

SC031490

# Assurance visit

## Information about this secure children's home

This secure children's home is operated by a local authority and is approved by the Secretary of State to restrict children's liberty. The home can accommodate up to seven children who are aged between 10 and 17. It provides for children accommodated under section 25 of the Children Act 1989, who are placed by local authorities.

Admission of any child who is under 13 years of age requires the approval of the Secretary of State, under section 25 of the Children Act 1989.

The commissioning of health services in this home is the statutory responsibility of NHS England under the Health and Social Care Act 2012. Education is provided on site in dedicated facilities.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since July 2017.

**Visit dates:** 19 to 21 October 2020

**Previous inspection date:** 25 February 2020

**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**

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the running of the home. At the midway point of the national lockdown, the home was part-way through a planned refurbishment programme and having an extension built to increase the numbers of children that it can look after. The building work stopped and added to the challenges faced when the lockdown period ended. The pandemic led to many staff absences. These brought many challenges to the staff and managers in maintaining day-to-day operations and ensuring that the care of children remained at a good standard. In the last week, the children have eventually moved into the new living areas in the new build, which should have occurred many months ago if it were not for the impact of COVID-19.

The children's new living areas in the new build are welcoming and calming. The children have already personalised their bedrooms and are involved with the staff in further personalising the communal areas. This move has lifted the children's and staff's morale considerably.

The home is providing care for children with highly complex and challenging needs. The staff have worked tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, which, at its initial peak, resulted in a significant number of staff absences through isolation, shielding or recovery from the virus. Implementing the contingency plans quickly ensured that there were enough staff to keep children safe. The staff supported the children to understand the situation.

The children continued to maintain contact with their families, when appropriate, despite the restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Using telephone calls and technology, the children maintained contact with people who are important to them.

Due to the building work, the children only had access to a limited-sized outdoor space during the COVID-19 restrictions. Some children were able to undertake exercise and access more space during the lockdown period through taking the permitted period of exercise outside of the outdoor area. In addition, the children had access to the gymnasium.

Due to the teaching and residential staff absences during the lockdown period, the children received restricted hours of classroom education. Classroom-based

education was supplemented by activities designed to promote the children's well-being and personal development.

Overall, the children engaged in their education and learning activities throughout the lockdown period and almost all children made progress towards improving their engagement in education and learning. The managers and staff adapted the main curriculum and created highly individualised learning plans to meet the very complex needs of the children. Furthermore, the staff have made plans to secure the provision of education in the next academic year, preparing for the home to significantly increase its residential capacity.

The health providers have ensured continuity of access to healthcare services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent recruitment will improve children's on-site access to physical health support and health promotion. The children continue to receive good formal and informal support for their mental and physical well-being, including while isolating. Healthcare staff have used remote technology when appropriate. There has been limited impact on staffing of healthcare services during the pandemic.

### **The safety of children**

The staff team is currently managing some highly complex children. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenges of a difficult building layout due to the building work and additional difficulties in managing some very challenging behaviours. The staff team has shown immense resilience when managing multiple incidents of highly abusive and physical assaults. These challenges increased the need for police assistance to keep the staff and children safe.

The staff respond appropriately to incidents requiring physical intervention to keep the children safe. The children are provided with an opportunity to discuss their views of the incident. The inspectors sampled closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage and records and identified no concerns and found that practice is good.

The children have individual behaviour management plans that set out children's presenting behaviours. However, some children's plans lack clear guidance on how the staff should best respond. In addition, it is unclear from incident reports if the staff are implementing the guidance when this is provided. Therefore, the children may not receive consistent responses from the staff, and it is unclear if the strategies are effective in addressing the behaviours.

Safeguarding matters have not always been managed appropriately. Following concerns about individual staff member's practices, there are no internal investigation records to provide detail on the decision-making outcomes. Therefore, it is unclear how outcomes of concerns have been addressed and whether all possible lessons to be learned have been identified.

### **Leaders and managers**

The manager and staff have shown commitment and determination during the

significant challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. They have managed the impact that this has had on the day-to-day operations of the home. The managers' close working with Public Health England ensured that COVID-19 concerns were addressed effectively. The manager has ensured that all the professionals working with the children have responded flexibly to the challenges. This has ensured that the well-being of the children has been at the centre of all decisions.

The health, education and care leadership team has an effective working strategy and this enables good communication and joined-up working across the services. The staff team reported good support from the management team and, in particular, the commitment of the manager during this challenging time. Equally, the management team values the staff's resilience and their commitment to the children. External professionals reported positively on the children's care.

The management team has taken steps to address two of the three requirements found at the last inspection. However, further requirements have been raised, and one recommendation has been repeated.

During the lockdown period, the independent visitor undertook the monthly visits virtually. The visitor continued to seek the views of children, the placing social workers and parents, and reviewed paperwork to gain a view of the service and to make recommendations for the manager to consider. The visits have now returned to on-site visits.

The internal monitoring systems lack sufficient oversight. The manager was not aware of the shortfalls identified from this visit. The recording of some paperwork requires improvement. Some records are factually incorrect and one document was not individual to the child.

The manager has failed to inform Ofsted of all significant incidents at the home, in particular when the police have been called to attend and support the staff. This does not enable clear monitoring of all actions required to reduce the risk of recurrence and provide Ofsted with information on the way in which these incidents have been managed.

## 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
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on—	06/11/2020

<p>mutual respect and trust;</p> <p>an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and</p> <p>positive responses to other children and adults.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that staff—</p> <p>meet each child’s behavioural and emotional needs, as set out in the child’s relevant plans; and</p> <p>are provided with supervision and support to enable them to understand and manage their own feelings and responses to the behaviour and emotions of children, and to help children to do the same.</p> <p>(Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c)(2)(a)(i)(x))</p>	
<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>understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; and</p> <p>are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home’s child protection policies.</p> <p>(Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(v)(vii))</p>	06/11/2020
<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 promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each</p>	11/12/2020

<p>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)(f)(h))</p>	
<p>The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if—</p> <p>an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(b))</p>	30/10/2020

## Recommendations

- Ensure the staff are familiar with the home's policies on record keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Staff should record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)
- Staff should encourage children to take a proactive role in looking after their day to-day health and well-being. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 34, paragraph 7.10)  
This is with specific reference to the health providers and home developing and implementing an integrated health promotion strategy to support children's physical and emotional well-being. (This recommendation has been carried over from the inspection in February 2020.)

## **Secure children's home details**

**Unique reference number:** SC031490

**Registered provider:** East Sussex County Council

**Registered provider address:** County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1UE

**Responsible individual:** Elizabeth Rugg

**Registered manager:** Helen Simmons

## **Inspectors**

Natalie Burton, Social Care Inspector  
Barnaby Dowell, Social Care Inspector

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