

SC040191

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The home is run by a registered charity. The home provides long-term placements for up to four children who have traumatic backgrounds and may have experienced neglect and/or emotional abuse.

The manager of the home was registered in October 2016.

Visit dates: 12 to 13 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 30 September 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 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

Children are making good progress at this home. One child has recently moved on from the home after a short placement. She was well supported during her moves into and out of the home. This was important for her as her move in was an emergency move in challenging circumstances. She has been able to return to a foster placement in line with her plans.

Children's education was interrupted because of the COVID-19 restrictions. The children were reluctant to engage in education at the home despite staff encouragement. Since the restrictions have been lifted, there has been progress, most notably for one child who is doing well and attending college after three years out of education.

Staff support children and help to meet their emotional needs. For one child, this has helped her to understand and share her feelings. She has been able to continue doing this after moving from the home.

Children's plans are generally clear and provide suitable information for staff, but in some cases, plans have not been updated with significant changes or they lack information. Staff are aware of children's current situation, so the impact of this is limited. However, if plans are not thorough and accurate, this can limit how well all staff, including new and relief staff, work consistently with children.

Children's views contribute to their plans and the running of the home. Staff have meaningful conversations with children and listen to their views. When their views cannot be acted on, staff explain this to the children, so that they understand the reasons why.

Managers are careful in assessing which children should move into the home. This helps them to match children well and prioritise the needs of those children already living at the home, so that their placements are not avoidably jeopardised.

The safety of children

Staff help children to reduce risk-taking behaviour by talking to them about risks and using resources such as online courses to help them understand the risks and how to keep themselves safer. The staff are helping the children to understand the way that they need to behave to keep themselves and others safe from COVID-19.

Children have access to the internet at the home. Staff monitor and limit this in line with each child's needs. One child wanted to start using social media and staff helped her to do this safely, so that she could have similar experiences of using the internet as other children of her age.

The independent visitor identified that the back door was not always being unlocked in the morning, as required in the fire risk assessment. Managers have made staff aware of the need to do this and are monitoring to make sure that it is done.

Earlier in the year, there was a time when children's behaviour was particularly challenging. This was compounded by a higher than usual level of inexperienced staff in the team. Through this period, the police were only called when necessary, and due to a good working relationship with the police, the children have not been criminalised. Managers are supporting staff and helping them to develop skills and build relationships with the children.

Since the beginning of April 2020, there have not been any physical interventions. There were some incidents of children going missing from the home, but there have not been any since 18 May 2020. One child who used to go missing has stopped. Records of children's missing episodes do not include details of the return home interviews that are said to have happened, which limits the otherwise good progress in this area.

Leaders and managers

Although the staff team is relatively inexperienced, managers are putting support in place to help new staff learn the skills that they need. Managers have been innovative in making sure that all staff get the training that they need, even when the COVID-19 restrictions have meant that the usual face-to-face training was not available.

COVID-19 and sickness have had an impact on staffing levels at times. Managers and senior leaders have addressed this by using core staff from the organisation to provide cover at the home when it is needed.

Managers have made sure that the COVID-19 restrictions have not prevented children from keeping in contact with their social workers and families. Children who do not like using video calls have kept in face-to-face contact, and another child, whose family were isolating, was able to use video calls to keep in touch with them.

The registered manager understands the challenges that the home has faced and the areas for development. There have been some recent changes to the senior management team with a new responsible individual and operations manager in post, both of whom are developing a good knowledge of the home.

External monitoring visits by the independent visitor have continued to take place during the COVID-19 restrictions, with some use of virtual visits. The independent visitor has identified issues and made recommendations for improvement during her visits. In a recent report, she did not make a clear statement on her opinion of whether children are safeguarded effectively and whether the conduct of the home promotes children's well-being. This limits the impact of her reports to some degree.

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 ensure that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month. 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 (1)(4)(a)(b))	27/11/2020

Recommendations

- Staff should be familiar with the home's policies on record keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective, and clear recording. ('Guide to children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC040191

Registered provider: Break

Registered provider address: Schofield House, 1 Spar Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR6 6BX

Responsible individual: Rachel Leslie

Registered manager: Lee Roberts

Inspector

Clive Lucas, Social Care Inspector

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