

SC039689

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The home is one of a number operated by the local authority. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to six children who may have emotional and social difficulties.

The manager has managed the home since January 2019, being registered by Ofsted in July 2019.

Visit dates: 16 to 17 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 20 August 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Requires improvement to be 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

Young people enjoy positive relationships with staff. The staff team is stable, enabling young people to develop meaningful relationships with them. Staff care about young people and act as good advocates for them. One social worker commented, 'I feel that staff present as committed and caring towards the young people. This shows by the relationships they are able to build with them.'

Staff demonstrate a good understanding of young people's individual needs. They are skilled at adapting their approach to get the best out of young people. Young people that are approaching independence are being helped to acquire the skills that they will need to live on their own.

The majority of the home has been redecorated since the last inspection. It is a welcoming environment. Young people have been involved in this, and as a result, are respectful of their home, rarely causing damage. There is a fish tank in the home and young people take care of the fish. One young person also has a hamster, as she was able to demonstrate her commitment to look after a pet and take responsibility for it.

In the main, young people managed lockdown well. They engaged in activities with staff during this time, such as doing online general knowledge quizzes and enjoying a barbeque together in the garden.

Staff support family contact. They appreciate the significance of these relationships and work with families, not against them. One young person was enabled to meet with his family on his birthday during lockdown by staff arranging for them to visit the home and spend time together in the large garden. Staff listened to what the young person wanted and managed this safely.

Young people know what the rules of the home are and largely abide by them. Staff help young people develop socially acceptable behaviour. Young people spoken to were positive about the home and said they were happy living here.

Young people are now back in school or college, albeit often on a reduced timetable. They are slowly getting back to normal but are benefiting from having this structure to their day.

The safety of children

Safeguarding practice has strengthened since the last inspection. Impact risk assessments support decision making about the suitability of a new young person being placed in the home. Similarly, the manager has used this process to illustrate to senior managers that a potential placement is likely to cause disruption to the existing group of young people, if it were to go ahead. This has helped to stabilise the home over recent months.

There has been a focus on addressing any bullying incidents in the home since the last inspection. All staff have completed anti-bullying training and a leaflet and workbook has been developed for young people. On the odd occasion when there have been concerns about bullying type behaviours, staff have revisited this work with the young people involved and the situation has improved. One young person, spoken to during this assurance visit, told the inspector how the situation had quickly been resolved by staff and was no longer a problem.

Lockdown did not result in a particular increase in challenging behaviour. While there have been some incidents and young people were beginning to get frustrated as time went on, they managed this period well. Physical interventions are rare and low level when they have been required. Similarly, there have been incidents of young people going missing from home, although, generally, staff know where they will be going. Staff are currently providing outreach support to two young people, who are likely to be remaining with those they are currently living with, following a change to their care plans. However, staff are monitoring young people's safety and well-being in the interim.

While Ofsted have been notified about some serious incidents in the home and the manager has sought advice about some missing incidents, concerns remain regarding the threshold for serious incident notifications. A requirement was made regarding such notifications at the last inspection and is repeated to ensure full compliance. While the necessary action has been taken by the manager, Ofsted has been unable to evaluate this at the time of the incident, as no notification has been made.

Leaders and managers

The registered manager is appropriately qualified and experienced. He is supported by two experienced deputy managers. Together, they are keen to drive forward improvements in the home. Staff talk positively about the support they receive from managers and describe the home as being the most settled it has been for a long time. Staff know each other well and feel that good use is made of their individual skills and interests. This helps to keep staff motivated.

There have been difficulties in accessing training for staff during the pandemic. A number of staff need to attend refresher restraint training and this is being prioritised in the return to face-to-face training. However, concerns regarding shortfalls in staff training on bullying and self-harming behaviour were actioned prior to lockdown, ensuring that staff have the skills they need to deal with these behaviours effectively.

The external monitoring of the home continued to take place during the pandemic, although these were completed remotely. The independent visitor was able to access documents electronically and speak with staff and young people. This enabled her to monitor young people's progress despite not being able to visit the home.

The manager uses a monthly audit form to help him monitor the effectiveness of the home and highlight any concerns. He has added a section on bullying behaviours to this to help him monitor such events, although it is too soon to assess the effectiveness of this.

Action has been taken to address the seven requirements and two recommendations made at the last full inspection. One requirement relating to serious incident notifications is repeated at this inspection, as highlighted above. One further requirement is made regarding sending updated copies of the statement of purpose to Ofsted in a timely manner, as is required by regulation. This document had been appropriately updated a number of months ago, but a copy was not sent to Ofsted, preventing review.

Social workers speak positively about the home. They report that communication is good. One social worker commented, 'I have no concerns regarding the home. I feel that they have coped well in a very difficult situation.'

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
Statement of purpose The registered person must compile in relation to the children's home a statement ("the statement of purpose") which covers the matters listed in Schedule 1. The registered person must— notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (1)(3)(b))	31/10/2020
Notification of a serious event 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;	31/10/2020

an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious;

there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there;

a child protection enquiry involving a child—

is instigated; or

concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or

there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious.

(Regulation 40 (4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(i)(ii)(e))

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC039689

Registered provider: Lancashire County Council

Registered provider address: PO Box 78, County Hall, Fishergate, Preston PR1 8XJ

Responsible individual: John Simpson

Registered manager: Warren Howarth

Inspectors

Mandy Williams, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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