

SC429702

# Assurance visit

## Information about this children's home

The home is owned by a private company. It is registered for four children who have a combination of needs, including mood dysregulation disorder, attention deficit disorder and learning disabilities.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since May 2012.

**Visit dates:** 29 to 30 October 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 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

There are four children living at the home. Two of the children are resident during the school term only. All the children attend the same school.

The children have a complex range of diagnoses. Some children require high levels of supervision. The staff work hard to provide individualised care that reflects their diverse needs.

The staff encourage the children's participation through community meetings and key-work sessions. The staff use pictorial information to obtain children's wishes and share important information about their care. This means that the children can fully express their views and feelings.

During the period of national lockdown due to COVID-19, some of the children remained at the home in full-time education and others returned to their families.

The remaining children initially struggled with the limited activities and lack of routine. The staff developed imaginative indoor activities such as treasure hunts and themed nights. The manager bought outdoor play equipment. This helped the children to enjoy spending more of their time at the home.

As all children returned to school, there have been incidents of conflict. The staff have found managing the children's relationships between home and school difficult. The staff work closely with the school to support each child. The staff and manager, however, have not considered how to manage the children's interpersonal relationships. Social workers and parents have not been fully involved. There is no clear strategy to consider the dynamics and group tensions between the children and how these affect their education and well-being.

The staff have continued to support the children to see their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two children have been unable to visit their parents due to family members shielding. The staff have organised alternative arrangements, such as taking parents and children for days out. This has reduced the children's anxieties and maintained their family connections.

The manager has organised redecoration of parts of the house. However, there are several areas that require refurbishment and cleaning. The bathrooms have small areas of mould and flaking paintwork and require cleaning. The garden is overgrown. This detracts from the homely environment.

## **The safety of children**

There have been serious incidents at the home linked to the challenge of the lockdown restrictions and the complexity of the children's needs. The staff can manage these incidents well. When physical interventions have been necessary, they are proportionate, and the records are subject to good managerial oversight. The staff support the children to reflect on their behaviours. This enables the children to learn from incidents and consider how they can behave differently.

The staff take a strong restorative approach to managing negative behaviours. Strategies include recognising acts of kindness, individual incentive programmes and writing letters of apology. These actions encourage children to understand the consequences of their behaviour and their impact on others.

Risk assessments lack detail. The staff have not broken down the triggers for when certain behaviours may occur and the type of management techniques that work best. This could limit the staff's ability to know how to de-escalate situations.

The staff have not clearly recorded some of the behavioural strategies used. The use of the loss of 'trust time', which means that some children lose unsupervised time in the community, is not regularly reviewed in the risk assessments. The staff and the manager do not clearly understand how effective this approach is and ways to support positive risk-taking behaviours for the children.

Although the staff have undertaken some specialist training, some of the staff are unclear about how the children's vulnerabilities can increase the risk of exploitation. The staff do not always distinguish between bullying and antagonistic behaviours. This means that some staff may not pick up on warning signs in the children's behaviours and respond to them effectively.

## **Leaders and managers**

The manager has worked at the home since 2012. She provides secure and stable leadership. She has developed positive partnerships with the school, the local police and youth offending services. The manager uses these relationships to advocate for the children. For one child, she arranged an in-depth face-to-face assessment with the youth offending service. This means that the child is receiving the specialist support that he needs.

The manager has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home. She uses monitoring and reviewing processes, such as the independent visitor's reports, to assess the home's effectiveness and make improvements.

The manager responds to complaints well. She ensures that the children receive a formal outcome that acknowledges their feelings and, when required, informs the staff practice at the home.

The staff feel supported by the manager. This has created a positive team culture and morale. However, there are long gaps in between the supervision meetings. For some of the staff, there has been a five-month gap. The manager's ability to use supervision to track staff's actions and measure their performance is therefore limited. This was a previous recommendation.

## 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;</p> <p>have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm.</p> <p>(Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(i)(iii))</p>	<p>22/03/2021</p>
<p>The registered person must ensure that all employees—</p> <p>receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience.</p> <p>(Regulation 33 (4)(b))</p>	<p>22/03/2021</p>

### Recommendations

- For children's homes to be nurturing and supportive environments that meet the needs of their children, they will, in most cases, be homely, domestic

environments. ('Guide to children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)

In particular, ensure that bathrooms and the staff office are decorated to a good standard and that the garden is kept tidy.

- Staff should understand what they must do to prevent bullying of children by other children or adults. Staff should be able to recognise and address different types of abuse such as peer abuse, cyber-bullying and bullying in day to day relationships in the home. Registered persons must ensure that procedures for dealing with allegations of bullying are in place and staff have the skills required to intervene, protect and address bullying behaviours effectively. ('Guide to children's homes regulations including the quality standards' page 39, paragraph 8.6)
- The registered person should ensure that they and their staff engage proactively with the placing authority to contribute fully to the relevant plans for the child's care on an ongoing basis. ('Guide to children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.3)

In particular, ensure that the manager coordinates education planning for the children to include the placing authority and the children's parents.

## Children's home details

**Unique reference number:** SC429702

**Registered provider:** The Ryes College Limited

**Registered provider address:** 3 Skyview Business Centre, 9 Church Field Road, Sudbury CO10 2YA

**Responsible individual:** Jaya Wright

**Registered manager:** Sharon Broadley

## Inspector

Leemya McKeown, Social Care Inspector

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