

1258095

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

A private company that operates a number of children's homes across the country owns this home. This home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to six children who have social and/or emotional difficulties.

There is no registered manager. The current manager has been in post since July 2020. She has a level 5 qualification in leadership and management and intends to apply to register with Ofsted.

Visit dates: 21 to 22 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 2 January 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

Managers and staff understand children's emotional and mental health needs. They advocate for children to receive specialist support. As a result, children engage in therapy when they have previously felt unable to. Furthermore, one child now has an education, health and care plan.

Staff ensure that children maintained contact with family and friends during COVID-19. This was via telephone and FaceTime. This helped children to maintain a positive sense of identity.

Children achieve stability at this home. One child had lived in 20 placements before they moved into the home. They have now lived at the home for almost two years. Another child was not attending education. Since living at the home their attendance at school had been irregular. They now attend school almost full time.

During the lockdown period, children were educated at home by staff with guidance from the organisation's school. Staff facilitated other activities such as a 'Come Dine with Me' experience. The children took turns cooking an evening meal. Once social distancing restrictions started to ease, children went camping and to the seaside for the day. The staff stored photos of activities in a memory book for the children to reflect upon in the future.

During the assurance visit one child was self-isolating. The home is implementing a robust risk assessment to ensure their safety as well as the safety of other children living at the home and the staff.

The safety of children

Risk assessments clearly identify risks and how staff should respond. This means that staff implement effective measures which keep children safe. One professional said that managers and staff have 'safety in mind all of the time'.

Staff say that the manager has provided them with improved guidance when responding to children's behaviour so that children receive support to understand how to regulate their feelings. Professionals say that managers and staff recognise patterns in children's behaviours. Staff respond appropriately to prevent children's behaviours from escalating.

Children say that there are more rules and routines now that the home has a new manager. They say they do not like them but that they receive rewards if they follow them. These rewards encourage positive behaviour. As a result, incidents have

significantly reduced. One social worker described the change in one child's behaviour as 'remarkable'. Since the last inspection, only one incident has occurred which required staff to physically intervene.

Children's individual behaviour support plans do not always link to their risk assessments and managers do not always update risk assessments when new risks are identified. This means that some guidance can be confusing for staff. Nevertheless, staff show good understanding of risk and how to respond to keep children safe.

Although children are rarely missing from the home, staff manage these incidents well. Staff respond immediately and follow a clear protocol devised by the manager. As a result, children are returned home quickly by the police.

Leaders and managers

The manager has been in post since July 2020 and plans to register with Ofsted. The manager is supported by an experienced deputy manager. They are both child focused and have a good understanding of the children's needs.

Professionals are very complimentary about the change in leadership at the home. The manager's leadership reflects improvements in the home. This is despite the challenges of COVID-19. The manager is committed to developing the staff team to provide consistency and stability for the children living at the home.

Some staff are inexperienced and do not have the relevant qualification. The manager has devised a robust training and development plan. Furthermore, staff receive regular supervision which they describe as a time for reflection.

The manager does not yet have robust monitoring and review systems in place. She has not reviewed the statement of purpose to reflect the current staff team. Management oversight of risk assessments is not clear. Despite this, staff know the children well and respond to risk effectively to ensure their safety.

Since the last inspection, there has been a complaint by a whistle-blower via the organisation's independent reporting system. The complaint was thoroughly investigated by the responsible individual. The investigation concluded with an appropriate and safe outcome for children.

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 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— ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(c)(h))</p>	21/12/2020
<p>The registered person must— keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it; and notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (3)(a)(b))</p>	21/11/2020

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1258095

Registered provider: Hillcrest Children's Services (2) Limited

Registered provider address: Turnpike Gate House, Alcester Heath, Alcester, Warwickshire B49 5JG

Responsible individual: Laura Duckers

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Sarah Berry, Social Care Inspector

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