

SC034083

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This local authority owned home is registered for six children and young people who have emotional and/or behavioural and/or learning difficulties. The statement of purpose details the age range of children and young people as being from 12 to 17 years.

The registered manager has considerable experience and is suitably qualified. The registered manager has been in post since before 2007, when the regulation of the home became the responsibility of Ofsted.

Visit dates: 30 September to 1 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 10 October 2018

Previous inspection judgement: 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

Children and young people enjoy trusting and meaningful relationships with staff. Staff know them well and share a clear understanding of their needs.

All children and young people are very settled, and some have lived at the home for several years. They have a real sense of belonging and say that staff are like family to them. There is a lot of fun and laughter in this home.

Staff work closely with emotional health and well-being professionals to ensure that children and young people are fully supported to make sense of, and deal with, feelings associated with earlier childhood events.

Staff encourage children and young people to value education and hold aspirations for their future. During the height of the pandemic, children and young people were each provided with personal laptops. These enabled them to complete school and college work provided and research other learning and work opportunities.

Children and young people have now returned to school and college and are making good progress with their studies. Staff continue to positively support their home learning.

Children and young people have remained active throughout this period, despite government restrictions. They have taken regular walks with staff and have all been involved in revamping the home's outdoor space, enjoying painting decking, upcycling garden furniture and planting new flowers and vegetables.

Children and young people understand the significance of the COVID-19 pandemic and have fully cooperated with government and health advice to keep safe and healthy. They have been able to share their views and discuss new issues as they have arisen in the media. Staff have been sensitive in supporting these discussions, making sure they do not heighten anxieties.

Children and young people have enjoyed, and taken part in, community initiatives. They regularly joined neighbours in clapping on Thursday nights, acknowledging the hard work of NHS workers. Morale has remained high in this home. Children, young people and staff recognise, and have actively contributed to, the very positive local community spirit.

The safety of children

Most staff have worked in this home for many years and are very experienced in caring for children and young people. Staff understand how to manage risk and keep children and young people safe.

The stability of the staff team has been a key factor that has kept children and young people so settled during this very uncertain period in their lives. Children and young people say they feel safe and staff are always there for them. The staff team provides them with the stability they need.

Staff show considerable commitment to children and young people in this home. Despite some staff knowing they had underlying health issues, they chose to remain working in the home to minimise the number of adults that children and young people would meet.

Children and young people valued that some staff would put themselves at risk to care for them. They responded with very positive behaviour throughout this period. As one young person commented, 'We have not had one single argument.'

Children understand the home's rules and boundaries and know what is expected of them. Their risks significantly reduce the longer they live in this home. The positive relationships that children and young people share with staff are clearly instrumental in this.

During this period, there has not been any incidence of children or young people going missing from this home. Additionally, there have not been any incidents during this period that have required any measures of discipline. This has contributed to children and young people's safety.

Children and young people feel they can talk to staff and would raise a concern if they had one. However, children and young people say they have nothing to complain about. Staff have ensured that children have been kept well informed about COVID-19 and the measures to keep them and others safe from the virus.

Leaders and managers

The home is led by a well-qualified and experienced registered manager, supported by three assistant managers. This management team is a real strength within this home, and managers are good role models for staff, children and young people.

Staff have benefited during this period from the purchase of new hardware and software applications. This has enabled them to keep in touch with each other and to maintain staff meetings, training and staff supervision using the video technology now available to them.

Supervision and training have been successfully maintained using video technology and online provision when restrictions limited face-to-face contact. Staff

acknowledge morale in the home has remained high. They voice pride in children and young people's attitude, understanding and motivation during this pandemic.

External monitoring of the home until restrictions eased was carried out remotely. Video technology enabled the independent person to speak privately with children and young people to ensure their safety and well-being while providing robust scrutiny of the home's performance.

However, monitoring visits to the home have now resumed. The visitor has taken great interest in the children and young people's garden project and has assisted them with planting vegetables during her visits.

External professionals do not identify any concerns for children and young people's safety or well-being at this home. They speak very highly of the staff team and have confidence in its practice.

The requirement made at the last inspection in October 2018 was met. However, the recommendation has been repeated as there is still some improvement required in the six-monthly reports received by Ofsted.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered person is responsible for deciding what each review should focus on, based on the specific circumstances of the home at that particular time and any areas of high risk to the children that the home is designed to care for, such as missing or exploitation. They will also consider what information or data recorded in the home will form part of the evidence base for their analysis and conclusions. There is no expectation that the registered person will review the home against every part of the Quality Standards every six months – registered persons should use their professional judgement to decide which factors to focus on. The review should enable the registered person to identify areas of strength and possible weakness in the home's care, which will be captured in the written report. The report should clearly identify any actions required for the next 6 months of delivery within the home and how those actions will be addressed. The whole review process and the resulting report should be used as a tool for continuous improvement in the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 65, paragraph 15.4.)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC034083

Registered provider: Cumbria County Council

Registered provider address: Cumbria County Council, Cumbria House, 117
Botchergate, Carlisle, Cumbria CA1 1RD

Responsible individual: Lynn Berryman

Registered manager: Caroline Reid

Inspector

Gillian Walters, Social Care Inspector

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