

SC369825

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This children's home is run by the local authority and offers care and accommodation for two young people who have experienced childhood instability leading to trauma and associated complex behaviours.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since November 2019.

Visit dates: 16 to 17 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 26 June 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 identified the following serious concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit:

- Staff do not follow agreed strategies to keep young people safe when they go missing.
- In some instances, staff lack professional curiosity. This means that they do not always fully assess and manage known risks.
- Staff have not supported one young person to fully understand the risks to which he is exposed.
- Staff's care planning for one young person has been poorly considered. This has increased the young person's potential exposure to harm.
- The registered manager has failed to fully escalate his concerns about the local authorities care planning for one young person.
- Management monitoring systems do not enable the manager to identify or address shortfalls in staff practice.
- Staff have been unable to overcome the barrier that prevents one young person from being able to attend education.

The care of children

There are currently two young people living in the home. One young person has recently been moved into the local authorities training flat for a three-week period as part of the planning for his future independence. The registered manager told the inspector that he was concerned about the young person living alone in the flat. However, he did not fully escalate these concerns or effectively challenge this decision. This shows that the registered manager is not able to act as a strong advocate to protect this young person from potential harm.

During the inspection, the registered manager put plans in place to provide the young person with more support and supervision in his flat. This included a plan to wake the young person up each day in the early hours of the morning in order to check that he was present and safe. It is not clear how this reactive plan has been assessed as being suitable.

Prior to the young person moving into the flat, staff were unsuccessful in engaging the young person. As a result, he often refuses their offers of support. This means his progress is minimal. For example, the young person has not attended education for a significant period of time. Staff's efforts to address this issue have been ineffective. In addition, staff do not consistently provide the young person with alternative educational activities when he is not in school.

Staff appear to be resigned to not being able to engage the young person effectively in education or other structured direct work.

In contrast, the other young person who currently lives at the home has settled well. He has formed trusted and secure relationships with staff. As a result, he has made good progress from his starting point.

Staff provide him with good-quality and individualised care to meet his needs. The young person attends school and has excellent attendance. Teachers told the inspector that the young person is making good progress.

The young person engages in a variety of leisure activities with staff. This includes going on holiday with staff, playing football and trampolining.

Overall, COVID-19 has not had a significant impact on the quality of care provided to young people. Staff have taken appropriate action to support the young people during this period. For example, staff have encouraged young people to use video calls to speak to their families or arranged picnics in local parks to allow face-to-face contact.

The safety of children

One young person goes missing from the home regularly. The registered manager and staff do not take the necessary steps to manage the risks associated with this behaviour. For example, there is only one member of staff on shift in the late evening. This means staff are unable to complete searches for the young person when he goes missing. Staff do not follow the agreed missing protocol, or request help from other staff in the organisation, to search for young people when they are missing.

Staff do not effectively challenge the young person about his persistent incidents of going missing. They do not use professional curiosity to explore and manage possible risks. For example, the young person is believed to be in a sexual relationship and regularly stays overnight at another young person's address. Staff do not fully evaluate or intervene to manage the possible risks associated with this behaviour.

Staff do not have the skills to engage the young person in discussions about his risk-taking behaviours. This means that concerns related to him going missing, engaging in a sexual relationship and using substances have not been fully explored by staff with the young person. Due to this, staff have been unable to support the young person to fully understand the risks he is exposed to or how he can keep himself safe.

The registered manager does not review risk assessments promptly. Further, risk assessments are of a variable quality. For example, some assessments lack details about the historical context of young people's behaviours. This means that staff are not always given all the information they need to understand how best to keep young people safe.

One young person is named as being at risk of criminal exploitation, going missing and using substances. Despite this, the registered manager has not challenged the local authorities plan to place the young person in a flat on his own. There has been insufficient assessment of how the young person's known vulnerabilities will be

managed while he is living independently. Consequently, this young person is at potential risk of harm.

The registered manager has not identified and addressed the quality of staff's recording of significant incidents. Staff do not always record what actions they have taken to keep young people safe. This means that there are missed opportunities for staff and managers to review incidents and identify learning to improve practice.

On one occasion, the registered manager has not informed Ofsted about a notifiable incident in the home. This error does not show a robust approach to safeguarding in the home.

Leaders and managers

The registered manager acknowledges that there are shortfalls in staff practice. For example, he has identified that staff provide young people with inconsistent care. The manager has begun to implement staff performance management measures to develop staff practice.

Although the registered manager recognises that improvements are required, his monitoring systems are not yet sufficient for him to fully understand the scale of improvements required. This means that staff do not always follow agreed strategies to manage risk. For example, the registered manager's monitoring had not enabled him to identify that staff had not always completed the planned welfare visits to check on the young person currently living on his own in a flat.

In some ways, staff present as being keen and express that they want young people to make progress. However, it is clear that staff are struggling to understand how to continue to meet the needs of one of the young people. Staff's dejection means that there is no clear plan as to how to re-engage the young person or appropriately support him on his transition into independent living.

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
In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff – seek to involve each child's placing authority effectively in the child's care, in accordance with the child's relevant plans;	02/11/2020

seek to secure the input and services required to meet each child's needs; if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority's or a relevant person's performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 5 (a)(b)(c))	
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 any 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; help each child who is above compulsory school age to participate in further education, training or employment and to prepare for future care, education or employment;	02/11/2020

help each child to attend education or training in accordance with the expectations in the child's relevant plans; and that each child has access to appropriate equipment, facilities and resources to support the child's learning. (Regulation 8(1)(2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(viii)(ix)(x)(b))	
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on – mutual respect and trust; an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and positive responses to other children and adults. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure – that staff – meet each child's behavioural and emotional needs, as set out in the child's relevant plans; help each child to develop socially aware behaviour; encourage each child to take responsibility for the child's behaviour, in accordance with the child's age and understanding; communicate to each child expectations about the child's behaviour and ensure that the child understands those expectations in accordance with the child's age and understanding; help each child to understand, in a way that is appropriate according to the child's age and understanding, personal, sexual and social relationships, and how those relationships can be supportive or harmful. (Regulation 11(1)(a)(b)(c)(2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(v)(vi)(ix))	02/11/2020
*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 –	02/11/2020

that staff – 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; help each child to understand how to keep safe; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child’s welfare; and are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home’s child protection policies. 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 effectiveness of the home’s child protection policies is monitored regularly. (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(v)(vi)(vii)(b)(e))*	
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; ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate;	02/11/2020

ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child; understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(a)(b)(e)(f))	
*The care planning standard is that children – receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home. (Regulation 14 (1)(a))	02/11/2020
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if – there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(e))	02/11/2020

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC369825

Registered provider: Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Registered provider address: City of Stoke-on-Trent, Swann House, Boothem Road, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 4SY

Responsible individual: Tracey Docksey

Registered manager: Darren Edwards

Inspectors

Gareth Leckey, Social Care Inspector

James Tallis, Social Care Inspector

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