

SC033127

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This is a local authority managed home to provide care and accommodation for up to 11 children who have learning and physical disabilities. The home is split into three smaller homes: The Bungalow and Rainbow provide long-term care for children, and Starlight provides short-break services. The registered manager has been in post since 2010.

Visit dates: 23 to 24 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 21 January 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Requires improvement to be 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

The manager has adapted the home to reduce the COVID-19 pandemic infection risk for children. Social 'bubbles' are in place to restrict the number of people in contact with the children. This has helped the children to remain virus-free and enabled the manager to maintain a stable and consistent staff team throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The short-break provision was suspended, but as COVID-19 restrictions ease, this group of children have started to return to the home.

Children benefit from personalised care and support. The staff and manager know and understand the children's needs and continually adapt the service to meet these needs. For example, to help reduce one child's anxiety around group living and the transmission of COVID-19, staff were able to provide care and support in a temporary alternative placement. Consequently, the child's care plan was not disrupted and they continued to make good progress.

Staff help the children to maintain their routines. This is important, as the children living in this home have learning disabilities or autism spectrum disorder, and predictability helps them to feel secure. During the COVID-19 pandemic, children continue to attend school and maintain positive links with their families. For the occasions when children were unable to have physical contact with their families because of the high risk of contracting COVID-19, they made portraits of themselves giving hugs to their families. These were placed up at the windows to help children feel connected during socially distanced family time.

Children are gaining new life experiences to help them into adulthood. The children's independence plans reflect their skills, abilities and vulnerabilities. These also include individualised targets to further support children's development and progress. As children experience things for the first time, this can bring an element of fear. One child said, 'The first time I paid for things in a shop was very scary.' Importantly, the children are developing these skills with the reassurance and support of staff.

Children continue to enjoy activities within the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff arranged COVID-19 safe versions of children's favourite activities, including country walks to feed the ducks and trips to see farm animals. As restrictions have eased, children have enjoyed time at the seaside and the circus. Pictures and photographs around the home celebrate the children's accomplishments and adventures, and help them to focus on positive experiences.

The safety of children

Children have trusting relationships with staff and these help to keep them safe. Staff understand the children's different forms of communication, including non-verbal cues, and recognise when children are distressed or need comfort. This means that children's requests for interaction or support are responded to quickly. One young person said, 'The staff know what to look out for when I am ill, and this comforts me'.

Staff have a good understanding of the children's behaviours and any risks to their safety. These are recorded in children's plans, along with strategies for staff to use to help to keep the children safe. However, if children are at risk of self-harm, and the preventative strategies that staff follow are ineffective, these risk assessments do not guide staff on what actions to take next. This may result in inconsistent staff practice if children harm themselves.

Children's care plans continued to be reviewed during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, staff do not help children to prepare for their statutory reviews effectively. This is a missed opportunity for children's views to be heard and for them to contribute to decisions about their lives.

Safer recruitment procedures are not fully carried out by the manager. Some staff are working with children without a current disclosure and barring service check, and there is an unnecessary delay in applying for these checks. To mitigate this shortfall, the manager ensures that other recruitment checks are gained, and she has implemented risk assessments prohibiting lone working with children.

Leaders and managers

The manager is addressing the requirements raised at the last inspection. One requirement is carried forward as the manager has been unable to arrange face-to-face training for the staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. The manager's internal monitoring and oversight of the home have strengthened. This enables her to identify practice shortfalls and provide clear direction to staff. As a result, children receive better care and support.

There were no visits to the home, or appropriate off-site monitoring in line with amended legislation, by an independent visitor between April and July 2020. The manager did not address this shortfall to ensure appropriate external scrutiny of the quality of care provided for children.

Staff continue to update their learning. For example, they have completed training to help them to support a child with epilepsy. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the manager has been unable to access autism spectrum disorder training. Managers and staff recognise that this training would help them to better support the children.

The staff benefit from regular supervision. This provides them with time to reflect on their practice and to discuss any anxieties around the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the appraisal and supervision records for staff do not include identified areas for personal development to help staff to continue to develop their knowledge and skills.

Partnership working is positive. Effective communication between the manager and other professionals ensures that the children's needs are being met and any issues are resolved quickly. Partner agencies and families speak highly of the care that the staff provide to the children.

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— ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(c)) This requirement has been carried forward.	20/11/2020
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The registered person may only— employ an individual to work at the children's home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). The requirements are that— full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1)(2)(a)(3)(d))	20/11/2020
The registered person must ensure that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month. When the independent person is carrying out a visit, the registered person must help the independent person—	20/11/2020

if they consent, to interview in private such of the children, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as the independent person requires. (Regulation 44 (1)(2)(a))	
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Recommendations

- Staff should continually and actively assess the risks to each child and the arrangements in place to protect them. Where there are safeguarding concerns for a child, their placement plan, agreed between the home and their placing authority, must include details of the steps the home will take to manage any assessed risks on a day to day basis. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 42, paragraph 9.5)
- The registered person and the home's staff should be familiar with the care planning process for looked-after children and must assist children to prepare for meetings in relation to this. Staff should play an important role in these meetings, including supporting the child and enabling a clear understanding to be reached about the child's views, wishes, feelings, and expectations for their future. An independent advocate can also be called upon by the child or staff to support the child in their reviews. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 23, paragraph 4.14)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC033127

Registered provider: North East Lincolnshire Council

Registered provider address: Civic Offices, Knoll Street, Cleethorpes, Lincolnshire DN35 8LN

Responsible individual: Daren Hale

Registered manager: Karen Stones

Inspector

Jennifer Fenlon, Social Care Inspector

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