

SC407430

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This home is one of five children's homes operated by a private organisation. The organisation also owns a school and a farm, which children from this home may attend.

The home provides care and accommodation for up to four children and young people aged over 11 years who may have experienced trauma and/or abuse. Some may have attachment difficulties.

The registered manager's post was vacant between September 2018 and April 2020.

The present registered manager was registered on 29 April 2020.

Visit dates: 27 to 28 October 2020 and 3 November 2020

Previous inspection date: 10 January 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Sustained effectiveness

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 and young people say that they are well cared for in this home. They enjoy trusting relationships with the staff and feel valued and safe. They can talk to staff if they have any worries. A professional who visits the home commented that the residents benefit from a supportive environment in which children can thrive and achieve.

The children and young people keep in touch with and visit family and friends outside the home, so long as this is in line with their local authority's plans.

One child's parents commented, 'We have been very pleased with (child's) care. He has calmed down and matured. (The manager and staff) have handled his behaviour professionally and have given him strategies to cope. He has built up good relationships with all the staff and is comfortable at the home.'

The children and young people can make suggestions about the home. They helped to choose the style and colour schemes for their bedrooms. They have also been involved in choosing decorations for the communal areas of the home, which are bright and homely.

The children and young people's healthcare needs are well met. They have access to specialist psychological support and to other professionals if additional help is needed. The staff have frank and open conversations with the children and young people about sensitive subjects, including sexual and mental health, to encourage them to seek advice and support appropriately.

The home has safe measures in place to respond to the present COVID-19 pandemic. The staff are very aware of the potential for anxiety and loneliness when children and young people are self-isolating. They find time to sit with them and play games. One child, who was self-isolating during the first part of this assurance visit, coped with this situation with considerable maturity. He explained that he will be taken out for an exciting new activity as soon as his self-isolation period ends.

The children and young people are all enrolled in local schools. Some are in the process of increasing the number of hours of education that they receive, but the aim for all is to achieve a full timetable.

The quality of the home's environment has improved considerably since the interim inspection. There has been substantial refurbishment of the interior and exterior of the home. The potholes outside the back door of the house still require repair, but

most of the driveway is tarmacked and sound. There is a clear plan in place to remedy the relatively small area which is damaged.

The safety of children

Children and young people are kept safe in the home. Comprehensive risk assessments and effective staff training ensure that the staff have a good understanding of safeguarding practices, so that they can take appropriate action when there are concerns.

For example, when a young person was subjected to inappropriate messages and images on social media, the staff acted swiftly to educate her about what action to take. The young person learned from the experience and when there was a further incident, she immediately blocked the person concerned and told the staff what had happened.

One child sometimes goes missing, but these incidents have reduced considerably since her arrival. A social worker commented, '(My child) has formed a good relationship with staff in the home because, when missing, she will answer her phone to welfare calls and let staff know she is safe and well.'

The staff act correctly in response to episodes of going missing from the home. They have thought creatively about the reasons for children going missing. For example, they obtained permission for them to visit their friends legitimately. This reduces the incentive for the child to leave the home without the adults' agreement.

The staff work together as a team to establish clear behavioural boundaries. Behavioural incidents are much less frequent than they were before the interim inspection. Consequently, there have been no restraints since then. In addition, there have been no safeguarding referrals to the designated officer or any complaints to the home.

A small number of children and young people have complained that they are being bullied in school. Staff are taking positive action to work with the school to reduce the risk of bullying and this risk is correctly recorded in their risk assessments. However, children and young people who have not raised bullying as a concern do not have this risk routinely evaluated.

Leaders and managers

The home now has an effective registered manager in place. The manager and deputy managers are currently undertaking the qualification at level 5 in leadership and management.

The home is monitored well, making use of electronic data-management systems to ensure that leaders and managers have up-to-date information to guide their decision-making.

The home is fully staffed and there are no agency staff routinely deployed. This helps to ensure continuity of care for the children and young people.

Staff say that they are happy and well supported. They receive regular supervision and good-quality training. Although COVID-19 disrupted the company's training plans because face-to-face training such as first aid and physical intervention could not take place as planned, there is a plan to remedy this as soon as government restrictions allow.

The staff are well supervised and supported to undertake their level 3 and level 5 qualifications. Approximately half of the members of the staff team of eight hold a qualification at level 3. The remaining staff are undertaking this award.

Leaders and managers have acted on the recommendations from the independent visitor with regard to updating the company's safeguarding policies. These now include radicalisation, forced marriage and county lines.

The team works well with other professionals. A social worker commented, '(The home) is easy to contact. They are happy for multi-agency working, will attend meetings readily and implement plans. Overall, I am pleased with the care given to my young person.'

Parents are very positive about the staff and manager. One family commented, 'We've found everyone to be friendly and supportive.'

The registered manager has ensured that the requirement and recommendation from the last inspection have been met.

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

- Ensure that children are encouraged by staff to see the home's records as 'living documents' which support them to view and contribute to the record in a way that reflects their voice on a regular basis. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards', April 2015, page 58, paragraph 11.19). In particular, ensure that the risks related to bullying are included on all the children's risk assessments.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC407430

Registered provider: Wessex College Limited

Registered provider address: Wessex College Limited, 4 Cedar Park, Cobham Road, Ferndown Industrial Estate, Wimborne BH21 7SF

Responsible individual: Joanne Sams

Registered manager: Claire Bates

Inspector

Heather Chaplin, Social Care Inspector

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