

SC056259

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The home is owned and operated by a private provider. The premises, which comprise a main home and a smaller home in the grounds, are registered to provide care and accommodation for up to six children and young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. There is a manager in post and he became registered in September 2019.

Visit dates: 13 to 14 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 6 March 2020

Previous inspection judgement: sustained 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

Staff provide good nurturing care to the children and young people. The children and young people enjoy living at the warm and welcoming home which staff personalise with photographs of days out, activities and the children and young people's families. The children and young people are proud of their bedrooms and possessions, including one child who owns a pet hamster. They experience stability and one professional said, 'The change in [name of young person] is amazing. The staff's work is life changing. This is the most settled he has ever been.'

The children and young people's education continued during the COVID-19 lockdown. Most children and young people were taught virtually, and staff drove one child into school every day so they could keep attending. This kept the children and young people motivated for when the new school term began.

Staff support the children and young people to understand the pandemic and how to keep themselves safe. This is through staff having discussions with the children and young people to share national health and government advice. The staff use good hygiene measures around the home, which contributes to a healthier environment.

Staff help the children and young people to keep busy and active. During lockdown, staff took the children out for local woodland walks, and they cared for horses, cooked meals and had movie nights together. This helped the children and young people to feel that things were normal and stopped them feeling scared or anxious about the virus.

As COVID-19 measures eased, the staff took the children and young people to new places where they gained different skills. This included going camping and one young person learned to put up a tent, cook on a campfire and sleep outdoors. This gives the children and young people new shared experiences and strengthens relationships with staff.

The safety of children

Staff understand the children and young people's individual risks and vulnerabilities. Regular safeguarding training and team discussions about the children and young people enhance this understanding. As a result, staff know what signs to look out for to indicate a child or young person may be at risk of exploitation or harm. This knowledge helps to better protect children.

Staff have good relationships with safeguarding professionals. They share local intelligence and attend meetings with the police and others. This multi-agency approach to risk management has contributed to a reduction in the number of missing episodes for one young person. Consequently, the young person is at a lower risk of harm and exploitation.

The staff team benefits from reflective discussions with the provider's psychologist. This helps them to understand the causes of the children and young people's behaviour and emotional responses. Children and young people also have comprehensive and individualised behaviour management plans. Staff use the strategies outlined in the plans, alongside their increased understanding, to manage behaviour effectively. This enables staff to change how they react to the children and young people, who benefit from an insightful staff team and are less frustrated.

Staff successfully distract, calm and reflect with children and young people when required. There have been no reported occasions when staff have had to hold children and young people to manage difficult behaviours. Instead, the staff team's consistent approach has led to the children and young people learning how to self-regulate their emotions.

Leaders and managers

The registered manager provides strong leadership to the staff team. He has introduced monitoring tools which provide him with effective oversight of the staff's practice. He makes sure that the children and young people's plans and documents are kept up to date and relevant.

The manager knows the children and young people well. This is because he has an open-door policy for the children and young people, and the staff, which gives him a good understanding of what is happening at the home. He promotes reflective discussions within the staff team, which the staff spoken to said that they enjoy. This is developing an openness and transparency between the staff members.

The staff benefit from regular training and supervision. The manager made sure that this continued during the COVID-19 lockdown. Staff report they feel supported by the manager and enjoy the additional in-house training that the provider's psychologist brings.

A previous requirement was made about actions taken by the home in response to allegations. Managers now respond appropriately to concerns raised by following processes and promptly involving the local authority designated officer. This contributes to keeping the children and young people safe.

Staff use a therapeutic approach and are becoming more nurturing of the children and young people. However, there have been a few occasions when some staff have been overfamiliar when caring for the children and young people. This has blurred professional boundaries and in response the manager is arranging extra training for staff on how to interact with the children and young people. This will refresh staff's understanding of the boundaries of a professional therapeutic approach.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Expectations of standards of behaviour should be high for all staff and children in the home. These standards should be clear and unambiguous. The development of safe, stable and secure relationships with staff in the home should be central to the ethos of the home and support the development of secure attachments that, where appropriate, persist over time. ('The Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.11). This is with reference to staff learning how to maintain professional boundaries with children and young people.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC056259

Registered provider: Pebbles Care Limited

Registered provider address: 2 The Calls, Leeds LS2 7JU

Responsible individual: David Hitchen

Registered manager: Roy Kirk

Inspectors

Rachel Ruth, Social Care Inspector

Tina Ruffles, Social Care Inspector

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