

SC405985

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This home is one of a small group run by an independent provider. The home provides care and accommodation for up to three children who may have behavioural and/or emotional difficulties.

The previous manager resigned in February 2020 and the home has been without a registered manager since March 2020.

Visit dates: 8 to 9 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 2 December 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 no serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

No new young people have moved into the home during the pandemic. The staff supported one young person to move on to semi-independent living. The current manager is ensuring thoughtful matching with the remaining young person. As a result, the home delivers individualised care that meets young people's needs.

The house has been redecorated and, in some areas, refurnished. As a result, the house is much homelier. Although the kitchen has some holes in the cupboard doors and damaged counters, there are plans to improve this.

The young people have been able to maintain contact with their families through social media and video calls.

The previous staffing difficulties have been addressed and the home now has a stable staff team that the young people have developed trusting relationships with. The children have maintained positive physical and mental health with the support of the staff. The staff have continued to work with young people on any substance misuse issues.

Neither of the young people engaged in education during the pandemic. However, staff worked on life skills to promote their independence. One young person has successfully secured employment. This is giving him improved confidence and a sense of routine.

The safety of children

The managers and staff have addressed the health and safety shortfalls identified at the last inspection. However, the fire doors have small gaps where new locks have not been correctly installed. These gaps would allow smoke and heat to easily travel in the event of a fire. Therefore, the doors would not be effective in the event of a fire.

The frequency of incidents of the young people going missing and substance misuse has reduced. Staff prevention of and responses to the young people going missing have improved. The young people now receive a return home interview after each occasion that they have been missing.

The young people were initially lacking in engagement and understanding of the risks of COVID-19. They continued to invite a friend into the house against guidelines and attended prohibited social gatherings. The staff, although initially slow to challenge the visits by this friend, were subsequently proactive to ensure that the young people understand the risks. The staff have enhanced the young

people's understanding through discussions and supporting them to undertake online training. The staff supported the young people when they were mistakenly challenged by the local police for being outside the home in breach of the limitations of freedom of movement that were in force at the time.

Leaders and managers

The previous registered manager left in March 2020. A new manager started in August 2020 and has applied for registration. In the interim, the home was overseen by the two deputy managers and a director of the organisation. These management arrangements continued to ensure that the young people's welfare was paramount. However, it is of concern that neither the acting manager or the senior managers within the organisation are aware of relevant pandemic-related regulatory and inspection regime changes.

The managers and staff have worked hard to meet most of the shortfalls that were identified at the last inspection. However, although the quality of record-keeping has improved since the last inspection, there is still not enough attention to detail. For example, records do not always document the actions taken by staff in relation to incidents at the home or sanctions applied.

The staff have continued to work closely with partner professionals during the pandemic to promote the young people's well-being.

Due to difficulties with a training provider, one staff member is outside of the statutory timescale to complete a relevant level 3 diploma in residential childcare.

The home arranged for independent visits to take place remotely during the pandemic. However, the visitor did not make consistent attempts to gain feedback from professionals. Therefore, these visits were not as effective as they could have been.

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.</p> <p>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>	23/09/2020
<p>For the purposes of paragraph (3)(b), an individual who works in the home in a care role has the appropriate qualification if, by the relevant date, the individual has attained—</p> <p>the Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare (England) ('the Level 3 Diploma'); or</p> <p>a qualification which the registered person considers to be equivalent to the Level 3 Diploma.</p> <p>The relevant date is—</p> <p>in the case of an individual who starts working in a care role in a home after 1 April 2014, the date which falls 2 years after the date on which the individual started working in a care role in a home; or</p> <p>in the case of an individual who was working in a care role in a home on 1 April 2014, 1 April 2016.</p> <p>(Regulation 32(4)(a)(b)(5)(a)(b))</p>	31/03/2021

Recommendations

- Ensure that staff understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Record information on individual children 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)

- The registered person should actively seek independent scrutiny of the home and make best use of information from independent and internal monitoring (including under regulations 44 and 45) to ensure continuous improvement. They should be skilled in anticipating difficulties and reviewing incidents, such as learning from disruptions and placement breakdowns. They are responsible for proactively implementing lessons learned and sustaining good practice. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 55, paragraph 10.24)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC405985

Registered provider: ERA Care Limited 5921904

Registered provider address: Unit G22 Allen House, Station Road,
Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire CM21 9JX

Responsible individual: Stephen Milton

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Joanna Heller, Social Care Inspector

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