

1159884

# Assurance visit

## Information about this children's home

A private provider manages and operates this children's home. It provides care and accommodation for up to five children or young people who have behavioural and/or emotional difficulties.

**Visit dates:** 8 to 9 September 2020

**Previous inspection date:** 4 December 2019

**Previous inspection judgement:** 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 the following serious and widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit:

- some children smoke in their bedrooms

- staff are ill-equipped to safeguard the children
- the quality of the children's risk assessments is poor and these do not identify all the children's known risks
- strategies to manage predictable risks are insufficient to prevent poor experiences for the children
- the home environment presents hazards to the children and does not create a homely environment
- the manager's monitoring of the service is ineffective.

## **The care of children**

The children's experiences are poor. This is because some staff do not provide care and support that reflect the children's needs or protect them from harm. As a result, some children's behaviours quickly escalate, resulting in violent incidents in the home. Other children regularly go missing from the home and are at risk of serious harm.

Some of the children smoke and regularly use illegal substances. Some staff do not have sufficient knowledge or skills to help children to understand how harmful these behaviours are to their physical and emotional health.

Most of the children have moved into the home since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The relationships between the children, and those that the children have with staff, are new and just beginning to form. This means that, at times, the children are reluctant to engage with staff in activities or to spend time in the company of their peers.

The children received some education during the COVID-19 pandemic. They took part in educational activities and life-skills workshops, including cooking sessions. This helped the children to maintain a daily routine.

The staff support the children to maintain safe relationships with their families. This support has continued during the COVID-19 pandemic, through the use of social media and computer technology. This means that children do not feel isolated.

## **The safety of children**

Some children's risk assessments do not include all known risks to their safety. These risks include children going missing from the home, substance misuse, internet safety and child sexual exploitation. The children's risk assessments do not provide staff with clear guidance or information on how to manage and reduce the

risks to children. As a result, the staff are ill-equipped to manage the risks to children.

The children and the staff are at risk of harm from fire. The efforts of staff to prevent the children from smoking in their bedrooms are ineffective. When some staff are aware that children are smoking in their bedrooms, they do not always report these safety concerns to managers. The inspector ensured that the registered manager took immediate action to address fire safety concerns during this visit.

The home is not well maintained. For example, a broken electrical socket in one child's bedroom is a fire risk. In other areas of the home, there is a loose skirting board, a loose dado rail, a broken window and a burnt and ill-fitting carpet that is a trip hazard. Furthermore, there was a strong smell of smoke in one child's bedroom, and their bed and bedding were dirty. This means that staff do not make sure that children live in a safe or hazard-free environment.

The staff do not consistently help the children to understand how to keep themselves safe. For example, they do not deliver key-work sessions about the risks that the children may face when they are missing from the home. As a result, the children do not believe that their behaviours may be harmful to themselves or others.

The registered manager does not ensure that the children's missing from home care plans include effective strategies for staff to follow to reduce this risk. These plans focus on crisis management and the use of restrictive behaviour management methods, such as physical restraint, to prevent children from going missing.

The staff use a combination of rewards and sanction to manage children's challenging behaviours. However, this approach is ineffective and does not motivate the children to change their behaviours or to find other ways of managing their frustrations.

## **Leaders and managers**

The registered manager does not operate the home in accordance with the aims and objectives of the statement of purpose. For example, some staff do not have the skills to identify, manage or reduce risks to the children's safety. This means that the children's experiences are not positive or safe.

The registered manager does not monitor the home effectively. He has failed to identify shortfalls in the children's support plans, in their risk assessments, and in staff practice. The registered manager's six-monthly monitoring review does not include the views of children or other agencies. This lack of consultation means that the registered manager does not understand how shortfalls in the quality of care affect children's progress.

The independent visitor continues to regularly monitor the home during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has identified shortfalls in practice. However, the registered

manager does not quickly act on the independent visitor's recommendations to improve the quality of care for children.

The registered manager does not notify the regulatory body of all significant events. Consequently, Ofsted cannot oversee safeguarding practice.

## 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 health and well-being standard is that the health and well-being needs of children are met;</p> <p>children receive advice, services and support in relation to their health and well-being; and</p> <p>children are helped to lead healthy lifestyles.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure that staff help each child to—</p> <p>understand and develop skills to promote the child's well-being. (Regulation 10 (1)(a)(b)(2)(a)(iv))</p>	11/10/2020
<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 that staff—</p> <p>assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child;</p> <p>help each child to understand how to keep safe;</p> <p>manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other;</p> <p>understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person;</p>	11/10/2020

<p>that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm;</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; and</p> <p>are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(d)(e))*</p>	
<p>The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that—</p> <p>helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and</p> <p>promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose;</p> <p>understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home; and</p> <p>use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(a)(f)(h))*</p>	11/10/2020
<p>The registered person must prepare and implement a policy ("the behaviour management policy") which sets out—</p> <p>how appropriate behaviour is to be promoted in the children's home; and</p> <p>the measures of control, discipline and restraint which may be used in relation to children in the home.</p> <p>The registered person must keep the behaviour management policy under review and, where appropriate, revise it. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b)(2))</p>	11/10/2020

In particular, revise behaviour management incentives and sanctions.	
<p>The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if—</p> <p>a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to,</p> <p>sexual exploitation;</p> <p>an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious;</p> <p>there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there; and</p> <p>a child protection enquiry involving a child —</p> <p>is instigated; or concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or</p> <p>there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious.</p> <p>(Regulation 40 (4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(i)(ii)(e))</p>	11/10/2020

\* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

## Children's home details

**Unique reference number:** 1159884

**Registered provider:** Spark Of Genius North East LLP

**Registered provider address:** King Edwin School, Mill Lane, Stockton on Tees, Cleveland TS20 1LG

**Responsible individual:** Zak McIlhargey

**Registered manager:** Paul Owens

## Inspector

Jamie Richardson, Social Care Inspector

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