

SC363268

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This home is owned by a private company. Its statement of purpose specifies that it will provide care and accommodation for up to three children who have social and/or emotional difficulties.

The manager was registered with Ofsted on 3 April 2019.

Visit dates: 15 to 16 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 2 July 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 continue to benefit from living in a well-managed home. All staff understand the model of care outlined in the statement of purpose. The staff are very focused on the children's individual needs and work closely as a team to ensure that they experience consistent care. Records of the conversations that staff have with the children evidence the positive approach and strategies used to build trusting relationships. As a result of this positive approach, all the children are very settled.

Staff and managers are aware of the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the children's overall emotional health and well-being. Well-thought-out plans and strategies drawn up by the staff have lessened this by keeping the children's daily routines as normal as possible. This has included working with the organisation's school staff to ensure that all children continue to attend school regularly in a COVID-19 secure way.

Children have also been supported by the staff to remain in touch with the important people in their lives. Using a mixture of technology and socially distanced visits, children have seen or spoken to friends, professionals and family members throughout. However, the staff have also acknowledged how difficult this has been and have taken children's wishes and feelings into account when making decisions. One professional spoken to during the inspection, described how the staff had listened to a child's wishes about wanting to see their family during the holidays and advocated appropriately on their behalf to get this agreed.

Children enjoy participating in a wide range of activities in their community and the staff recognise the importance of these. Because of this, and during the lockdown period, the staff quickly reviewed the children's activity plans to ensure that they remained engaged and occupied. This included ensuring that the children had one-to-one time with the staff as well as in groups. The children also enjoyed two group holidays as restrictions were eased. Not only did this reduce conflict between peers, but relationships between the staff and the children blossomed during this time.

The safety of children

Managers and staff are committed to keeping the children safe. Serious incidents are rare, but when they do occur, every opportunity is used to prevent a reoccurrence. This includes reviewing and reflecting on incidents to see what can be learned. Following one incident, some creative thinking by the registered manager resulted in the children swapping bedrooms to meet their individual needs. This now means that they have the space and opportunity to be as independent as possible and the risks have been reduced.

The registered manager has worked hard to change the staff's approach to incidents of challenging behaviour. By taking a hands-off approach, the number of physical interventions on the children has reduced significantly over the past few months. When incidents do occur, the records evidence that these types of interventions are used as a last resort and that the staff are now following written guidance and the children's individual plans.

The staff continue to help the children to understand, manage and/or take responsibility for their own behaviour. All children have a 'safe space', where carefully chosen items are kept for them, so that they can go and play if they are upset. They are also encouraged to express how they feel following incidents, by writing down their version of events and thinking about ways to repair and rebuild relationships.

Caring staff have helped the children to adapt and cope with the recent anxieties arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The staff have taught the children how to keep safe and have provided them with child-friendly masks to wear when necessary. They have also enabled one child to continue with their paper round throughout the lockdown period, by working closely with the paper shop to ensure that the correct measures were in place to reduce the risk of catching the virus.

Leaders and managers

The registered manager is very child focused. Through her leadership, the staff have minimised the impact of COVID-19 on the children's day-to-day lives. Their willingness to adapt, be flexible and provide cover for each other has eliminated the need for agency staff coming into the home. This has reduced the overall risk of the children contracting the virus, and as a result both the staff and the children have remained healthy. During this time, senior managers have continued to provide support to the registered manager via the telephone and through socially distanced visits to the staff and the children.

The registered manager is committed to the overall development of the home. She uses external feedback from a range of sources to good effect and is open to trying new ways of working to improve practice. This includes looking at incidents and allegations within the home and learning from poor practice. Her own reflective style sets a good example to the staff and helps create a more open and safe culture.

Senior leaders and managers have good oversight of the home. The monitoring arrangements in place have improved vastly over the past six months. There have been noted improvements in the quality of: notifications to the regulator, monthly reports from the independent visitor and the six-monthly report from the registered manager. This information together shows that the children are all making progress and achieving their stated outcomes.

The requirement made at the last inspection has been met.

No requirements or recommendations are made following this visit.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC363268

Registered provider: New Forest Care

Registered provider address: New Forest Care Ltd, West Shore House, West Street, Hythe, Southampton, Hampshire SO45 6AA

Responsible individual: Laura Cave

Registered manager: Alison Jones

Inspector

Amanda Harvey, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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