

SC065684

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to six children. There is a registered school on the same site.

The manager was registered with Ofsted in May 2017.

Visit dates: 29 to 30 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 10 December 2019

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 growing up in a warm and nurturing environment. The staff openly show the children affection and give them lots of positive attention. Over time, the staff have worked hard to develop secure attachments with them. The care that the staff give to the children helps them to feel safe and to make sense of their lives. Because of their consistent approach, the children are settled and feel respected and understood.

Leaders, managers and staff have worked together to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the children. Their commitment to keeping daily routines as normal as possible has supported them, both practically and emotionally, through the national lockdown and the easing of the restrictions. This has meant that the children have remained fit and healthy, attended school every day and kept in contact with the important people in their lives.

The registered manager has created a positive culture in the home. All staff are encouraged to share their skills, hobbies and interests with the children. Every day is filled with opportunities for the staff and the children to interact with each other. This includes breaks in the school day, where a quick game of pool or table tennis allows everyone to re-energise and have fun.

During lockdown, when external activities stopped, the staff planned a range of different activities for the children to enjoy. The children embraced these opportunities and spent even more time with the staff. Activities included learning new skills, cooking three-course meals, writing and producing music, and playing their electronic games. Because of these experiences, the children have grown in confidence and have improved self-esteem.

The safety of children

Staff are committed to keeping the children safe. Their positive approach to behaviour management has seen a reduction in both incidents and the use of physical interventions. Using communication more effectively has led to the children learning to talk about and reflect on when things go wrong. Because of this, they are now more equipped to manage their own behaviour, anxieties and concerns.

Staff understand and recognise bullying-type behaviours. High levels of staff supervision and positive engagement are used effectively to prevent this from happening. If these types of incidents do occur, the staff deal with them quickly. This means that the children get along and are reaping the benefits of living together as a group.

Children benefit from consistent routines and boundaries. The staff's supportive approach, combined with trusting relationships, enables the children to move through the day smoothly. This includes accessing the on-site school, where education staff work closely with care staff to help with these transitions. Because of this, the children know what to expect and are happy to comply.

Incidents of children going missing are rare. In the past, the staff have prevented the children from leaving the home to keep them safe. Recognising that this is not always necessary or appropriate, this strategy is no longer routinely used by the staff. Consequently, the children know that they can leave the premises unsupervised, but they choose not to do so.

Leaders and managers

During the national lockdown and the subsequent easing of restrictions linked to COVID-19, the oversight and scrutiny of the home has continued. Following government advice, the home has been closed to external visitors. However, the effective use of virtual management meetings and virtual visits from the independent visitor has helped to keep track of children's experience, progress and outcomes.

Senior managers and leaders continue to invest in the home. The ongoing development plan captures the areas for improvement and the maintenance and redecoration plans continue to be implemented. This is making the environment feel and look much homelier. The staff are also getting better at recording what they do to evidence the positive impact they have on the children's lives. For example, they make good use of photographs to show the range of activities that children are enjoying and to provide visual prompts for children to recognise their achievements

The registered manager is working hard to ensure that the children receive stability, unconditional love and care. The deputy manager is helping him to raise standards and change the culture. Working closely together, they are helping the staff to understand what the children need. Some good work has already begun on how the staff can meet children's needs arising from their identities. However, this is in its infancy so therefore not fully embedded into everyday practice or into children's individual plans.

Staff say that they feel supported by managers. New staff are given access to relevant support and training to help them to undertake their roles. This includes formal one-to-one meetings. However, while the records of the meetings show that the staff are given the opportunity to reflect on their practice, they do not take place at the frequency outlined in the home's procedure. The absence of regular meetings and clear actions is a missed opportunity to support the staff's continued development and to hold them to account.

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

Recommendations

- Children should be supported to express themselves as individuals and should be given an appropriate degree of freedom and choice in relation to day to day arrangements for their care, depending on their individual needs and the setting in which they are cared for. This is in relation to both activities and personal items such as clothing, technology and leisure items. Children's reasonable preferences

in relation to day to day arrangements should be met with consideration given to safeguarding, particularly in relation to the use of technology. Where a child's preferences are unreasonable or cannot be met for safeguarding reasons, staff should discuss this with the child to help them understand why. ('Guide to children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 17, paragraph 3.21)

In particular, ensure that children's in-house care plans demonstrate the child's individual culture and identity beyond their religion and ethnicity.

- As set out in regulations 31-33, the registered person is responsible for maintaining good employment practice. They must ensure that recruitment, supervision and performance management of staff safeguards children and minimises potential risks to them. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)

In particular, ensure that the frequency of supervision is delivered in line with the home's internal procedure and that staff have clear objectives.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC065684

Registered provider: J&R Care Limited

Registered provider address: Ash House South, Longfield, Kent DA3 8JF

Responsible individual: Jane Parish

Registered manager: Eric De Mel

Inspector

Amanda Harvey, Social Care Inspector

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