

SC063110

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This local authority home provides care for up to four girls aged between eight and 17 who may have experienced neglect and/or emotional abuse or had a traumatic experience that has left them vulnerable.

The home has been without a registered manager since 13 January 2020. A new manager joined the home in March 2020 and has applied to Ofsted for registration.

Visit dates: 30 September to 1 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 identified the following serious and widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit:

- Several areas of the home are damaged or poorly maintained. Damage has gone unrepaired for some time.
- The manager was unable to demonstrate robust recruitment and vetting of agency staff.
- The manager has failed to provide oversight of practice following significant incidents at the home.
- There is no consistent approach to stop the children smoking in the home. Attempts to challenge this behaviour are ineffective.
- Some children are experiencing a negative impact on their progress, safety and well-being since coming to live at the home, with incidents of going missing, offending and smoking.
- There have been a high number of police callouts to the home to manage the children's behaviour.
- The children have gained access to the staff office and taken keys.

The care of children

One child has moved into the home since 1 April 2020. There are currently three children living at the home. The home is unsettled and there are times when the staff do not have control of the children's behaviour. Incidents go on into the early hours of the morning, including playing loud music, breaking into the staff offices and assaults on staff. These disrupt the children's sleep patterns and contribute to the unsettled culture. The coronavirus pandemic has led to staff shortages and delays in some staff training.

The manager and staff have not removed obscenities written on bedroom walls, in the corridors and in children's bathrooms. Some of this graffiti has been present for several months. Paint is peeling from the bathroom wall. The sanitary disposal bin is broken. A child's bedding is worn and a pillow is badly frayed. Lack of care and attention to children's bedrooms and bathrooms does not make children feel valued or encourage them to take pride in their home.

Two children have poor school attendance. Parents said that they are worried about the lack of behavioural boundaries and children missing education. One child attends regularly, but this child said that she is kept awake into the early hours due to incidents during the night, leaving her tired. On one occasion, this made her late for school. Daily logs show a lack of structured activity during the day and some children stay in bed late into the morning. This does not help to prepare them for good education routines.

The children have warm relationships with some of the staff. Some external professionals said that there has been a positive change in aspects of care; the staff make themselves more available and have been more proactive with undertaking activities with the children.

The staff helped the children to maintain contact with their families during lockdown and have supported face-to-face meetings since the lockdown restrictions have lifted.

The safety of children

One child regularly self-harms and the other children sometimes witness these incidents. Despite the child being known to self-harm, there was a delay in action being taken to prevent further incidents. Children's risk assessments do not clearly set out the actions that the staff need to take to manage and prevent children from harming themselves.

The staff have called the police to the home, in response to incidents, on 16 occasions since 1 April 2020.

The children have gained access to the staff office and taken the staff's keys and have been able to enter areas of the building that contain hazards. At the time of the assurance visit, the whereabouts of some confidential records taken by the children were not known and the manager was unclear whether key fobs have been returned. The responsible individual has since confirmed that the records are accounted for. A child has used a staff member's key fob to access other children's bedrooms and the staff sleep-in room. This put the staff and children concerned at increased risk of harm and allegations.

The children get along together but they draw each other into negative behaviours. One child, who is described as vulnerable, goes missing with another child from the home. This is a new behaviour that has started since the admission of another child and puts her at risk of harm. In addition, this child has started smoking since the admission of another child into the home. This vulnerable child's experiences, safety and well-being have recently deteriorated.

Children smoke in the home. The manager has not given clear direction to the staff on how to manage this. Lack of clear boundaries and consequences means that children are not responding to requests to stop. Smoking indoors poses a fire risk and has the potential to compromise the safety of children and staff.

Children raise concerns with staff and the staff listen to the children's views. Children have benefited from some restorative work following concerns being raised.

Leaders and managers

COVID-19 has had an impact on staffing because of shielding and isolating requirements. There has also been an impact on accessibility of tradespeople due to COVID-19.

The manager could not evidence adequate review of serious incidents that have happened at the home. The manager was unable to say who had discussed the incidents with the staff concerned or to provide any evidence of learning, action to prevent recurrence or whether there were any identified training needs. Failure to review incidents and take forward any learning means that the likelihood of recurrence remains, placing children and others at continued risk of harm.

Shortfalls in the environment were raised at the interim inspection in March 2020. Although there is a plan to undertake refurbishment, there is no date scheduled for this work, and in the interim the children are living in an environment that is of a poor standard. The manager confirmed that some aspects of the damage have been left for several months. Consequently, children do not live in a home that helps them to feel valued.

External monitoring by the independent visitor has failed to raise concerns about the environment. Monitoring was raised as a requirement at the interim inspection. Lack of robust independent monitoring means that opportunities to identify shortfalls and recommend actions are missed.

The manager was unable to provide evidence of sufficient safe recruitment checks on agency staff. Lack of appropriate checks puts children at risk of being cared for by unsuitable adults.

Parents said that they are not kept updated about incidents, including when children go missing. Education professionals said that there have been communication difficulties but that things are beginning to improve in this area with more regular information sharing.

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—	30/10/2020

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)) In particular, remove graffiti and ensure that children's bedrooms and bathrooms are clean and maintained to an acceptable standard.	
The education standard is that children make measurable progress towards achieving their educational potential and are helped to do so. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure that staff— help each child to achieve the child's education and training targets, as recorded in the child's relevant plans; help a child who is excluded from school, or who is of compulsory school age but not attending school, to access educational and training support throughout the period of exclusion or non-attendance and to return to school as soon as possible. (Regulation 8 (1)(2)(a)(i)(viii)) In particular, ensure that children are supported to fully attend school and that they arrive on time, and that children benefit from good routines that prepare them for school attendance and engagement.	30/10/2020
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—	30/10/2020

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; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm; that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed, furnished and maintained so as to protect each child from avoidable hazards to the child's health. (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(i)(iv)(b)(d))*	
The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose; use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(a)(h))*	30/10/2020
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The registered person may only— employ an individual to work at the children's home; or if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow	30/10/2020

that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3).

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)(2)(a)(b)(3)(d))

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC063110

Registered provider: Suffolk County Council

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

Responsible individual: Clifford James

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Angela Weston, Social Care Inspector

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