

SC035499

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

A local authority operates and runs this home. The home provides care for up to six children and young people, and its plan is for them to live in medium- to long-term residential care. The home's manager has been registered since October 2019.

Visit dates: 21 to 22 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 19 November 2019

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 identified the following serious and widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit:

- the staff have not taken effective action when there has been concern about young people's welfare

- the registered manager's oversight of risk management is poor
- not all staff have received training in key areas, such as child sexual exploitation and/or criminal exploitation
- matching processes are poor and do not include the full information about the young people
- staffing levels do not support the safety and well-being of young people
- monitoring systems are not effective
- serious incidents are not always notified.

The care of children

The care that the young people receive does not adequately protect them from harm. Staff are not always able to collect young people when they are missing or away from the home. This is a missed opportunity for the staff to improve relationships, which have deteriorated between the staff and the young people.

The COVID-19 restrictions have added to the deterioration in relationships. Prior to this, two of the young people had experienced a sense of permanence living at this home. However, they are now saying that they do not want to remain living there. The staff team worked hard to engage the young people with games and activities during the COVID-19 lockdown period. However, the lack of access to external entertainment venues has impacted negatively on the relationships between the staff and young people. After the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, some young people have re-engaged with activities outside of the home. This includes equine therapy for one young person and the other has enjoyed the increased time with their family.

The most recent young person's placement at the home was made within quick succession of the last. This change in the home dynamic unsettled the existing young people, who had little time to adjust to the changes. The fast pace of this last admission did not allow the young people to establish a good rapport and build appropriate relationships with each other. One young person indicated that they felt isolated as a result of the changes in the home.

The young people have not engaged in their education despite them all having a place at a local school or college. The staff try to engage the young people and teach them about the value of having a good education. However, this has not been successful, and the young people have been out of formal education for many months.

Child-centred discussions facilitated by the staff about COVID-19 have helped to educate the young people about the pandemic and the risk of infection. This has helped the young people to better understand the government guidelines about how to stay safe. However, the young people have continued to go missing and be away from the home without consent.

The safety of children

Serious and widespread concerns have compromised the safety and well-being of the young people living at this home.

Staff have not been proactive at safeguarding the young people and protecting them from harm. Despite having a protocol with the police to actively search for young people when they are missing or away from the home, this is not consistent practice. The low staffing levels during the nights do not allow for staff to leave the premises and search for the young people. A recent incident involving two young people being exposed to serious harm was not prioritised. Staff did not collect the young people, leaving them in a risky situation for several hours before a taxi was sent by staff to collect them.

Staff attend strategy meetings following young people's risk-taking behaviours. However, at times, the information shared by the staff in these meetings has not always been appropriately detailed or clear about the extent of the risk. This does not support a shared understanding between safeguarding professionals about how to respond when young people are at risk. The police have commented about the 'unsafe practice' at the home.

The leaders, managers and staff have not demonstrated a good understanding of their responsibilities to protect the young people. Risk management plans are not clear, lack detail and do not identify appropriate strategies to mitigate young people's known risks. Management oversight of these documents is poor. Risk is often viewed in isolation and the connection between missing from home and child sexual exploitation is not made explicit in young people's plans. For some young people, this is despite there being clear signs of risk through sexual and criminal exploitation. This has left young people without adequate safety plans to protect them from harm.

Some young people are at risk of criminal exploitation and have experienced a decline in their safety and outcomes since moving into this home. Some young people have endangered themselves and others through serious behaviours that have led to them being criminalised. They have not always felt safe at home or in the community. This has led to at least one young person carrying weapons to keep themselves safe. Staff conducted a room search on the back of information about a young person having a knife and alcohol. These serious concerns have not resulted in appropriate safety plans to protect the young people.

Gaps in staff's knowledge about sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation have not been addressed during the COVID-19 period. This means that staff do not have the skills and knowledge to take effective action to reduce the potential risk to young people.

Leaders and managers

There are serious concerns about the leadership and management of the home. The home has functioned without a deputy manager for almost one year. This is because the current staff are not deemed to have the skills and experience to act up into this role. The registered manager has been working from home for part of the week during the COVID-19 period. This has left the staff without sufficient direction, oversight and support to manage the young people's challenging and complex behaviours.

Staffing shortfalls have led to the young people's needs and priorities being overlooked. Staff morale is low, and staff feel that their welfare has been neglected. Some night staff report having to stay awake during the night when they should be sleeping. This is usually a result of young people's missing and disruptive behaviours. The staff work long hours and report feeling too tired to collect missing young people. During this assurance visit, the provider indicated they had temporarily appointed an agency waking night worker to respond to young people's needs and behaviours. However, it is unclear when this additional member of staff commenced in the role due to the lack of clarity from the provider.

There are gaps in the quality and consistency of young people's records. In particular, physical interventions and missing-from-home records. These documents do not suitably demonstrate the manager's oversight and neither do they clarify the number of missing-from-home incidents for young people. This lack of clarity does not support good management of risk.

Monitoring systems in the home are not effective. They do not support the manager's understanding on the quality of care at the home. The manager has not always notified the regulator about serious incidents relating to child sexual or criminal exploitation. Ofsted was not informed about young people carrying weapons or about some other serious incidents. This has prevented the regulator from maintaining a good overview of how young people are safeguarded and how the home is managed.

The concerns identified during this assurance visit have led to the regulator issuing three compliance notices and imposing a restriction of numbers.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person 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; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child’s welfare. (Regulation 12(2)(a)(i)(iii)(vi))	01/11/2020
* 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— ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child; and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(2)(b)(h))	01/11/2020
* The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children’s home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—	01/11/2020

that arrangements are in place to— ensure that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home’s statement of purpose. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b)(2)(a))	
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; or there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(a)(e))	01/11/2020

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Children’s home details

Unique reference number: SC035499

Registered provider: East Riding of Yorkshire Council

Registered provider address: Room - AF97, Goole Council Offices, Church Street, Goole, East Yorkshire DN14 5BG

Responsible individual: Eoin Rush

Registered manager: Robert Bridgett

Inspectors

Tina Ruffles, Social Care Inspector
Rachel Ruth, Social Care Inspector

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