

SC066115

# Assurance visit

## Information about this children's home

The children's home is operated by a private organisation. The home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four children or young people who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The registered manager has been in post since February 2020.

**Visit dates:** 6 to 7 October 2020

**Previous inspection date:** 15 May 2018

**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**

The home has managed the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic well. Staff have worked tirelessly to maintain good routines, which has kept children interested and positively motivated. For example, children have continued to attend education during the day and enjoy a range of positive and stimulating activities during evenings, weekends and holidays.

Staff work hard to provide children with a much-needed sense of belonging. They recognise the importance of strong parent-like attachments and make every effort to be reliable and positive adult role models.

Children benefit from age-appropriate boundaries. These boundaries help children to develop feelings of being safe, secure and well cared for. One child said, 'The staff are caring and understand me. They always told me that I could do well and didn't give up. They gave me ways of coping that have helped me a lot.'

During the pandemic, staff have helped children to understand and adapt how they keep in touch with the important people in their lives. One child spoke about some of her frustrations with the rules but recognises that staff are doing all that they can.

Children's views and opinions are welcomed and encouraged. Children talked about spending one-to-one time with staff, who they say are interested in them. One child was keen to tell the inspector about the storybooks that staff read to him at bedtime.

## **The safety of children**

Staff act as any reasonable parent would do in ensuring that children are given the right supervision and support, relative to their age and understanding. Staff take an educational approach that enables children to understand risks, such as those associated with the internet. An independent reviewing officer said, '[Name of child] is currently working towards having a smart phone. [Name of child] was able to tell me about how this was incentivised and some of the work that staff are doing to educate about the risks when using the internet.'

High levels of supervision and positive engagement deter children from going missing from home. Protocols are in place if this should happen, and have been used effectively for one child who persistently went missing from home and no longer lives at the home.

The need and demand for attention is constantly high for these children. Staff understand each child well and demonstrate patience and resilience. They recognise when children are struggling to control their emotions and make every effort to support them to regain control. When this is not possible, staff utilise their training in the caring application of physical restraint, which is required frequently for two particularly volatile young children.

COVID-19 restrictions and the need to social distance has meant that some staff have yet to complete training in using restraint. Managers have offered a clear directive to these staff, advising them that they should not restrain children. However, the inspector noted an isolated incident when an untrained staff member performed a low-level restraint on a small child. While it is acknowledged that no harm came to the child, a recommendation is made.

### **Leaders and managers**

The home is run effectively by a child-centred manager who aspires to provide high standards of care. She has been in post since February 2020 and there is good evidence of her promoting an improvement agenda. This is confirmed by staff who describe the manager as having high expectations and being firm but fair.

The manager maintains good oversight of staff practice, care planning and children's progress. She implements a range of effective internal quality assurance processes that are used to promote an improvement agenda. This monitoring activity is further enhanced by the monthly scrutiny of an independent visitor.

Staffing has been a challenge at times. However, every effort has been made to limit the number of people coming into the home. Although children have found this difficult at times, every effort has been made to maintain continuity of care as far as is practicably possible.

Social workers and independent reviewing officers provided positive feedback. They spoke about staff's nurturing approach and recognised the improvements in children's behaviour. One independent reviewing officer said, '[Name of child] came from a very chaotic background having had several placement breakdowns. Since moving to this home, she has settled, and her restraints have reduced significantly. This is down to the nurturing care and her positive relationships with staff.'

Since taking over at the home, the manager has maintained good communication with her Ofsted inspector, keeping her informed about serious incidents in the home. However, the manager has failed to notify Ofsted of an incident when the police were called to the home to assist staff in managing children's behaviour.

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

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person is responsible for ensuring that all staff have been adequately trained in the principles of restraint and any restraint techniques appropriate to the needs of the children the home is set up to care for as defined in the home's statement of purpose. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 49, section 9.57)

Specifically, ensure that staff who have not been trained in restraint techniques follow the directive given by managers not to restrain children.

- Regulation 40 (4) requires the registered person to notify Ofsted and other relevant persons if one of the situations specified in regulation 40 (4)(a)–(d) occurs, or if there is an incident relating to the protection, safeguarding or welfare of a child living in the home which the registered person considers to be serious (Regulation 40 (4)(e)). ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 63, section 14.10)

## Children's home details

**Unique reference number:** SC066115

**Registered provider:** Keys ACE Limited

**Registered provider address:** Second Floor, Maybrook House, Queensway, Halesowen, Worcestershire B63 4AH

**Responsible individual:** Sarah Haworth

**Registered manager:** Jaime Meller

## Inspector

Paul Scott, Social Care Inspector

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