

SC035380

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The children's home provides care and accommodation for children and/or young people with physical and/or learning disabilities. The home offers short-break care and accommodation for up to six children and/or young people, and care and accommodation for one long-term placement. It is owned and operated by the local authority.

The manager has been registered since July 2020.

Visit dates: 7 to 8 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 26 February 2020

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

The children benefit from the continuation of this short-break service throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. A reduction in the number of children accessing the service at any one time minimises the risk of spreading the virus. Leaders and managers carefully monitor staff, children and visitors for COVID-19 symptoms. This reduces the likelihood of children contracting the virus.

The children make good progress in all areas of their development. The staff celebrate the children's achievements and continually reward positive behaviours. They use a 'star' system to reinforce the children's good behaviour and display these stars around the home. This helps the children to recognise their own progress.

Staff support and encourage the children to pursue their personal interests and hobbies, and to participate in activities. This is captured in photographs, and staff use these to create 'memory books' for the children that reflect their time at the home. One child said that he was able to develop his interest in music because of the support of staff. This is important in promoting a sense of achievement for the children and increasing their self-confidence.

The children continue to make good educational progress. One child had not been in school due to their specific needs. The manager works with the 'virtual' school to provide a tutor until an appropriate provision can be identified. This approach means that the children have the opportunity to continue with their learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The safety of children

The children's risk assessments are clear and easy for staff to understand and follow. This means that staff are fully aware of all potential risks to the children's safety and the actions to take to manage and reduce these.

Leaders and managers ensure that shift handover processes include up-to-date information regarding recent incidents and any changes to children's behaviours. As a result, the children benefit from consistent staff practice and this helps to keep the children safe and promotes their welfare.

The children respond well to the model of care that is used in the home. This child-focused approach helps them to better manage their anxieties, emotions and frustrations. Staff use this model alongside positive reinforcements to motivate the children to behave well. As a result, incidents of negative behaviour have reduced, which, in turn, has reduced the number of sanctions imposed.

There has been one occasion when a casual member of staff did not follow whistle-blowing procedures. This potentially placed the children at risk of harm. Leaders and managers did not address this shortfall quickly in order to make sure that all staff are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. This could leave the children vulnerable and at risk of harm.

Leaders and managers

The relationships between the registered manager, staff and other professionals are positive. Professionals, including the children's social workers, comment positively on the responsiveness of the manager to meet the children's individual needs.

The registered manager ensures that through the use of appropriate technology, multi-agency meetings and reviews continue to take place during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. This means that the children's plans continue to reflect their needs and support their progress.

The staff are subject a service review within the home. This means that vacancies in the home are not being filled and that rota shortfalls are covered by casual staff. The manager uses regular casual staff to ensure continuity for the children. This approach is a temporary response to managing staff shortages and does not appear to impact negatively on the care provided to children at this time.

The manager uses the information from monitoring and external oversight to improve the quality of care provided for the children. He has a good oversight of the home and uses this information to plan the longer-term development of the service. The independent visitor has continued to complete virtual and face-to-face visits during the COVID-19 pandemic. This provides independent scrutiny of the home and the feedback to the manager contributes to service development plans.

The manager ensures that his staff receive regular supervision. These sessions are reflective and focus on the impact that the care provided has on the children's progress and well-being. However, the manager reports that he has not received regular supervision. This leaves him without the opportunity to reflect on his own practice and development.

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.	20/11/2020

In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure that staff—

are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(vii)

In particular, the registered person must ensure that all casual staff are familiar with and abide by safeguarding procedures.

Recommendations

- The registered person must have systems in place so that all staff, including the manager, receive supervision of their practice from an appropriately qualified and experienced professional, which allows them to reflect on their practice and the needs of the children assigned to their care. ('Guide to the children's home regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC035380

Registered provider: Stockton-On-Tees Borough Council

Registered provider address: Municipal Buildings, Church Road, Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland TS18 1LD

Responsible individual: Rhona Bollands

Registered manager: David Vickerstaff

Inspectors

Deb Duffy, Social Care Inspector

Gemma McDonnell, Social Care Inspector

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