

1241836

# Assurance visit

## Information about this children's home

The home is privately owned and run by an education specialist service provider. It is registered to care for up to seven children who have learning disabilities, and focuses on caring for children who have complex needs that may include autism spectrum disorder and associated difficulties. The home is located within the provider's school campus.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since January 2017.

**Visit dates:** 2 to 3 September 2020

**Previous inspection date:** 4 February 2020

**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 no serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

### **The care of children**

Children are confident and comfortable in their surroundings. They approach staff to talk, play or help them with tasks. There is a relaxed and homely atmosphere where children do not need to be constantly supervised. This gives a genuine feeling of it being their home. Children happily wandered around into rooms, asking the inspectors questions with genuine curiosity and interest. Children's views and ideas are held central to planning, and children's plans are written from the child's point of view. Photographs of children enjoying new toys or experiencing activities evidence how some of their ideas are responded to.

During the period of nationwide lockdown, children have remained in contact with parents and others who are important to them via telephone and video calls. Social workers have remained in contact through similar means, and have recently started to visit children in the home. Parents and social workers are equally positive about the care that children receive, particularly in recent challenging circumstances.

Staff are acutely aware of all the children's health and emotional well-being needs. The consistent team ensures that all aspects of physical and emotional health are considered. Staff have not allowed the lack of face-to-face appointments to be a barrier to securing medical treatment and medication changes for children. Joint working with the learning disability nurse, psychiatrist and on-site therapies team has ensured that those struggling with their mental health have been well cared for.

The on-site school has continued to educate children in their home, within bubbles. While this has at times been unsettling and confusing for children, joint working, along with the excellent understanding of children's needs, has resulted in new routines becoming embedded. Children have continued to access the community, and social stories have supported their understanding of why some of the favoured activities cannot happen at the current time. An inspector enjoyed a trip to the lake with the group, particularly noting how this showcased children's independence skills, such as crossing the road safely, and how natural the process of keeping their hands hygienic throughout the trip had become.

### **The safety of children**

Children's actions and demeanor show they feel safe in the home. Staff are acutely aware of each child's vulnerabilities and are alert to any risks, both in the home and community. Children's behaviours are relaxed, and even when anxious or distressed, staff offer support to calm them using agreed strategies, as detailed in their plans. The use of physical intervention is rare, with none during this inspection period.

Responses to concerns regarding risk assessments and the fire risk assessment at the last inspection have now all been actioned. A new fire risk assessment, completed recently by an external contractor, is being acted upon, with the identified concerns being a site issue rather than in the home itself.

There are some low-level concerns regarding maintenance and cleanliness in children's bedrooms. Some of these are the result of lockdown and the ability to access children's bedrooms for adequate time to make good the minor damage. However, some, such as mildew in grouting and the smell in one child's toilet, could have been easily rectified.

Staff are well versed in safeguarding and their responsibilities to keep children protected from harm. They are confident in what they should they do should a child be at risk, including whistle-blowing procedures and reporting outside of the organisation. There have been no incidents requiring partner agencies' support since the last inspection.

### **Leaders and managers**

The home is managed and well run by a skilled manager. The recent addition of an enthusiastic deputy manager has allowed the manager to focus on areas that have drifted, such as supervision. Staff are passionate and confident in their roles and complimentary of the management team's approach to support and supervision. The consistent team knows how to meet children's needs and strives for them to be as independent as possible. Staff benefit from training to meet children's needs and have continued to access online and distance learning during the pandemic.

Children's plans are clear, and the information is consistent across the range of documents. There is risk that some information is missing or not updated due to the volume of duplicated information across plans and risk assessments. There is some poor use of language and inaccurate spelling in children's plans and reports, which leads to an impression that staff are slapdash in their approach, which is not borne out in observation of practice. Children's culture and identity is not consistently individualised in plans, rather a broad-brush approach is taken. This is not reflective of the tailored care children enjoy.

The management team has reflected on the requirements made at the last inspection. They use their monitoring in line with regulation 45 and the independent visitor reports. This is in addition to observations and evaluation of the home and children's progress to ensure children are receiving individualised care, as well as the home being suitable for their needs. Managers actively challenge partner agencies if they feel they are not providing the service children require.

## 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
<p>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—</p> <p>that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed, furnished and maintained so as to protect each child from avoidable hazards to the child's health.</p> <p>(Regulation 12 (1)(2)(d))</p>	16/10/2020

### Recommendations

- Care which meets each child's needs and promotes their welfare, taking into account of the child's gender, religion, ethnicity, cultural and linguistic background, sexual identity, mental health, any disability, their assessed needs, previous experiences and any relevant plans. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 14, paragraph 3.2)
- 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)

## Children's home details

**Unique reference number:** 1241836

**Registered provider:** Priory Education Services Limited

**Registered provider address:** Priory Group, 80 Hammersmith Road, London W14 8UD

**Responsible individual:** Hannah Cox

**Registered manager:** Kathleen Bridge

## Inspectors

Jennie Christopher, Social Care Inspector  
Matt Nicholls, 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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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