

SC037281

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This local authority home provides care for up to six children aged between 10 and 17. The children may have experienced neglect and/or emotional abuse or had traumatic experiences that have left them vulnerable.

The manager has been registered since April 2020.

Visit dates: 2 to 3 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 26 February 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Declined in 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 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

There are currently four children living at the home. Since October 2020, the home has changed its statement of purpose to care for older children. This has altered the dynamics at the home. The staff have struggled with the shift in focus of care. The management team has failed to provide the staff with adequate training to develop the skill set required to work with older children. This led to an unsettled period of increased incidents and the children going missing from the home.

Changes to staff shift patterns have led to some staff turnover. The children have lacked a stable staff team and, consequently, struggled to develop trusting relationships with the staff.

Further challenges because of the COVID-19 lockdown period have limited the children's activities and routines. Being kept indoors created tensions in the children's relationships. The staff have tried to promote positive relationships through children's meetings and key-work sessions. However, the manager has failed to identify a clear strategy on how to manage the children's interpersonal relationships. This has meant that the work that has been undertaken has not been consistent or effective.

The staff do not always provide personalised care for the children. Despite one child struggling to develop a healthy sleeping pattern, the staff did not consider an individualised plan to meet his needs or consider specialist support. Lack of healthy sleep patterns has negatively affected his ability to attend education and engage in daytime activities. For another child, the staff identified her understanding of English as a challenging factor in communication. Despite this, the staff did not follow up accessing language support for the child. This means that the child may not be able to fully express herself and her preferences as she would like.

The staff have continued to support the children throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The staff have helped the children to maintain virtual and, later, appropriately socially distanced contact with their families.

The quality of the accommodation continues to require improvement. There is a damaged door and flaking paintwork in the communal areas. In one child's room, there is a water stain on the ceiling. Another child's bedroom walls are damaged. The manager said that there is a plan for the home to move properties. Nevertheless, the lack of investment in improving the home creates an uncomfortable lived experience for the children and an unwelcoming environment.

The safety of children

There has been a high number of incidents at the home requiring physical intervention. The staff have managed these safely, but the records do not consistently include all of the required information. When incidents have involved more than one child, not all the children have been offered a debrief. Therefore,

some children have not been given the opportunity to reflect on their actions and how they could have behaved differently. In addition, the managers do not consistently date the records. It is therefore not always clear how timely the managerial oversight has been.

Risk-management plans do not include full details of the children's individual risks. For example, the staff identified the internet and sexual exploitation as risks for one child. They described the difficulty of monitoring the child's mobile phone as it is in a different language. However, this risk was not mitigated in the child's risk assessment.

Although some risk assessments identify the children's individual risks, risk-reduction strategies are not detailed. This means that the staff do not have clear and effective guidance on how to keep the children safe.

Following initial changes to the group dynamics, there has been a significant number of missing-from-home episodes. The manager has actively ensured that the staff follow the missing-from-home protocols. The staff swiftly notify social workers and return home interviews are conducted. This has led to a recent reduction in children going missing from the home.

Allegations about staff are responded to swiftly and thoroughly. The manager makes appropriate referrals to the designated officer and works closely with social workers to ensure that the children are kept safe.

The staff take a thoughtful approach to managing negative behaviours. The staff include the children in deciding consequences that are meaningful and restorative, such as writing letters of apology. These actions encourage the children to understand the consequences of their behaviour and their impact on others.

Leaders and managers

The staff said that, although the manager has been supportive, there has been unhappiness at the changes in shift pattern and staff turnover. For some staff, a consequence has been a loss of confidence in their practice.

Some of the staff have yet to achieve a relevant level 3 diploma, despite working for the provider for over two years. There has been limited specialist training provided to the staff. The staff do not always distinguish between bullying, racism and antagonistic behaviours. There is a lack of clear guidance on how the staff are to challenge bullying and racist behaviours effectively. This increases the likelihood of these behaviours going unchecked.

Staff have monthly supervision. However, the supervision records do not demonstrate how practice issues have been fully explored or how the staff will reflect on and consider their learning and the changing dynamics of the home.

