

SC037256

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This local authority home provides care for up to six children and young people aged between 11 and 18. The children may have experienced neglect and emotional abuse or had traumatic experiences that have left them vulnerable.

The registered manager has been in post since July 2020.

Visit dates: 3 to 4 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 19 February 2020

Previous inspection judgement: inadequate

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 no serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

In the last six months there have been two recent admissions. Prior to this, there has been a stable and settled period. Recently, there have been a few incidents. Currently, there are no widespread failures. There is, however, potential for the children to influence one another and become unsettled again.

Several of the children have moved on in a planned way. Some of the children have been housed close to the home under a supported housing scheme and are in college or work. They remain in contact with the staff and visited the home for an 18th birthday celebration in the garden.

There are few structured activities, although this is due to children's ages and interests mainly being in their peer group. Recently, following the restrictions being lifted, the children thoroughly enjoyed a group trip to a theme park with the staff.

Staff provide ample support for the children to spend time with their families. Parents can contact the staff and request support when the children are at their family homes. Staff have built relationships with the children's families and gained their trust. These relationships help the children to work positively towards family reunification.

The manager works closely with partner agencies to help the children work towards independence and to support their mental health needs. Support workers are visiting the home again or providing telephone contact for the children.

There is no system to monitor the children's physical health needs properly. A child who has a suppressed appetite requiring a high calorie intake does not eat regular meals. Staff do not record what the child has eaten in enough detail over a period to know their food intake.

Social workers for three of the children have provided positive feedback. Two social workers for children placed for over one year have noted significant improvements in the children's relationship with the staff.

Despite extensive improvements to the decor in some areas of the home, most of the carpets are worn and stained.

The safety of children

There have been some serious incidents and on two occasions the police have been called to the home. This is generally regarding two children leaving the home and

some behaviours that the staff were unable to manage without police support. The manager has failed to notify Ofsted about two incidents despite their severity and police involvement. A failure to notify makes it difficult for Ofsted to monitor the events at the home and reduces the effectiveness of this intended external safeguard.

Staff are aware of each child's risks and the combined risks of the group of children. The risks are evaluated prior to admission and in each child's risk assessment plan. Staff are guided by clear strategies in the management of risky situations. The guidance ensures that incidents such as self-injurious behaviour and substance misuse are managed in accordance with each child's needs.

There have been a number of children leaving the home without agreement. The frequency was higher at the start of the lockdown. The COVID-19 pandemic meant that the children were reported missing after a short period due to the risks of not social distancing. The staff report, record and follow up each incident to ensure that they know the children's whereabouts and aid their safe return. Following the admission of a child, these incidents increased, but they have since reduced after staff listened to the child's views and compromised on meeting friends.

Staff try to uphold the house rules and work together in a consistent and meaningful way. This consistency gives the children a clear message about expectations. Staff are kind and nurturing in their approach. They can see the reasons behind behaviours and understand the children's past experiences. Consequences for behaviour are linked to events and help the children to learn from their actions.

Staff are developing better skills in managing incidents and requests from the children. Weekly guidance from the home's psychologist supports the staff team. Although there are altercations, staff quickly calm situations before the other children become unsettled or there is any environmental damage.

Leaders and managers

The manager has been registered following a period as senior youth support practitioner. Her appointment followed an extremely unsettled period that resulted in an inadequate judgement. The manager has made some steady improvements throughout these challenges and the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. These positive changes are being tested as the number of children increases and the school term starts.

The independent monthly visits are regular, and the reports identify areas for improvement. However, the visitor does not make a clear safeguarding statement about whether the children's welfare is promoted. The visitor's opinion is unclear. Given the previous concerns, the importance of a clear summary following visits is crucial.

The managerial monitoring has improved. This is evident in the reports that the manager has reviewed. Staff receive supportive supervision that is regular and demonstrates that they are able to consider their actions and reflect on their practice. Records detail incidents that clearly link to actions including support sessions and updated risk assessments. These actions show that the children are guided and supported by staff.

The staffing structure has changed following an organisational restructure. The new shift pattern provides better continuity of care and encourages stable relationships.

Training has continued as best as possible during the six-month period with some training taking place virtually and some further training dates booked. This ensures that staff are confident in how to manage the children's needs.

The requirements made at the last inspection have been met and a further two requirements and two recommendations have been made.

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 registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40(4)(b))	30/10/2020
The independent person must produce a report about a visit ('the independent person's report') which sets out, in particular, the independent person's opinion as to whether— children are effectively safeguarded; and the conduct of the home promotes children's well-being. (Regulation 44(4)(a)(b))	30/10/2020

Recommendations

- Provide a nurturing environment that is welcoming. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
In particular, ensure that the stained carpets are replaced.
- The registered person should ensure that children are provided with nutritious meals suitable for each child's needs. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.8)
In particular, ensure that the children's individual dietary requirements are met.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC037256

Registered provider: Suffolk County Council

Registered provider address: Endeavour House, Russell Road, Ipswich IP1 2BX

Responsible individual: Clifford James

Registered manager: Louisa Nimmo

Inspector

Deirdra Keating, Social Care Inspector

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