

SC431228

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This privately run home provides care for up to six children. The children may have had traumatic experiences that have left them vulnerable. The manager of the home was registered with Ofsted in March 2017.

Visit dates: 21 to 22 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 29 January 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 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 have positive and trusting relationships with the staff. The children said that they can talk to the staff about any issues that they have, and that they feel listened to. The children said that, during lockdown, the staff provided them with regular information and helped them understand how to keep themselves safe and healthy.

All the children continued to access education and activities during lockdown. The staff have been creative in developing opportunities for the children to grow and learn. These activities have included going camping, building dens in the garden, growing herbs and vegetables, and having disco nights. The children have benefited from a diverse staff team with a range of skills. The children enjoy learning new ways of cooking, as the staff share recipes with the children to cook together.

Children continue to keep in touch with their families. The staff provide the children with technology to enable them to speak to their families and professionals. Professionals and parents said that the quality of care provided is good.

The staff encourage the children's participation through community meetings, at mealtimes and in key-work sessions. This means that the children have individualised care that reflects their diverse interests and needs.

The children have personalised bedrooms. Some communal rooms have pictures of the children engaged in a variety of activities. These serve as a reminder of enjoyable times spent with the staff.

The hallway and some of the rooms in the house require updating and refurbishment. The door alarms for the front and rear doors are activated throughout the day. This does not make for a homely environment and compromises the staff's capacity to create a family feel for the children. There is a large garden with outdoor play equipment and raised beds in which to grow vegetables.

The safety of children

The staff understand the children's risks and what their triggers are. The positive relationships between the staff and children underpin the successful use of de-escalation and distraction techniques. Consequently, the number of incidents and restraints have reduced, and children are safer.

Staff work well managing the children's complex needs and, at times, serious risk-taking behaviours. The staff have sought specialist advice and support when needed. The staff have used specialist knowledge to review the care for children and provide effective monitoring to ensure that the children's mental health and well-being are promoted.

Staff understand the importance of the children building positive and supportive relationships with one another. This was particularly important during lockdown, when the children were in confined spaces together. The staff have dealt with this

challenge by providing activities that the children enjoy doing together and very much look forward to.

Incidents of bullying have reduced, and when they have occurred, the staff have challenged children appropriately. The staff have received training in anti-bullying and provide the children with opportunities to explore the issue. Social workers and children said that bullying is not an issue and felt confident that if it did arise, it would be sufficiently addressed.

The children have received one-to-one support and there has been an increase in staffing. This increase in staffing ensures that children's needs are more routinely met and that their associated risks are managed effectively.

Leaders and managers

In January 2020, this home was acquired by a large national children's social care provider. Consequently, there have been numerous improvements to the quality of care and children's experience.

The manager has worked at the home for several years. The manager and the senior management team are working together to make improvements to the home. They have recently employed an extra deputy manager to ensure that the children have additional support. The manager has met all the requirements that were raised at the last inspection.

Senior managers have undertaken regular planning in response to COVID-19 and shared this with the staff. The staff clearly understand these plans and implement them appropriately.

The staff team is stable, and the staff work together well. Staff feel supported by the manager. They receive regular supervision that explores the practical nature of their work, as well as providing a reflective space to consider how their personal experiences inform their practice.

The manager has ensured that the staff respond consistently to the children's changing care needs. Staff receive regular training and specialist support. This ensures that they have the necessary skills to meet the children's needs and manage risks as they arise.

Staff use praise and reward to support the children. There is, however, an over-reliance on restricting children's use of electronic devices as a penalty for poor behaviour. The manager has not provided the staff with alternative options to help the children to positively change unhelpful behaviours. This means that children are not given the opportunity to be educated about their poor behaviour or supported to reflect on how they can behave differently.

The manager has not provided an internal monitoring report to Ofsted in line with regulation. This does not enable Ofsted to have an accurate oversight of the home.

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 complete a review of the quality of care provided for children ('a quality of care review') at least once every 6 months.</p> <p>The registered person must—</p> <p>supply to HMCI a copy of the quality of care review report within 28 days of the date on which the quality of care review is completed.</p> <p>(Regulation 45(1)(4)(a))</p>	30/10/2020

Recommendations

- For children's homes to be nurturing and supportive environments that meet the needs of their children, they will, in most cases, be homely, domestic environments. Children's homes must comply with relevant health and safety legislations (alarms, food hygiene etc.); however, in doing so, homes should seek as far as possible to maintain a domestic rather than 'institutional' impression. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- In particular:
- assess the need to activate door alarms during daytime hours
 - maintain a good standard of decoration in all areas of the home.
- Regulation 19(2) details sanctions that are prohibited in behaviour management. Any sanctions used to address poor behaviour should be restorative in nature, to help children recognise the impact of their behaviour on themselves, other children, the staff caring for them and the wider community. In some cases, it will be important for children to make reparation in some form to anyone hurt by their behaviour and the staff in the home should be skilled to support the child to understand this and carry it out. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.38)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC431228

Registered provider: Unique Care Homes Support Limited

Registered provider address: 2nd Floor Maybrook House, Queensway,
Halesowen, Worcestershire B63 4AH

Responsible individual: Janet Porter

Registered manager: Rosie Ellington

Inspectors

Lianne Bradford, Social Care Inspector
Leemya McKeown, Social Care Inspector

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