

SC047483

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This privately run home offers care for up to three children who may have experienced neglect, abuse or trauma which has left them vulnerable.

A manager is in post.

Visit dates: 12 to 13 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 2 October 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 told the inspectors that living at the home has had a positive impact on their lives. Children take pride in their home and, with the help of the staff, have been able to personalise their bedrooms to reflect their individual styles and preferences. Consequently, children are happy and settled living at the home.

Children talk openly with staff and share any worries they have. Staff discuss a range of topics with children that are individualised to their needs. These topics include sexuality, healthy relationships, the COVID-19 pandemic, and understanding about aspects of race and racism. This keeps children informed and educated on issues that are important to them.

Staff support children to see their family and friends. During the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have used video calls and phone calls to enable children to stay in touch with the people who are important to them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have continued to engage children in their education by supporting online learning when children have been unable to attend school. This has included helping children to access laptops to aid their learning. As children have begun to return to school, staff have ensured that they have been supported to access the right education to reflect their individual needs.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the staff have continued to ensure that children access primary health services. When services have reopened, staff have helped children to access gyms, to promote their physical health. One child enjoys going to the gym three times a week. Staff have also worked with the children to cook nutritious, balanced meals. As a result, children are in good health.

Staff have minimised the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children. Children have been kept informed and educated about the restrictions. Throughout the national lockdown, staff were creative in finding different ways to engage children in activities to keep them occupied and safe.

The safety of children

Staff understand the children's individual needs and behaviours. Staff speak confidently about the different behaviour management strategies that they use to keep children safe, including distraction, humour and rewarding positive behaviour.

Staff rarely use negative consequences to manage children's behaviour. These are viewed as a last resort. On some occasions, children can reduce the severity of the consequence by demonstrating positive behaviour.

Physical interventions rarely happen. On the one occasion this did happen, staff managed the situation well.

Staff do not tolerate bullying in the home and intervene when there are disagreements and altercations between children. Staff talk to children about their behaviour and explain why it is not acceptable. This child-centred approach helps to encourage children to build and maintain positive relationships with others.

Staff are good at following children's behaviour risk assessment and support plans. However, these are not always brought up to date when changes occur. For example, one child's plan states that he is still attending Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, when this has stopped. This has the potential to create confusion.

The manager has updated the home's location risk assessment to identify risks within the local area. However, the document does not include how these risks will be reduced. Despite this shortfall, the manager's partnership working with the local police helps to ensure that children are kept safe from any potential risks in the local area.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that all staff who work in the home are safely recruited. Full and satisfactory recruitment checks are not always completed when new staff are starting at the home. Managers have not verified why staff have left their previous employment when they have worked with children and/or vulnerable adults. The manager has not viewed the most recent certificate from the Disclosure and Barring Service for one member of staff. Furthermore, safer recruitment checks for a senior manager were not completed or available for inspectors to view prior to her starting work. These shortfalls have the potential to place young people at risk.

The staff and managers have implemented measures to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 within the home by following the government guidelines.

Leaders and managers

A new manager has been in post since April 2020 and has overseen the care of children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staff feel supported by the manager. They have regular supervision, informal discussions and team meetings. This helps staff to reflect and develop their practice.

Social workers, school staff and parents are pleased with the progress that children are making. Good communication from the manager and staff keeps them up to date and informed about the care the children receive.

There has been one complaint since April 2020. The complaint was taken seriously and investigated by the manager. The complaint was resolved without further issues arising.

Staff have completed a range of training to meet the children's needs. The manager is in the process of updating the training matrix as this does not reflect all the training that staff have completed.

The independent visitor has continued to provide monthly reports to the home during the COVID-19 pandemic. This provides the manager with external monitoring of the home.

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 recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The requirements are that— full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1)(3)(d))	20/11/2020

Recommendations

- Under regulation 46, the registered person should review the appropriateness and suitability of the location and premises of the home at least once a year. The review should include the identification of any risks and opportunities presented by the home's location and strategies for managing these. ('Guide to the Children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 64, paragraph 15.1)
- Regulations 35 to 39 detail the records that must be kept in children's homes. All children's case records (regulation 36) must be kept up to date and stored securely while they remain in the home. Case records must be kept up to date and signed and dated by the author of each entry. Children's case records must be kept for 75 years from the date of birth of the child, or if the child dies before the age of 18, for 15 years from the date of his or her death. ('Guide to the Children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)
This relates to children's records and staff's training records.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC047483

Registered provider: Mulberry House Care Homes Limited

Registered provider address: 2 Railway Street, Stafford, Staffordshire ST16 2EA

Responsible individual: Joy Bradley

Registered manager: Post Vacant

Inspectors

Lisa O'Donovan, Social Care Inspector
Alison Cooper, Social Care Inspector

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