

SC031698

Registered provider: East Sussex County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

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.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this setting on 15 September 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 16 to 17 September 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 16 January 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: declined in effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
16/01/2020	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
02/10/2019	Full	Good
22/08/2018	Full	Requires improvement to be good
29/08/2017	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Staff are currently supporting two children with very complex needs in full-time placements. As a result, the respite and short-breaks function of the service have been affected. Large areas of the building have been dedicated to supporting the two current children in solo placements. Leaders recognise that the building was not originally designed for this purpose. However, the local authority has invested high levels of resources and worked creatively to find staffing solutions. This has made it possible to sustain the current placements and provide safe and positive care for these most vulnerable children.

Children's health needs are supported by staff through careful planning and strong communication with external health professionals. Staff have regular training in the safe administration of medication and have advocated effectively for medication reviews when required.

Children are not able to attend education placements at present, but staff work hard to provide them with educational opportunities and home learning. This is tailored to each child's specific needs, and progress is recorded for feedback to parents and professionals.

Children benefit from lots of play and activity resources. There is also a large garden which the children can access throughout the day. They really enjoy their time outside, building models, playing on the outdoor equipment and exploring all of the sensory stimulus around them.

Staff have also organised a range of themed experience days for children, based around public holidays and major sporting events. Staff have collected lovely photographs of these events to create memories for the children and to share with loved ones.

Children are, despite some significant challenges, making progress and experiencing a good quality of care. One child who did not have verbal communication when he came to the home is now regularly using single words to express choices. Staff also make excellent use of communication aids to seek out his wishes and ensure that he has autonomy wherever possible. The positive behaviour support lead, who is attached to the home, says: 'In the last couple of years, the [home] has had to deal with unprecedented challenges. I have watched staff and managers take on and embrace these challenges and work with commitment and imagination to overcome difficulties.'

At all times, children are fully supported when they get upset or angry. Children benefit from supportive, nurturing and skilled staff. As a result, the frequency and severity of incidents are reducing.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Staff work with immense care to provide the safest environment possible for the children. They strive to identify and remove triggers for children that lead to incidents of difficult behaviour. Staff benefit from a wide network of professional support, enabling them to seek specialist advice about strategies that children can use to lower their anxiety and stress levels.

The manager identifies where improvements are needed. For example, an agency member of staff used a physical hold on a child that was not part of their care plan. The manager worked closely with the external provider to improve channels of communication and ensure that all the staff in the building were fully aware of the plans in place for both children.

The whole network of support staff around both children agrees that, at present, engagement in community activity cannot be carried out safely. Legal advice has been sought where necessary. However, this is under constant review, and staff hope to be able to re-engage the children in activities outside the home when it is deemed safe for the children, staff and members of the community.

The property was not originally designed for the needs of the children currently living here. However, the manager works closely with the head of home to try to create a safe and durable environment that can withstand a high level of damage and destructive behaviours. Leaders recognise this can only be a temporary solution and continue to search for exactly the right environments to meet the needs of the children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager has shown excellent leadership to her team during a challenging and emotionally difficult period at the home. The registered manager is grateful to her senior leadership for their shared ownership of the current situation. She feels well supported and appreciates that everyone involved is working hard to provide a positive outcome for the children.

Staff are open and honest about the pressures of working in a very high-intensity environment with significant challenges. They universally praise the quality of supervision and training on offer. They feel that the management team has been visible and accessible throughout this time. Supervision frameworks are clear, but the opportunity to support staff to reflect on their professional development has been missed and could be developed further.

The registered manager has developed a close working relationship with the specialist agency that provides support for a child at the home. She maintains a clear overview of the external staff to ensure that they have the required skills and experience. She also regularly monitors safe recruitment practices to satisfy herself that all staff are suitable to work with children with complex needs. External

professionals universally praise the work of the staff teams at the home. A professional commented: 'The home has been remarkably resilient. Staff have been through a process of questioning and frustration, towards acceptance and understanding. Staff have shown great patience and flexibility.'

The registered manager has a very strong overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the home and works creatively to overcome any challenges that the teams face in their day-to-day work. The provider is working tirelessly to find the right placements for both children. This has been very difficult, and the current situation looks set to remain as it is for some time to come. The current statement of purpose is under review to reflect the changes in placement practice at the home.

Staff have responded to recent challenges with tremendous commitment and resilience. Leaders have brought in additional staff from an agency that specialises in working with children with complex behaviours. Staff say that they have found this helpful and that the relationship between the two teams is constructive and works well.

Senior leaders are present and fully engaged in supporting staff in the home. They have developed a broad and effective team around the children to support them effectively in this current placement. They are also approaching planning for the future of the children in an innovative and ambitious way.

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 leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)) In particular, to review the statement of purpose to reflect the current placement practice at the home and once complete update the regulator.	31/12/2021

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs and should understand the key role they play in the training and development of staff in the home. In particular, to utilise supervision as an additional means to promote the continuous professional development of staff. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.11)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC031698

Provision sub-type: Children's home

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

Responsible individual: Elizabeth Rugg

Registered manager: Shirin White

Inspector

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector

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