

2501791

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This privately owned home, and manager, registered with Ofsted on 12 July 2019. The home's statement of purpose states that the staff team provides care and accommodation for up to three children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, including mild to moderate learning disabilities.

Visit dates: 1 to 2 September 2020

Previous inspection date: Not previously inspected

Previous inspection judgement: Not previously inspected

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 feel happy and safe living at this home. A child said, 'I've got people to look after me properly now.' They enjoy warm, supportive and trusting relationships with the adults who care for them. The children feel that the staff know them well and know their individual traits and needs. This leads to them being comfortable and relaxed, and underpins their confidence in the staff's abilities to keep them safe and happy.

Children have been able to keep in regular contact with their families despite restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Use of technology has ensured that relationships have not been disrupted. Once some restrictions were eased, staff ensured that the children were able to visit their loved ones safely. This commitment has been appreciated by the children and parents.

Children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic has been promoted. Continuity has been maintained where possible, with children supported to complete home schooling. The manager has promoted schooling for children by being in contact with virtual heads to make sure plans have been followed. This approach ensures that education is in place when a child has had interim arrangements, for example, when they are new to the home and come from a different area.

Children's views and opinions continue to be welcomed and encouraged. They are able to attend weekly staff meetings if they wish so that they can share their ideas. Additionally, the children have regular sessions with individual members of staff to discuss any issues and have ready access to the registered manager. The culture in the home encourages children to feel valued and to be confident that they can influence how their home is run.

The safety of children

Staff have the knowledge and skills to keep children safe. They are aware of what to do and who to inform if they have concerns about a child's welfare. They have used their knowledge effectively in practice. This has meant that concerns can be addressed promptly, which in turn reassures children.

This home is in a rural location and has a large garden. Consequently, lockdown restrictions have not over confined children. Children are aware of how COVID-19 has impacted on their lives and the wider world and have at the same time been educated as to why the restrictions are in place. As a result, they have understood and accepted why measures need to be in place.

Emphasis is placed on rewarding positive behaviour. Children enjoy rewards such as extra outings, ice creams and games bought for their games consoles. The use of sanctions is rare but the recording and monitoring of these lack rigour. Two entries had not been reviewed or assessed for effectiveness and one of them had been recorded some 13 days after the incident had occurred. While this shortfall has not

impacted on the children's welfare, it does compromise monitoring and review of effectiveness.

Incidents where children have been absent without permission have reduced significantly since an unsettled period in June this year. Clear protocols for staff to follow are in place for each child should they leave the site without permission. These have been implemented effectively and have ensured the safety of children.

Leaders and managers

Staff speak highly of the support and guidance they receive from the registered manager. While she is seen as being readily accessible to both children and staff, formal supervision sessions have yet to be implemented consistently in line with the organisation's own policy. Although this has not undermined the standard of care, it does restrict opportunities for staff to formally reflect on their performance and to have a record of the discussion.

There was, initially, a very unsettled time during the early months of the home's opening. It is now much calmer and the atmosphere is more conducive to that of a caring family environment. There is now an established core team of staff who are providing consistency and nurture to the children. Good support and regular training mean that as time progresses, the staff team's confidence and knowledge are growing.

Initially a number of staff left after a short time working in the home. The manager, supported by her line manager, revisited the recruitment process, meaning that they have more direct influence and ownership of the process. This has meant that new staff are aware of the potential challenges they may face and that they have the resilience to undertake their role effectively.

The manager and her line manager have also been effective in assessing referrals to ensure that the mix of children is appropriate. The original system implemented was more centralised, meaning the registered manager had little influence over admissions to the home. The process at that time was not thorough and this led to a poor mix of children. This resulted in a volatile and unsettled atmosphere. The revised referral process has ensured that the children are now living in a settled and nurturing home.

The impact of COVID-19 has been managed very well. The staff team has remained consistent and there has been no need to quarantine or isolate either children or staff members. The staff have supported each other during this time and their commitment has ensured continuity of care and stability for the children. One member of staff said of her colleagues, 'It's not just a job, they genuinely care for these children. They go above and beyond.' One parent stated, 'This is the best he's been to, he's come along really well.'

The more effective approach to admitting children as well as establishing a more settled core staff team has meant that both requirements made at the monitoring visit in July 2020 have 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, 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 registered person must ensure that—</p> <p>within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a child in the home, a record is made which includes—</p> <p>the name of the child;</p> <p>details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of the measure;</p> <p>the date, time and location of the use of the measure;</p> <p>a description of the measure and its duration;</p> <p>details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure;</p> <p>the name of the person who used the measure ("the user"), and of any other person present when the measure was used;</p> <p>the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and</p> <p>a description of any injury to the child or any other person, and any medical treatment administered, as a result of the measure;</p> <p>within 48 hours of the use of the measure, the registered person, or a person who is authorised by the registered person to do so ("the authorised person")—</p>	02/12/2020

<p>has spoken to the user about the measure; and</p> <p>has signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and</p> <p>within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure.</p> <p>(Regulation 35 (3)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(viii)(b)(i)(ii)(c))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that sanctions are promptly recorded and their effectiveness is reviewed.</p>	
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Recommendations

- The supervision of staff and the manager must be regular and records of this should provide evidence that supervision is being delivered in line with regulation 33 (4)(b). ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.3). In particular, ensure that formal sessions happen as expected and that records are kept of these.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 2501791

Registered provider: Esland North Limited

Registered provider address: Esland Ltd, Suites 1 and 5 Riverside Business Centre, Foundry Lane, Milford, Belper, Derbyshire DE56 0RN

Responsible individual: James Barlow

Registered manager: Sarah Creasey

Inspector

Paul Taylor, Social Care Inspector



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