

SC366002

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four children who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. It is owned by a private provider.

A new manager started in post on 18 May 2020, but is not yet registered.

Visit dates: 9 to 10 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 17 December 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Requires improvement to be 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's experiences are mixed. Children currently living in the home were observed to have positive and trusting relationships with the staff during the visit. A child, who has recently moved to the home, has been able to disclose issues experienced since returning to school, so that the staff are able to offer support and speak to school staff to ensure that the issue is addressed.

Children keep in touch with their families and friends. The company provided a computer tablet to the home to help them to communicate remotely during restrictions. The home also facilitated face-to-face meetings in the community when restrictions were relaxed but usual venues remained closed.

Some children continue to learn and make progress. The staff and education providers keep in regular contact to make sure that children can access additional educational activities and resources when they cannot go to school. The new manager has introduced visual aids to help a child who has additional needs to plan his daily routine with the staff. These reduced his anxiety when schools closed and when he returned to school.

During the visit, children were excited to speak about their day at school as the new term had started, and enjoyed healthy after-school snacks prepared with imagination and care. When asked to provide a score out of 10 for the home, one child was confident that the home deserved 11.

However, some children do not engage with education regularly and the staff do not follow written protocols to encourage them to keep to a consistent routine. A requirement set at the last inspection is therefore repeated.

Children are encouraged to take daily exercise, walking a circular route near the home, and enjoyed games in the garden and the home during the lockdown restrictions. The staff have sought specialist support for children's health needs, including speech and language, and with medications. Children have been supported to maintain good hygiene habits to keep themselves safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The staff ensure that a child's cultural needs are met, for example, by supporting him to access specialist hair and skin-care products and services.

Children are encouraged to share their views about their home and how they are cared for. The new manager has introduced a new consultation form about the home and how care is provided, which children can complete individually.

The safety of children

The staff now understand how to manage risk better to keep children safe. Assessments are now clear, and staff have better guidance on how to respond proactively. Improved pre-admission assessments fully consider the impact that a child moving to the home may have on those who already live there, to ensure that the home can meet the needs of all children and reduce the risk of placement breakdown.

Some staff say that, previously, they did not feel there was a consistent approach in how to manage some behaviours, but that this is much improved. This provides children with clearer boundaries and a greater sense of stability.

Some children, who no longer live at the home, continued to go missing, usually when visiting families or friends. The staff followed procedures, liaised with external safeguarding agencies, and sought independent return-home interviews. Risk assessments did not always consider the heightened risk of potential COVID-19 infection due to children going missing. The staff did encourage appropriate hygiene measures when children returned home. Views of staff about one child's risk of criminal exploitation when away from the home differ, and it is unclear from records if this was fully addressed. These children have either moved back to the family home or nearer to home, as directed by a court.

The staff continue to access training online, which helps them to respond to children's behaviour more consistently and to consider children's individual needs. This means that the need to manage behaviours using physical intervention shows a reducing trend. However, records show that, at times, the staff have not always considered their own responses during incidents. This means that restraint has been used when better de-escalation skills could have prevented this course of action. Judgemental language is apparent in records about a child.

The designated officer and placing authority social worker are informed if a child makes an allegation against a member of staff. However, the previous registered manager failed to notify Ofsted when this occurred. The child later retracted the allegation and no further action was taken.

Bedroom door alarms are used in this home when assessed as required to safeguard children. These are now appropriately risk assessed, written consent is provided by the child's social worker and measures are kept under review. However, under the previous registered manager, this consent was not in place. In addition, one child's door alarm was deactivated, despite being assessed as required, leading to an investigation.

The new manager ensured that all measures were put in place to reduce the risk of fire due to a child smoking in the house. Support was also sought from the provider's substance misuse specialist to guide practice in the home.

Leaders and managers

The new manager is knowledgeable and experienced and has worked for the provider as a registered manager in another of their homes. There have been delays in her application due to technical issues, despite several submission attempts. The previous registered manager stepped down from his role and now supports the manager as her deputy.

