutinised by the positive behaviour support manager and a proportion of these are overseen by the operations manager. These additional layers of oversight ensure that any measures used are subject to scrutiny and this further strengthens the safeguarding practice at this service.

Through excellent interagency working, staff draw on a pool of knowledge to further ensure that the plans for the children are regularly reviewed and updated as their needs change. Professionals in the children's wider network gave positive feedback about this service. However, all acknowledge that the children currently living at the service are not suitably placed.

The delays caused by COVID-19 to meet one child's health needs had exacerbated anxious and challenging behaviours. The staff worked tirelessly with a range of health professionals to ensure that the child accessed health appointments as soon

as the restrictions were lifted. Subsequently, there has been a decrease in critical incidents for the child.

Leaders and managers

There is need for specialist emergency placements within the local authority, and this has led to a disruption in the provision of short breaks within this service. Leaders and managers are currently, reluctantly, providing care for children who are not suitably placed at this short-break service. The future of the service is uncertain whilst the local authority considers suitable options.

The registered manager's response to COVID-19 has been thorough. Clear plans guide the staff to follow enhanced hygiene and cleaning routines. Additional measures are in place for agency staff, with personal protective equipment and clothing provided to further reduce the risk of infection. When outbreaks have occurred, advice from Public Health England is followed and this has helped to control the spread of the virus.

The staff feel well supported by the manager. Supervision is regular and addresses shortfalls in practice. Plans are underway to increase the focus on reflective practice in order to continue to develop the skills of the staff.

The registered manager has a good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. When complaints have been made, her response has been sensitive and thorough. Learning has been translated into changes in practice and the registered manager regularly seeks feedback from key stakeholders to ensure that service development continues.

Managerial monitoring is effective. The registered manager makes good use of the independent reports to underpin improving practice at this service. The previous requirements and recommendations have been met.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC031698

Registered provider: East Sussex County Council

Registered provider address: County Hall, St Annes Crescent, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1UE

Responsible individual: Elizabeth Rugg

Registered manager: Shirin White

Inspectors

Sarah Olliver, Social Care Inspector

Mark Newington, Social Care Inspector

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