

1227060

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The children's home is made up of separate houses in the grounds of a residential special school. Both the school and home are owned by a private company. There were four houses providing residential care at the time of the assurance visit: Beeches, Birch, Cedars and Oaktrees.

The children are placed by various local authorities throughout the United Kingdom. Their residential placements are for 38 or 52 weeks of the year. The school also caters for day pupils. The children may have learning disabilities and/or a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. They all have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).

The home has been without a registered manager since July 2019. The current manager is in the process of applying to be registered with Ofsted.

Visit dates: 9 to 11 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 14 January 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Sustained 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

Staff support the children to understand how to stay safe in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Social stories and posters help the children to follow government safety guidance. Staff protect the children when out in the community by providing personal protection equipment or lanyards to identify the children as having hidden disabilities.

Children keep in touch with their families. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most children have remained living in the home, but some were able to return to their families. In these circumstances, staff maintained links to children and their families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. These mean that staff were able to identify when families needed extra help and support. As restrictions ease, socially distanced visits occur, and these are significant for those children placed far away from their families.

Children's learning has continued throughout the pandemic. Children continued to attend school, maintaining their routines and educational structure.

An 'activity passport' encourages the children to explore and try new activities. One child talked excitedly about her first time building dens in the woods. Staff used the on-site resources and large grounds to keep the children active and occupied during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photographs capture the fun that the children had during a group camping experience. As a result, children continue to grow in confidence.

The children are listened to and share their views with the staff and an independent advocate. Despite the children's wishes being considered by the manager and her team, they do not routinely feed this back to the children. This means that the children are unaware if the staff act on their requests and suggestions.

The safety of children

Children's risk management plans are not routinely updated. Permanent staff have a good insight into the children's risks and know how to address these. However, staffing shortages mean that agency staff often work in the home, and these staff do not have this knowledge. Children may be at risk of harm because their current risk management plans do not detail all of the risks to their safety.

Staff do not always ensure that missing from home protocols are individualised to reflect each child's needs. These documents do not clearly identify the immediate and specific responses required by the staff to help keep some children safe.

Children's phone usage and their ability to connect to the internet and social media sites represents a safeguarding risk. Incidents have occurred where children have accessed inappropriate videos and been in phone contact with unknown adults. The measures in place to manage the children's online safety do not prevent harm effectively.

Some staff are not trained in behaviour management and restraint. Children have raised concerns about holds that have been carried out by untrained staff, and the manager has investigated these incidents. However, physical intervention records do not provide an objective overview regarding untrained staff holding children. These mean that leaders and managers are not fully aware of the possible effects of this practice on children's welfare and safety.

Leaders and managers

The home has been without a registered manager since July 2019. The current manager has been in post since May 2020 and is in the process of applying to be registered with Ofsted. The manager has identified areas of development within her staff team and across the service, but has yet to take effective action to address these areas.

The manager is unaware of gaps and inaccuracies within the children's case records because internal monitoring systems are ineffective. For example, there are gaps in incident reports and behaviour support plans. These gaps restrict the manager's oversight of children's progress. Furthermore, the manager has yet to complete a suitable quality of care review. This requirement is repeated from the last inspection.

Staffing shortages impact on the children and on staff morale. The use of agency staff means that children do not benefit from working with consistent staff who know and fully understand their needs. In addition, not all recently appointed staff receive the same training. For example, not all new staff have completed their mandatory training, or training around autism spectrum disorders. As a result, some staff do not have the skills or knowledge to support the children effectively.

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 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; and</p> <p>take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare;</p> <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>(Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(i)(vi)(b))</p>	09/11/2020
<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>ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child;</p> <p>ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child; and</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.</p> <p>(Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(c)(e)(f))</p>	09/11/2020
<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>	09/11/2020

In order to complete a quality of care review the registered person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating—

the quality of care provided for children;

the feedback and opinions of children about the children's home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it; and

any actions that the registered person considers necessary in order to improve or maintain the quality of care provided for children.

The system referred to in paragraph (2) must provide for ascertaining and considering the opinions of children, their parents, placing authorities and staff.

(Regulation 45 (1)(2)(a)(b)(c)(5))

This is a repeated requirement.

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- Records of restraint must be kept and should enable the registered person and staff to review the use of control, discipline and restraint to identify effective practice and respond promptly where any issues or trends of concern emerge. The review should provide the opportunity for amending practice to ensure it meets the needs of each child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 49 paragraph 9.59)
- In some instances, a child may express wishes that are not always in their best interests or which may conflict with the views of other children in the home. In such circumstances, the responsible adults will have to balance the wishes of the child against what they judge to be in the best interests of the child and reach a reasonable view about the best way forward in the interests of all. The reasons for reaching any decision will need to be carefully explained to and understood by the child or children concerned. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 22 paragraph 4.9)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1227060

Registered provider: Cambian Autism Services Limited

Registered provider address: Metropolitan House, 3 Darkes Road, Potters Bar
EN6 1AG

Responsible individual: David Phipps

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Jenny Fenlon, Social Care Inspector
Jan Edwards, Her Majesty's Inspector

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