

SC042446

# Assurance visit

## Information about this children's home

The service is registered for eight children aged between four and 18. The home's statement of purpose describes the home as providing care and accommodation for children who have severe learning difficulties, which may include additional physical disabilities, autism spectrum disorders and/or complex health needs. The home is owned by a charitable organisation and provides overnight short breaks on a planned or occasional basis.

The manager is also registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and manages care and accommodation for adults with similar needs in a separate part of the building. Care staff work across both adult and children's services. A separate report by the CQC is available for the adult service.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 2016.

**Visit dates:** 2 to 3 November 2020

**Previous inspection date:** 10 February 2020

**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**

Senior leaders decided to keep the service open during the COVID-19 lockdown so that children could continue to enjoy their short-break experience. Staff recognise the confusion and additional stress on children whose routines have been disrupted. Staff demonstrate emotional intelligence in the way they provide care to minimise the impact on children, keeping as much structure for them as possible in difficult circumstances. Consequently, children enjoy their short break. A parent said, '(name of child) is treated like one of the family. She always comes back looking relaxed and refreshed, giggling and smiling.'

Children have made extraordinary progress despite the challenging circumstances due to the pandemic. A child with multi-sensory impairment has had a significant reduction in using negative behaviour to communicate her feelings and has developed independent skills. A parent said, 'I have seen a massive improvement in (name of child)'s behaviour since she started her short break. She was refusing to eat at school and now not only eats but feeds herself too.'

Staff have been wise in their approach, using different doors and clothing to communicate with a deaf and blind child when she is in education and when she is in the short-break service. This helps her differentiate more easily between the different environments and the expectations staff have of her. This has meant that a child with complex needs has been able to access education during the pandemic, even though several schools previously had assessed that they could not meet her needs. A professional said, 'Staff have been extremely supportive in a very complex situation with a child. They have gone above and beyond with the support they have provided.'

Children are unmistakably at the centre of the practice. Some staff have lived in accommodation at the setting during the COVID-19 lockdown to minimise the risk to children. The registered manager arranged for an extensive training programme for staff on the complex needs of a child with multi-sensory impairment. She ensured that this was individualised and not generic training, so the quality of care for the child was optimised. The correct posture and positioning for children are individualised. For example, staff use written guidance and photos for each child, so they can ensure children are comfortable and safe when using their beds or wheelchairs. Senior leaders identified a child with complex needs in the wider community who needed support. They were persistent in pursuing other agencies, so the short-break service could be arranged to relieve pressure on the family.

Senior leaders have offered extra nights and some day care to assist families, especially when children have not been given a school place. This innovative approach has meant that children have been able to remain at home with their families.

Staff have shown an understanding of the wider pressure on families. Staff have collected food and prescriptions for families as well as, on occasion, provided clothing for families who are struggling during the pandemic. Their careful thought and subsequent action are a beacon of light within the short-break family community and is worthy of wider dissemination. Staff have also donated food to the wider community, such as lunch clubs to those who have struggled with their usual sources of income or donations. Staff have made telephone contact with 135 families every week to check on their ongoing welfare and the well-being of their children who access the short-break service.

### **The safety of children**

The approach to managing risk and caring for staff welfare has meant that a consistent staff team has worked during the pandemic. There has been success in reducing the use of agency staff to almost zero, with only one regular agency staff member required. This has reduced further the risk of introducing COVID-19 into the setting. A professional said, 'The senior leadership works to continue to provide means by which staff well-being can be supported and promoted to optimise continuity of service delivery insofar as this is possible.' Another professional said, 'Senior leaders have engaged with key professionals to implement the changes to routines required, to provide an environment that is COVID-19 safe for children, families and their staff.'

Staff are dedicated to keeping children safe. They demonstrate a thorough knowledge of safeguarding procedures, articulating any concerns professionally and through the right channels. Senior leaders escalate these concerns when necessary, working with other safeguarding professionals to provide the best possible outcomes for children. It is noteworthy that staff have developed positive relationships with parents that enable staff to have difficult conversations with them and especially when there are welfare issues that warrant escalation.

Staff are confident to use the whistle-blowing procedure. They show a good understanding of safeguarding in relation to risk that children may face in all environments that they interact with. Staff raise issues from outside the work environment that have the potential to have an impact on the children in their care. Senior leaders take such issues seriously, making swift decisions to keep all safe while any necessary investigations take place. They use reflective learning, such as with the independent visitor, to consider and amend policy if required. In one case, this resulted in some additional training for senior leaders.

## Leaders and managers

Senior managers have shown exceptional leadership. Their approach to risk management has been impressive. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they have met daily to agree strategies based on the most up-to-date government guidance. They have trained staff in specialist safety precautions, for example 'fit testing of masks', so that key healthcare tasks such as oral suction and secretions can continue to be carried out. This means that children have still been able to access their short break. Senior leaders have successfully kept the provision open in these difficult circumstances despite the current pandemic. A professional said, 'I think COVID-19 has tested the leadership and they have passed the test. They have managed the anxieties of staff and families, working with the ever-changing demands of COVID-19, while caring for the children who are out of routine and consistency.' A parent said, 'I would not have got through this time without the support of the home.'

Senior managers are unquestionably committed to the welfare of their staff team. They have ensured the provision of personal protective equipment, additional cleaning of the work environment and weekly testing for COVID-19. They have been innovative in their thinking such as providing taxis to work for staff, to minimise the use of public transport and hence the risk of infection. They have provided meals after work so staff can have social contact in a safe environment. Staff have relished the opportunity to discuss their well-being with colleagues. Staff speak positively of the 'COVID-19 supervisions' and the emotional support that they have received from their line managers. Staff also have access to a chaplain who comes in regularly to the setting. Staff said that they received a boost to their morale when senior leaders posted letters of support to their home addresses from a celebrity and another high-profile individual who both have an interest in the service. Senior leaders have continued to recognise staff with the 'pride and passion' award. A staff member said, 'It is a joy to come to work.' Another member of staff said, 'My job is worthwhile because it helps improve another person's quality of life.'

The registered manager has developed widespread links with the local community. Donations of masks, food and other goods have been extensive. This is a much-loved provision at the centre of its community.

The independent visitor has continued to be a valuable asset to this provision, identifying the pertinent points even when she has had to do the visit remotely. She analyses the presenting issues and acts as a critical friend. The registered manager welcomes her approach and describes the transparent relationship in the most positive of terms. The provider strives for improvement even in the most difficult of circumstances due to COVID-19.

The provider's passion for children, care for staff and risk management approach to COVID-19 have been outstanding. Other services have sought the senior leaders' expertise and outbreak management plan as they reopen their own provisions.

## Children's home details

**Unique reference number:** SC042446

**Registered provider:** The Rose Road Association

**Registered provider address:** 300 Aldermoor Road, Southampton, Hampshire  
SO16 5NA

**Responsible individual:** Juno Hollyhock

**Registered manager:** Tina Fullbrook

## Inspector

Keith Riley, Social Care Inspector

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