

SC033174

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The home is owned and managed by a local authority. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to five children aged between 10 and 17; 16 is the maximum age on admission. According to the home's statement of purpose, it offers residential care with therapeutic emphasis and multi-agency involvement, to help children recover from experiences which have rendered them vulnerable and disrupted from their primary relationships.

The manager was registered in November 2017.

Visit dates: 8 to 9 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 30 October 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Sustained 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 identified the following serious concern in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit:

- There are a range of regulatory shortfalls which indicate that leadership and management are weak and quality assurance systems are not effective.

The care of children

Staff and children have had some challenging times over the last few months. However, the current group of children is settling together, and staff are working hard to improve the consistency and quality of care for them. Children were observed to be confident in their views, comfortable in their surroundings and relaxed in the presence of staff.

The physical environment is looking tired in places. Some children's rooms are untidy, and the education room is currently unusable. This is due to detritus on the floor and the room being inaccessible due to being locked.

Children have, on the whole, continued to make steady progress. For example, some children have settled into the home's routines and established more secure attachments with staff and other children. The views and wishes of the children continue to be explored in a variety of ways. Children have been involved in interviewing prospective care staff, and their views have shaped who has been recruited into these key roles.

Children are encouraged, and supported, to explore their individuality. There is a tolerant atmosphere and staff are quick to intervene when tensions arise. Experienced staff know when to let children resolve their own arguments and when to step in as adults and role models. This means that children's relationships are improving, and friendships are developing.

Children have maintained some level of education attendance during the past few months. A teacher commented that, 'Key workers for the young people demonstrate care and kindness, and advocate for the young person at all times.' Staff have provided reassurance to children during some challenging times, and they have sought to increase children's participation in activities.

The safety of children

Children told inspectors that they feel safe, and are safe, at the home. Staff are aware of the vulnerabilities of children and know the children well. However, risk management plans do not contain enough information about how to manage known risks. For example, one such plan notes a high risk but has no information recorded. Another plan is vague about how to provide appropriate personal care for a child.

There has been an increase and subsequent reduction in incidents. This can be attributed to the pandemic and children moving into and out of the home. Staff work hard to manage relationships between the children and put in place effective boundaries. The children have helped to devise some sanctions, but some of these are not appropriate. For example, children have asked that they are fined a small amount of money if they smoke, and this has been implemented by the staff. This amounts to an inappropriate financial sanction and, as such, does not support the child to realise the health consequences or potential fire hazard. When sanctions are given to children, there is a lack of follow up afterwards. This means that leaders and managers do not ensure that children are spoken to, as required, following these measures.

Significant concerns are managed in line with the local authority's procedures. Staff and managers know how to spot risks and what actions to take. On one occasion, there was a delay of nine days between concerns being identified and action being taken. This has been thoroughly reviewed and a 'lessons-learned' approach has identified, and implemented, changes to practice. However, Ofsted was not notified of the incident despite this being a serious allegation about a member of staff.

Children know how to complain and do so when they have cause to be dissatisfied. The registered manager ensures that swift investigatory actions are in place and all actions recorded. However, the outcome of complaints or indication of the complainant's view are not so well recorded. This is a missed opportunity to capture the views of children.

Leaders and managers

There are some widespread weaknesses in the local and wider management of the home. The registered manager has failed to ensure that robust quality assurance systems are in place. Senior leaders have similarly failed to ensure that such systems are reviewed. This means that there has been a deterioration in the quality of care over the last few months.

The manager's own quality checks have identified some areas that require improvement. These include staff supervision and consistency. However, further shortfalls identified at this inspection have not been identified or actioned effectively.

Regulation 44 visits have taken place throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This has provided an additional layer of checks to the home. The visitor has not always documented whether the children were spoken to, or whether the children chose not to engage. This means that there is the potential for children's views to have gone unheard or unexplored. Similarly, the manager's own reviews have not evaluated any consultation that has taken place with children.

There has been some progress since the last inspection visit. Senior leaders, present during the inspection, confirmed that there are firm plans to improve the physical environment. Staff induction has improved. Additional staff, from other homes in the organisation, have brought some new ideas and fresh thinking. The deputy manager

and registered manager are working hard to make improvements to the staff team, and recruitment is actively underway. Stakeholders note the efforts being taken to provide good care for children. A social worker commented that, 'There is a feeling of working together, and they are keen to create a positive and homely atmosphere.'

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 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 necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child. (Regulation 12(1)(2)(a)(i))	31/10/2020
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 use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13(1)(a)(b)(2)(h))*	31/10/2020*
No measure of control or discipline which is excessive, unreasonable or contrary to paragraph (2) may be used in relation to any child. The following measures may not be used to discipline any child— imposing a financial penalty, other than a requirement for the payment of a reasonable sum (which may be by instalments) by way of reparation. (Regulation 19(1)(2)(f))	31/10/2020
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy ("the behaviour management policy") which sets out— how appropriate behaviour is to be promoted in the children's home and the measures of control, discipline and	31/10/2020

restraint which may be used in relation to children in the home. The registered person must ensure that within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35(1)(a)(b)(3)(c))	
The registered person must ensure that a record is made of any complaint, the action taken in response, and the outcome of any investigation. (Regulation 39(3))	31/10/2020
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation; an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious; there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there; a child protection enquiry involving a child is instigated or concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40(4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(i)(ii)(e))	31/10/2020
When the independent person is carrying out a visit, the registered person must help the independent person 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(2)(a))	31/10/2020
In order to complete a quality of care review the registered person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating— the quality of care provided for children; the feedback and opinions of children about the children's home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it; and any actions that the registered person considers necessary in order to improve or maintain the quality of care provided for children. (Regulation 45(2)(a)(b)(c))	31/10/2020

*This requirement is subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- Many children placed in homes may undergo a difficult transition, and what should be simple aspects of their care take on a substantial significance in this context. Staff should provide a nurturing environment that is welcoming, supportive, and which provides appropriate boundaries in relation to their behaviour. Homes must also meet children's basic day-to-day needs and physical necessities. Staff should seek to meet the child's basic needs in the way that a good parent would, recognising that many children in residential care have experienced environments where these needs have not been consistently met – doing so is an important aspect of demonstrating that the staff care for the child and value them as an individual. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.7)

In particular, ensure that all the children's bedrooms are kept to a reasonable standard of tidiness and the education room is made available for use.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC033174

Registered provider: Hampshire County Council

Registered provider address: Hampshire Council, 3rd Floor, Elizabeth II Court
North, The Castle, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 8UG

Responsible individual: John Stacey

Registered manager: Sarah Harris

Inspectors

Pete Hylton, Regulatory Inspection Manager

Kelly Marchmont, Social Care Inspector

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