

1275569

# Assurance visit

## Information about this children's home

According to the home's statement of purpose, the home provides an integrated combination of residential therapeutic care, treatment and education for boys and girls of primary school age who have severe social, emotional and mental health difficulties. It also works with those children's families. A child's placement is for either 38 or 52 weeks per year.

The head of group living was registered with Ofsted as the home's manager on 18 June 2018.

**Visit dates:** 16 to 17 September 2020

**Previous inspection date:** 5 November 2019

**Previous inspection judgement:** Outstanding

## 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**

Contingency planning and risk assessment in response to COVID-19 is excellent. Staff understand these plans and apply them pragmatically. Attuned staff provide care that is responsive and nurturing, taking into account the younger age of the children and their need for physical closeness and reassurance.

Empathetic and authoritative parenting allows children to play and take age-appropriate risks. The staff understand how to manage risk without being too restrictive. Children have ample space to climb, play sport and take part in energetic games outside. Staff manage a good balance of providing a mix of free and structured play. As a result, risks reduce for children, while opportunities for children to grow and problem-solve increase.

Well-resourced homes provide opportunities for the children to have quieter time for activities such as art, reading and playing music. Children said that they particularly like having lots of other children to play with. Staff recognise that these friendships help the children to develop important life skills, like getting along with other people and sorting out conflicts and problems.

Staff focus on each child, noticing small cues, and taking time to praise and redirect when required. There is a strong emphasis on helping the children to repair relationships and to accept responsibility for behaviour without experiencing this as shameful.

During the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, the children continued with their education. Creative planning maximised indoor and outdoor learning opportunities. For some children, this was mainly classroom-based, and for others, there was a more activity-based learning approach. Consequently, children continue to learn and make progress in their education.

Staff show tenacity and flexibility in order to help children through difficult times, and come up with new ways of supporting them. One social worker spoke enthusiastically about the authentic care that shone through in the staff practice.

### **The safety of children**

Through the staff's alert and attentive focus on the children's emotional needs, the children develop meaningful relationships and a sense of safety.

Staff work well together to provide consistency, using reflection, curiosity and active listening. This helps the children to think things through and gain a greater

understanding of the impact that their feelings have on their behaviour. As a result, children develop self-awareness and self-compassion.

Staff recognise the importance of involving the children in decisions about their care and day-to-day life. Alert and present staff interaction provides opportunities for the children to express matters arising from group living, as well as opportunities to put forward their views and any worries that they may have.

Complaints are thoroughly investigated and satisfactorily resolved. Staff practice is reflective and demonstrates an individualised approach. As a result, children feel heard and listened to.

As the children settle into the home and build trust with the staff, the need to use physical holding decreases. Incidents of physical interventions are subject to weekly monitoring through early intervention clinics. Scrutiny of restraint practice is further supported by an independent consultant. These forums are used to examine trends and patterns in more detail and implement interventions to support change.

Leaders and managers take pride in ensuring that there is a strong safeguarding culture at the home. Regular meetings are held with the designated officer of the local authority to discuss incidents. Since the last inspection, the overwhelming majority of incidents have been addressed in line with home's child protection policy. Yet, there have been occasions of delays in information being shared with outside agencies. Following any shortfalls in safeguarding practice, robust internal investigations are conducted, and lessons learned are taken forward to ensure safe practice.

## **Leaders and managers**

Leaders and managers have been thorough in their response to COVID-19. They have ensured that children's plans are frequently reviewed, in consideration of the easing of restrictions. At the beginning of the lockdown restrictions, some staff moved into the home to isolate with a group of children in response to a child showing symptoms of COVID-19. This is a good example and reflection of the ethos of the organisation that will go over and beyond for each child.

The registered manager and leaders promote an inclusive culture at the home. Staff effectively and sensitively challenge discriminatory behaviour. Staff provide opportunities for the children to celebrate and understand differences. As a result, children experience care and help that are responsive to their individual needs.

Staff focus on developing trusting relationships with the children, and they extend this out to families and professionals. Partnership working is a particular strength of the senior management team. Social workers and carers have spoken positively about the quality of support provided for the children.

Individual support for the staff is regular, reflective and focused on the children. Staff spoken to said that they felt well supported. Training for the staff continues in

a variety of formats, to ensure that the staff are competent and confident in providing a nurturing and therapeutic approach to the children's care.

Monitoring reports are evaluative about the quality of care provided for the children and their progress. Virtual visits have been undertaken by the independent visitor since the COVID-19 restrictions were put in place. However, despite her efforts to talk to and see children, this has been minimal. The registered manager has plans in place to address the barriers that have prevented her from regularly speaking and ascertaining the views of the children.

## 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
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there. (Regulation 40 (4)(c))	20/10/20

## Children's home details

**Unique reference number:** 1275569

**Registered provider:** The Mulberry Bush Organisation Ltd

Registered provider address: Abingdon Road, Standlake, Witney, Oxfordshire OX29 7RW

**Responsible individual:** Lee Wright

**Registered manager:** Claire McCarthy

## Inspectors

Anne-Marie Davies, social care inspector

Lee Kirwin, regulatory inspection manager

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