

SC057718

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The children's home is one of a number of homes operated by an independent organisation. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to five young people who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, physical disabilities or learning disabilities.

The registered manager post has been vacant since July 2019.

Visit dates: 24 to 25 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 14 May 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 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

All young people are making significant progress from their starting points. Young people receive well-planned and individualised care that promotes their needs and aids their development.

One young person has successfully transitioned from full-time care in the home to shared care with his family. This has been possible due to the progress made by the young person with the support of staff. This change in care arrangements has been well planned. Staff continue to offer the young person outreach support to help his transition back to his family.

During the period of COVID-19 restrictions, young people have continued to be taken some distance from the home on days out. Not all these trips have been well planned. As a result, the benefits for these young people with complex needs cannot always be evidenced.

Young people have continued to see their families either 'virtually' or, when assessed as safe to do so, through direct socially distanced meetings. This has helped young people with additional and complex needs to maintain their important family relationships at a time of potential confusion for them.

During the reporting period, the home has completed the delayed refurbishment of the sensory room. This provides young people with a welcome additional resource to meet their sensory needs.

The safety of children

For the most part, young people receive a good standard of help and protection. Staff understand the particular vulnerabilities of each young person and, the majority of the time, respond appropriately to these, to keep young people safe.

There have been two whistleblowing complaints during the reporting period. One of these incidents was not recorded accurately. There is a lack of clarity about the response to concerns about the behaviour of one staff member. As a result, there is a lack of evidence that the organisation responded appropriately to concerns raised.

One whistleblowing complaint was not notified to Ofsted in a timely manner. As a result, there was a delay in the external oversight of the incident.

Staff have, on the whole, responded well to incidents of bullying in the home. Given that young people are non-verbal, staff have not always sought alternative methods

to seek young people's views after an incident of bullying. This means that the feelings and views of young people after the incident have not been captured.

The environment of the home is generally safe and supports young people to have some independence and time alone, as appropriate. One young person sustained minor injuries to his face while in the bathroom. The need to make the bathroom safe has been recognised, but an effective solution has not yet been identified. As a result, there is a likelihood of further incidents occurring.

Leaders and managers

The registered manager post has been vacant since July 2019. Appointments have been made to the post but these have not progressed to successful registration by Ofsted. A new manager has recently been appointed. She has not yet started in her employment.

The home is currently being managed on an interim basis by an experienced and skilled registered manager from one of the organisation's other homes. She is supported by a permanent assistant manager.

Staff told inspectors that there has been an improvement in leadership and management since the interim manager took over. Staff value the clear direction set out for them by the interim manager. They reported that both the manager and assistant manager listen to the staff team and respond to ideas put forward. As a result, morale among the staff has improved.

During the period of lockdown, the independent person has continued to assess the performance of the home via virtual visits. The reports provided do not always give timescales for completion of recommendations. The reports do not provide a clear statement about whether young people are effectively safeguarded and their well-being is promoted.

Staff new to the organisation have not always received the level of supervision and support through their probationary period in line with organisational expectations. One new member of staff did not have supervision for a period of five months. As a result, her ability to meet the needs of young people was not being formally assessed. She did not receive the support she needed to undertake her role effectively. The interim manager has ensured that all staff are now receiving regular supervision, which supports their development and ensures that young people are being cared for and safeguarded.

A number of recommendations and requirements were made at the last inspection. These have all been met.

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 ensure that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month.</p> <p>The independent person must produce a report about a visit ('the independent person's report') which sets out, in particular, the independent person's opinion as to whether—</p> <p>(a) children are effectively safeguarded; and (b) the conduct of the home promotes children's well-being.</p> <p>The independent person's report may recommend actions that the registered person may take in relation to the home and timescales within which the registered person must consider whether or not to take those actions.</p> <p>(Regulation 44 (1)(4)(a)(b)(c))</p>	31/10/2020
<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, 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;</p> <p>a child protection enquiry involving a child—</p> <p>is instigated; or</p> <p>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>	31/10/2020

<p>A notification made under this regulation—</p> <p>must include details of—</p> <p>the matter;</p> <p>the other persons, bodies or organisations (if any) who or which have been notified;</p> <p>and any actions taken by the registered person as a result of the matter;</p> <p>must be made or confirmed in writing.</p> <p>(Regulation 40 (4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(i)(ii)(e)(5)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(b))</p>	
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Recommendations

- The registered person is responsible for ensuring that each child’s day to day health and well-being needs are met. Staff should work to make the children’s home an environment that supports children’s physical, mental and emotional health, in line with the approach set out in the home’s Statement of Purpose (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 33, paragraph 7.3). Specifically, ensure that risks in relation to physical injury around the bathroom window ledges are addressed.
- Staff should understand how children might communicate their feelings through their behaviour, or non-verbally especially where the child has a disability which does not allow them to communicate as others might (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 22, paragraph 4.10). Specifically, staff should ensure that children’s views and feelings are gained following incidents in the home.
- The registered person must have systems in place so that all staff, including the manager, receive supervision of their practice from an appropriately qualified and experienced professional, which allows them to reflect on their practice and the needs of the children assigned to their care. Professionally qualified staff employed by the home, e.g. teachers or social workers, should be provided with relevant professional or clinical supervision by an appropriately qualified and experienced professional. (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 61, paragraph 13.2)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC057718

Registered provider: The Together Trust

Registered provider address: The Together Trust Centre, Schools Hill, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 1JE

Responsible individual: Jill Shel Drake

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector
Karen Willson, Social Care Inspector

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