

1236916

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This children's home is owned by a private company. The company owns two other children's homes. The home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to three children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The registered manager has been in post since June 2016.

Visit dates: 30 September to 1 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 14 January 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Improved effectiveness

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 are well cared for and say that they like living here. They say that they like the staff and that they feel listened to. Parents and social workers speak highly of the care and support that the children receive. They say that they can see the progress that children are making.

Throughout the lockdown period, children used video calls and face-to-face meetings to spend time with their family members. A parent spoke positive about this and said, 'I was amazed how well staff supported my child to manage the lockdown period.'

Staff provide a wide range of activities in the home and local community and encourage children to take part in them. In addition, the children enjoyed a holiday at a seaside resort. Staff have captured these positive experiences and activities in the form of photographs.

Staff provide children with effective support and encouragement to continue to attend school and where needed, home tuition. Recording systems have been devised to monitor both the nature and the amount of education support that staff provide. However, staff are not always recording these activities effectively.

The safety of children

Children are kept safe and say that the staff make them feel safe. This is echoed by a parent and social workers, who say that they do not have any concerns in relation to their child's safety and well-being.

Staff are provided with detailed support plans and risk assessments that guide staff in how to respond when children become upset. These are regularly reviewed and updated. Staff are well prepared and supported to assist children to manage their emotions and feelings effectively. However, on two occasions, staff have called the police to assist in managing a child's behaviour. The registered manager has fully evaluated these incidents and reflected with staff on their practice to avoid the use of police in the future where possible.

The use of restraint is rare. However, if used, it is used as a last resort to keep children and others safe. The registered manager thoroughly reviews and evaluates the appropriateness of the measure used. Staff ensure that discussions are held with children to seek their views, and discussions are held with staff to identify any lessons learned in order to improve their practice.

Missing from home incidents are infrequent. When they do happen, staff take effective action to ensure that the children are found and returned safely to the home. They look for children and keep in regular contact with parents and safeguarding agencies. Staff ensure that children receive an independent return home interview.

Leaders and managers

The home is managed effectively by a permanent and well-qualified manager. Since the interim visit in January 2020, he has completed a comprehensive review and evaluation of the quality of care provided in the home. This included detailed analysis of incidents, children going missing and the use of restraint. He has set realistic targets to further improve.

Staff say that they feel well supported and that they feel valued. The registered manager ensures that staff receive the training that they require to meet the individual children's needs.

Social workers speak very highly of the commitment of the staff team. They say that they are regularly updated about the children's care. In addition, they say that they are sent incident reports and that communication is good. These are positive examples of good partnership working.

Since the interim inspection in January 2020, Ofsted has received two complaints about the home from the local community. This was primarily due to the alleged behaviours of some of the children. Leaders and managers take complaints seriously and these complaints have been thoroughly investigated and appropriate action taken.

Following a recent complaint, the provider has erected a fence at the foot of the rear garden and has made improvements to this area. However, regular checks of this area are not included in the home's maintenance programme to ensure that this area is well maintained.

The recommendation that was made at the interim inspection in January 2020 has been met.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Where children are placed in a home and are not participating in education because they have been excluded or are not on a school role for some other reason, the registered person and staff must work closely with the placing authority so that the child is supported and enabled to resume full-time education as soon as possible. In the interim, the child should be supported to sustain or regain their confidence in education and be engaged in suitable structured activities. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 28, paragraph 5.15) In particular, ensure that staff record the education activities they provide effectively.
- The location of the home should support its aims, objectives and ethos, as

described in the Statement of Purpose. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 17, paragraph 3.23) In particular, ensure that regular maintenance checks are undertaken of the rear of the garden area.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1236916

Registered provider: Utopia Children's Services Ltd

Registered provider address: Hazlewoods, Windsor House, Bayshill Road, Cheltenham GL50 3AT

Responsible individual: Louis Stuart-Kelso

Registered manager: Leon James

Inspector

David Kidner, Social Care Inspector

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