

SC063116

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This privately owned home provides care and accommodation for up to six children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. Currently, all the children are boys aged between 9 and 12.

The manager was registered with Ofsted in February 2012.

Visit dates: 16 to 17 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 26 February 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Outstanding

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

A cohesive and dedicated staff team has enabled the children to thrive under the restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it was difficult for some children, on the whole they remained engaged in their learning when making the transition to home schooling and continue to do so now they have returned to the classroom. This is the result of the skilled and individualised support provided to each child by staff during these difficult processes of change.

Staff have responded positively and enthusiastically to the challenges presented by COVID-19 and have provided the children with regular, thoughtfully planned opportunities for fun, stimulation and learning. Exceptional effort and commitment by staff enabled the eagerly awaited summer house holiday to take place. For some children, this was a first-time experience, but all speak with enthusiasm and excitement and have positive memories of their many and varied holiday experiences and activities.

During this period, relationships and understanding between the children, and between children and staff, have deepened. There has been particular benefit for the two children who moved in shortly before lockdown. All the children have settled into the routines and culture of the home and express feelings of belonging and attachment to the home and to the staff. According to one placing social worker, her recently placed child told her, 'For the first time in my life I am at a place where I can feel that people really care about me.'

The staff team responded quickly and effectively to the restrictions to personal contact imposed by COVID-19 guidance on social distancing and were able to maintain, and, in some instances, improve, the children's time with their families. Placing social workers speak highly of the consistency and quality of care provided by the staff and the progress that children are making.

The safety of children

Children's plans, discussions with staff and observation of staff and child interactions all clearly show that each child's needs and vulnerabilities are well understood. Sensitive and vigilant staff are equipped to keep the children safe. The children say that they feel safe and are confident that the staff will protect them if they felt threatened in any way. One child said, 'This is the first place where I feel safe.'

The consistent boundaries, routines and structure maintained by the staff contribute significantly to the children's feelings of safety and security.

The children understand the threats posed by COVID-19 and have embraced the necessary restrictions and practices required to keep themselves and others safe. They are also prepared for the possibility of renewed lockdown restrictions. The children's understanding of their situation and preparedness are results of a caring and attentive staff team.

Meticulous planning ensured that the children were kept safe in all respects during their house holiday and were able to enjoy and fully experience the much-anticipated event.

Leaders and managers

The novel challenges posed by the pandemic have shown that the leadership of the home is fit and able to remain strongly focused on the well-being of the children at all times. Flexibility, thoughtfulness and creativity have been key features of the leadership during this period.

The cohesive and mutually supportive staff team follows the example set by the registered manager in being entirely focused on the needs and well-being of the children. The collective decision by the staff to all self-isolate together with the children, in the event of someone testing positive to COVID-19, reflects their commitment to the children.

The registered manager has been able to maintain the necessary management and administrative activities, for example staff supervision, induction, mandatory training, and probation, during this challenging period, which reflects high levels of organisation and good administration. The registered manager closely monitors all aspects of the running of the home and the care of the children, but is not currently using this information, as intended by regulation 45, to further improve the quality of care being provided.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person is responsible for deciding what each (regulation 45) review should focus on, based on the specific circumstances of the home at that particular time and any areas of high risk to the children that the home is designed to care for, such as missing or exploitation. They will also consider what information or data recorded in the home will form part of the evidence base for their analysis and conclusions. There is no expectation that the registered person will review the home against every part of the Quality Standards every six months – registered persons should use their professional judgement to decide which factors to focus on. The review should enable the registered person to identify areas of strength and possible weakness in the home's care, which will be captured in the written report. The report should clearly identify any actions required for the next 6 months of delivery within the home and how those actions will be addressed. The whole review process and the resulting report should be

used as a tool for continuous improvement in the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 65, paragraph 15.4)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC063116

Registered provider: Ethelbert Specialist Homes Limited

Registered provider address: Ethelbert Specialist Homes Limited, 17 Leigh Road, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 5EU

Responsible individual: Leslie Davenport

Registered manager: Kerri Matthews

Inspector:

John Pledger, Social Care Inspector

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