

SC453372

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The children's home provides care and accommodation for up to five children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. It is operated by a private provider. The manager started in the post three days prior to the quality assurance visit. He is in the process of making an application to Ofsted to be registered.

Visit dates: 14 to 15 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 16 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 identified the following serious concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit:

- leaders' and staff's responses to safeguarding incidents are inconsistent. They do not always put safe measures in place to protect children and young people
- risk assessments read as ambiguous and are difficult to follow. This means that staff have no clear guidance on how to support and protect children and young people
- children's and young people's care planning is compromised due to ineffective working relationships with all placing local authorities
- lack of leadership and management of the service has prevented improvements being made. Several shortfalls were identified during the visit.

The care of children

Children and young people share their worries and concerns with staff. Staff help them to access support from other agencies when they need it. This helps children and young people to feel listened to and strengthens their relationships with staff.

Children and young people enjoy activities of their choice. Staff are creative and facilitate themed nights, movie night, cookery sessions, and arts and crafts, and play a range of games with the children and young people. During the pandemic period, this was enjoyed by children and young people, and helped to create a sense of normality and fun for them.

Progress for children and young people is mixed. There have been delays in progressing the transition plans for one young person who is ready to move on. Another young person has successfully transitioned to semi-independence, having made progress.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, staff continued to support children's and young people's education. This has helped their transition back into formal education, helping them to make progress with their learning.

Children and young people have continued to keep in touch with their families and friends during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff ensured this was supported in line with government guidance.

Staff have helped the children and young people to understand the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. This has helped to educate the children and young people on how to reduce the risks of the virus and how to stay healthy.

The safety of children

The inspector found an isolated incident where a senior leader gave direction to staff in respect of a serious safeguarding incident that showed a lack of knowledge of safeguarding processes. There were delays in notifying all relevant agencies so that

action would be taken. This potentially leaves children and young people at risk of harm.

When there have been concerns about the exploitation of children and young people, staff have responded appropriately to help safeguard them. Key-work sessions have helped children and young people to understand risks associated with exploitation, helping to better protect them.

The recording in risk assessments is not consistently clear. Some information reads as ambiguous and is not up to date. While children and young people are kept increasingly safe, it is difficult for children and young people to see how they are making progress in relation to their known risks.

Staff follow protocols to aid the safe return of children and young people when they go missing from the home. However, children and young people are not always given the opportunity to speak to someone who is independent of the home when they return. This means that they are unable to share with someone independent of the home any worries or concerns they might have that are associated with living at the home.

Not all serious incidents have been reported to Ofsted. This means that there has been no regulatory oversight to ensure that staff and leaders take appropriate steps to safeguard children and young people.

Leaders and managers

There has been no registered manager in the home since May 2019. The responsible individual has not ensured that there is enough oversight of practice in the home. A lack of monitoring and scrutiny of practice leaves children and young people at risk of potential harm.

Directors, who are not included in the staffing section of the home's statement of purpose, have been involved in the operation of the home. They make important decisions, including those relating to safeguarding. Failure to outline the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the home means that parents and carers, commissioners and Ofsted cannot be assured that all individuals working in the home have the required skills, knowledge and experience.

Poor leadership in the home has resulted in children's and young people's care plans drifting. Staff and leaders do not always build effective professional relationships with children's and young people's placing local authorities. This has resulted in a young person's transition plan being ineffective at helping her to move on.

Staffing issues have previously been a concern in this home. The provider has recruited new staff to help the core group of experienced staff to deliver care and support to the children and young people.

A requirement made at a monitoring visit in June 2020 has been met.

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, the 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 develop and maintain effective professional relationships with such persons, bodies or organisations as the registered person considers appropriate having regard to the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the children's home is to provide care and accommodation. (Regulation 5(d))	01/11/2020
The quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— help each child to develop resilience and skills that prepare the child to return home, to live in a new placement or to live independently as an adult; (Regulation 6 (1)(2)(b)(vi))	01/11/2020
*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 that staff— 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; (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(iii)(v)(vi))	01/11/2020
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 that staff— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if	01/11/2020

necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child; (Regulation 12 (2)(a)(i))	
*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. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b))	01/11/2020
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home's statement of purpose; that arrangements are in place to— plan for, and help, each child to prepare to leave the home or to move into adult care in a way that is consistent with arrangements agreed with the child's placing authority; (Regulation 14(1)(a)(b)(2)(a)(b)(iii))	01/11/2020
The registered person must— keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it; and notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. Subject to paragraph (6), the registered person must ensure that the home is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. (Regulation 16 (3)(a)(b)(5))	01/11/2020
If the registered provider is an individual, the individual must undertake such continuing professional development as is	01/11/2020

necessary to ensure that the individual has the skills needed for carrying on the children's home. If the registered provider is a partnership, the partnership must ensure that one of the partners undertakes such continuing professional development as is necessary to ensure that the partner has the skills needed for carrying on the home. (Regulation 29 (1)(3))	
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation; an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious; there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there; a child protection enquiry involving a child is instigated; or concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. A notification made under this regulation— must include details of— the matter; the other persons, bodies or organisations (if any) who or which have been notified; and any actions taken by the registered person as a result of the matter; must be made or confirmed in writing. (Regulation 40 (4)(5))	01/11/2020

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- When a child returns to the home after being missing from care or away from the home without permission, the responsible local authority must provide an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. Homes should take account of information provided by such interviews when assessing

risks and putting arrangements in place to protect each child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC453372

Responsible individual: Richard Parker

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Jacqueline Tate, Social Care Inspector

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