The manager monitors and reports on the home. However, the reports lack details of how actions will improve the quality of care and the time frame for these actions. This therefore limits the report's usefulness as a tool to support improvements.

Placement plans are not all up to date. The manager has not ensured that the staff record all changes to children's care and placement plans. This means that staff may not have important information about a child's circumstances to be able to respond appropriately.

The manager has provided a timely response to complaints. He has worked collaboratively with the community to consider feedback and how this can inform practice.

The manager has begun to develop professional partnerships to consider contextual risks. He has initiated plans for the local missing coordinator to attend regular team meetings to promote joint working with the staff.

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 quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children; use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed and furnished so as to— meet the needs of each child. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c)(i)) This particularly refers to ensuring that the repairs in the children's bedrooms are completed.	29 January 2021

The health and well-being standard is that— the health and well-being needs of children are met; children receive advice, services and support in relation to their health and well-being; and children are helped to lead healthy lifestyles. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff help each child to— achieve the health and well-being outcomes that are recorded in the child's relevant plans; understand the child's health and well-being needs and the options that are available in relation to the child's health and well-being, in a way that is appropriate to the child's age and understanding; understand and develop skills to promote the child's well-being. (Regulation 10 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iv)) This particularly refers to ensuring that children have individualised health plans that address their needs and are recorded in the children's care and placement plans.	29 January 2021
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust; an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and positive responses to other children and adults. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— help each child to develop socially aware behaviour; help each child to develop and practise skills to resolve conflicts positively and without harm to anyone;	29 January 2021

de-escalate confrontations with or between children, or potentially violent behaviour by children; understand and communicate to children that bullying is unacceptable; and have the skills to recognise incidents or indications of bullying and how to deal with them. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(ii)(iv)(xi)(xii)(xiii)) This particularly refers to ensuring that all staff undertake training on promoting diversity and managing bullying and racism and that staff understand how to challenge racist and bullying behaviours.	
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; help each child to understand how to keep safe; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)) This particularly refers to ensuring that the risk assessments explore all the children’s risks and vulnerabilities with clear guidance on how to mitigate those risks. In addition, ensure that the staff receive relevant training to enable them to meet the children’s identified needs.	29 January 2021
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children’s safety. The requirements are that—	30 April 2021

the individual has the appropriate experience, qualification and skills for the work that the individual is to perform.

For the purposes of paragraph (3)(b), an individual who works in the home in a care role has the appropriate qualification if, by the relevant date, the individual has attained—

the Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare (England) ("the Level 3 Diploma"); or

a qualification which the registered person considers to be equivalent to the Level 3 Diploma.

The relevant date is—

in the case of an individual who starts working in a care role in a home after 1st April 2014, the date which falls 2 years after the date on which the individual started working in a care role in a home; or

in the case of an individual who was working in a care role in a home on 1st April 2014, 1st April 2016.

The registered person may defer the relevant date if the individual—

does not work, or has not worked, in a care role in a home for a prolonged period; or

works, or has worked, in a care role in a home on a part-time basis.

(Regulation 32 (1) (3)(b) (4)(a)(b) (5)(a)(b) (6)(a)(b))

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that each child is provided with support (appropriate to their age and understanding) to communicate their views, wishes and feelings and participate as fully as possible in all aspects of their care planning and daily care. This may include the use of and support to use communication aids, equipment and/or any necessary language support. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 22, paragraph 4.6)
- The registered person should ensure that any child who has been restrained is given the opportunity express their feelings about their experience of the restraint as soon as is practicable, ideally within 24 hours of the restraint incident, taking the age of the child and the circumstances of the restraint into account. ('Guide to

the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 50, paragraph 13.2)

- The registered person must have systems in place so that all staff receive supervision of their practice which allows them to reflect on their practice and the needs of the children assigned to their care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2)
- The registered person must ensure that staff understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording of information on individual children in a way that will be helpful to the child. Specifically, ensure that placement plans are up to date and records are dated. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)
- The registered person should clearly identify any actions required for the next six 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: SC03728

Registered provider: Suffolk County Council

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

Responsible individual: Clifford James

Registered manager: Joseph Cox

Inspectors

Leemya McKeown, Social Care Inspector

Tom Anthony, Social Care Inspector

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