

1230411

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This home provides bespoke care and accommodation for up to two children, who may have complex emotional and/or behavioural needs. It is owned and run by the local authority.

This home was not operational between November 2019 and May 2020.

The home has been without a registered manager since October 2019.

Visit dates: 22 to 23 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 4 March 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Not judged

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 have the time and space to form strong relationships with staff, who are sensitive to children's needs. The small building, and two-to-one staff support, allow children the time and attention to develop and grow, in a nurturing environment. The approach to care is that every minute is a fresh start. This allows the children, who have suffered significant trauma and abuse, to learn that if they make a mistake or act out when angry, it does not define who they are.

Children's emotional well-being is central to all practice within the home. Staff's weekly sessions with child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) demonstrate strong partnership and joint working in order to meet children's needs. This enables staff to support children in creative and innovative ways. Through this, children's progress is often small, but highly significant. Examples include being able to turn their light off at night and accepting meals staff have cooked.

Education is supported through good links with the specialist education team. Staff recognise barriers to learning and acknowledge the children may not fully engage in formal education. Creative use of familiar professionals, and seeking alternative approaches to learning, have allowed children to start talking about what skills they would like to learn.

Children have been encouraged to remain in contact with those important to them during the COVID-19 restrictions. Staff have continued to facilitate and support visits to family, encouraging children to maintain good hygiene and follow government guidance on social distancing. This has not always been successful, as some children and staff required repeated testing.

The safety of children

Children are beginning to feel safe and trust the staff. They are opening up about their life histories and experiences. Staff respond appropriately to any new disclosures or information that the children share. Staff are knowledgeable about their roles in keeping children safe. They are acutely aware of children's individual vulnerabilities and are proactive in keeping children safe. All allegations are investigated thoroughly, even if other staff have been witness to the incident. This shows a clear approach to safeguarding and listening to the child.

Children do go missing from the home. Joint working with social workers, CAMHS and police means a clear formulated response allows the children independence, recognising they may not return on time. Due to children's significant trauma and numerous previous unsuccessful placements, the approach is highly effective for

those who are seeking to break their placement. Weekly staff meetings with CAMHS allow staff to consider new ways of working to make children feel safe. For example, 'connect before correct' is an approach to supporting the children. While this approach appears counter-intuitive, the focus on relationship building has the children's safety in mind. Children are always welcomed back warmly. The home has comprehensive lists of local authority approved taxi firms for any area where children may go to, to ensure their safe return. Staff are diligent in making sure children are safe.

Children are learning to understand how they may be at risk in the community. Children are supported individually by staff in relation to risk, keeping safe and building self-esteem. As a result, progress has been made. This has included always answering their phone to say where they are and when they have got into the taxi provided. As a result, incidents of going missing from home have significantly reduced, and children are now remaining in the home and engaging with staff for significantly longer periods since being in placement.

Plans in response to children's challenging behaviours are clear and demonstrate an acute awareness of children's needs, in particular, recognising that a child's perceived racism may be a projection of the discrimination they have personally suffered. Staff recognise that children's behaviour is a communication and do all they can to understand and work through this with children. The police have been involved in some instances, to provide community resolutions. Children have responded well to this, understanding why staff had taken this course of action.

On one occasion, a member of staff who has not had full safeguarding training was working with an agency member of staff who did not have full safeguarding training either. These two staff were the only staff on duty at the home. Furthermore, Ofsted was informed of a safeguarding incident over a month after it had taken place. Records of physical intervention are not clear on the hold used, and new staff are yet to receive training in the service's prescribed method of behaviour management while working with agency staff who do not have this training. It is acknowledged that this has been a struggle during the COVID-19 restrictions.

Leaders and managers

The home has been without a registered manager since October 2019. The home was not operational between November 2019 and May 2020. A manager is in place who has applied to be registered with Ofsted.

Staff are enthusiastic about their roles and the support they receive from the management team. They value weekly clinical supervision with CAMHS as essential to help meet the children's needs. Staff acknowledge that it has been a challenging time with the COVID-19 restrictions. A high turnover of staff is linked to some feeling they could not remain in such a challenging environment with children who were not adhering to the restrictions imposed during this period. The home has a group of regular bank and agency staff supporting the permanent staff team.

The permanent staff have completed wide and varying training in order to meet the needs of the children. Those members of staff employed by an agency do not have the same level of insight. The management team recognises that a permanent staff team which understands this level of training, especially with regards to emotional well-being and children’s culturally-specific awareness, is required. The management team is currently interviewing several candidates for the vacant posts. It has been difficult to sustain a permanent staff team during the challenges of the pandemic, and also with the specific needs of the children. Action to address this has included moving staff from within other residential provision in the local authority.

The senior managers ensure that there is continued joint working of the multi-disciplinary teams around the children. They have been thoughtful in recognising that the children would benefit from working with adults who have known them for a long time. This is because staff not only understand their needs, but they know their history and complex family dynamics. Managers actively challenge partner agencies they feel are not working in the child’s best interest.

Managers review effectively the quality of service provided and are reflective in their approach to what may need to change. They welcome the feedback from the independent visitor and use this to inform the development plan for the home. It was noted that the home did not have reports from the independent visitor between June and September 2020.

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— 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. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(c))</p>	20/11/2020
The registered person must ensure that—	20/11/2020

<p>within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a child in the home, a record is made which includes— a description of the measure and its duration. (Regulation 35 (3)(a)(iv))</p>	
<p>The registered person must ensure that an independent person visits the children’s home at least once each month. (Regulation 44 (1))</p>	<p>20/11/2020</p>

Recommendations

- The use of external agency staff can be a positive choice to complement the skills and experiences of the permanent workforce. Any external agency staff should meet the requirements in regulation 32(4) regarding mandatory qualifications and the registered person should consider their skills, qualifications and any induction necessary before they commence work in the home. The use of agency staff should be carefully monitored and reviewed to ensure children receive continuity of care. (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 54, paragraph 10.16)
- The registered person should have a system in place so that all serious events are notified, within 24 hours, to the appropriate people. The system should cover the action that should be followed if the event arises at the weekend or on a public holiday. Notification must include details of the action taken by the home’s staff in response to the event. (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 63, paragraph 14.13)

Children’s home details

Unique reference number: 1230411

Registered provider: Surrey County Council

Registered provider address: Quadrant Court, 35 Guildford Road, Woking, Surrey GU22 7QQ

Responsible individual: Lisa Wade

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Jennie Christopher, Social Care Inspector

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