The manager has thoroughly reviewed and improved documents and uses team meetings to outline her expectations of the team and improve their understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The staff have access to new resources to help them to support children who have additional needs.

There is now a prompt response to external monitoring of the home. Previously, recommendations by the independent visitor were not addressed consistently by the former registered manager. The current manager is clear of what is required in future reviews of the quality of care, and robust monitoring systems are now used effectively. She has a clear vision of what is required to drive forward improvements to practice in the home, to provide children with a good quality of care that promotes positive outcomes.

The manager ensures that the staff receive regular supervision in line with the provider's policy. Prior to her arrival, this was not consistent. As a result, some staff had not had the opportunity to demonstrate that they had completed induction activities and therefore, their probationary period was extended.

The staff team has continued to access online training and will resume face-to-face training once this can be safely facilitated. They report that they feel more confident, enthusiastic and that the team is working together better to support the children they care for. However, they have not completed training on the impact of bereavement, as recommended at the last inspection. This recommendation is repeated.

Some areas of the home have been improved to make it feel more welcoming, but the manager is aware that other areas look tired and need updating. Understandably, there have been delays to the planned refurbishment of the home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, cracked bathroom floor tiles present a health and safety concern as children are at risk of cutting their feet if they are barefoot. This needs to be addressed urgently and identified improvements to the home need to be carried out as soon as it is practical and safe to do so.

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 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— 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; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; 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. (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(i)(iii)(b)(d)) This is specifically in relation to ensuring that impact risk assessments are completed thoroughly to ensure that children new to the home are compatible with those already living there. Risk assessments should be clear and cross-referenced for staff to understand elevated concerns, such as increased risk of Covid-19 infection due to being missing from the home. Staff should also have a clear understanding of potential associated risks of being missing, including exploitation. The registered person should ensure that the bathroom floors with broken tiles are replaced to reduce risk of injury, and that delayed refurbishment is completed as soon as restrictions allow.	23/10/2020

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; support each child’s learning and development, including helping the child to develop independent study skills and, where appropriate, helping the child to complete independent study; understand the barriers to learning that each child may face and take appropriate action to help the child to overcome such barriers; help each child to understand the importance and value of education, learning, training and employment; promote opportunities for each child to learn informally; 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)(ii)(iii)(iv)(viii)) Specifically, ensure that a good routine and structure is maintained in the home for encouraging young people to be ready for their school day, that all information on a young person’s education is drawn into one plan and that there is an educational timetable to demonstrate what support is being offered when young people are not in full-time education.	23/10/2020
The registered person may only use devices for the monitoring or surveillance of children if— the child’s placing authority consents in writing to the monitoring or surveillance. (Regulation 24 (1)(b))	23/10/2020
Restraint in relation to a child must be necessary and proportionate. (Regulation 20 (2))	23/10/2020

Specifically, review the use of any prone holds, which are not approved by the provider's model of behaviour management.	
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there. (Regulation 40 (4)(c))	23/10/2020
The registered person must ensure that all employees— receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33(4)(b)) Specifically, supervision, particularly for members of staff in their probationary period, should take place in line with the provider's policy.	23/10/2020
	23/10/2020

Recommendations

- Staff should be familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective, and clear recording. Staff should record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4). Staff should avoid the use of judgemental language in describing a child.
- The registered person should undertake a review that focuses on the quality of the care provided by the home, the experiences of children living there and the impact the care is having on outcomes and improvements for the children. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 65, paragraphs 15.2). This is specifically in relation to ensuring that the focus is on how the care provided supports children's progress and takes into account their views.
- The registered person should ensure that staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.11). In particular, that staff receive bereavement training to support young people. This recommendation is repeated.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC366002

Registered provider: Keys ACE Limited

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

Responsible individual: Lucy James

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Karen Willson, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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