

1247885

# Assurance visit

## Information about this children's home

The home is registered by a charitable organisation to provide care and accommodation under short-break arrangements for up to five children and young people.

The home provides children and young people with a child-centred approach. The forefront of all practice is conducted in a safe, caring, relaxed and homely environment.

The manager registered with Ofsted in May 2020 and is qualified and experienced.

**Visit dates:** 3 to 4 December 2020

**Previous inspection date:** 29 October 2018

**Previous inspection judgement:** Outstanding

## 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**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and two serious safeguarding incidents involving this home and another home run by the organisation, the home has been closed for several months. The home has recently reopened and is providing a service for one child at a time to ensure children's safety and well-being during the pandemic.

Children enjoy short breaks at this home. For some, this has been a second home for many years. Parents express their confidence in the service staff provide and value the short breaks that their children receive.

Staff know children well and have a sound understanding of their diverse and often complex needs. Staff work in cooperation with parents and partner agencies to learn how best to meet children's educational and health needs. Children share meaningful relationships with staff and are said by parents to have missed visiting [name of home] during its closure.

During the home's closure, managers and staff reviewed and updated children's plans, ready to discuss with parents and those children who are able to contribute to their planning. Plans demonstrate careful attention to children's individual health needs. They also ensure that clear detail and guidance is robust to inform staff of how to meet those needs and keep children safe.

Staff were eager to welcome children back to the home for short breaks. Staff believe from comments of their social media page that children have missed staff as much as staff have missed caring for them. One social worker commented, 'I would really like to get some of my children back in. Families are really struggling.'

The temporary loss of this service has been immense for some. One parent explained, 'We didn't cope with lockdown well. Our son has attended [name of home] for some time. The lockdown and closure of [name of the home] and the inability of foster carers to have our son has speeded up his admission to full-time care.'

### **The safety of children**

Staff ensure that all possible risks to children are thoroughly explored and that plans are agreed with parents to mitigate these risks. Overall, the home has had a good track record of providing a safe and supportive environment for children.

The manager notified Ofsted in May 2020 of a serious error that had been made in administering a child's medication. This was an isolated incident. Ofsted was reassured that all relevant parties had been notified. Immediate consultation with

the child's general practitioner confirmed that the increased dosage of medication given would not constitute an overdose or be harmful to the child.

Managers have fully investigated the matter and shared their findings with all relevant parties. Both procedure and practice have since been modified to avoid any repetition and ensure staff follow safe medication administration practice. Staff also completed further training and a process of observations to ensure management's confidence in their practice.

Staff continue to promote children's health and safety as a key priority. They are familiar with and follow the current COVID-19 government guidance, especially encouraging children and visitors to the home to follow the government's 'hands, space, face' campaign.

Children's behaviours are thoroughly understood and well supported by staff. Staff aim to make their short breaks at the home enjoyable and fun. Staff make sure that all activities are appropriately assessed and safe for children to enjoy.

Staff are trained in behaviour management and physical intervention practice. However, the home does not promote any use of disciplinary measures as the priority is for children to have an enjoyable experience during their visits at the home. Any need for manual handling due to disability is clearly detailed in planning records.

Parents voice their confidence in staff and the home. With the knowledge of the reason for the home's closure, a parent commented on her experience of the home saying, 'It's safe and I know he will be well looked after.'

## **Leaders and managers**

The home has a new manager who registered with Ofsted in May 2020. He is qualified and experienced in working with both adults and children with disabilities and complex health needs. He is very ably supported by a deputy manager who has worked at the home for a considerable number of years. The combination of their skills and experience provides the home with strong leadership.

The home's overriding strength can be clearly seen in staff's skill and commitment to the service they provide for children and their families. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, those staff who were not required to shield were coming into the home as usual to maintain and improve the environment and make it ready for children to return.

The closure and suspension of this service by the local authority, due to the safeguarding incident at this home and the incident that occurred at a sister home, has been much longer than staff and professionals would have anticipated. Unfortunately, this has had a considerable impact on those children and families who rely on short-break care. For parents, the lack of respite they would normally receive

has significantly impacted on the ways they cope and has caused them greater fatigue.

Staff have shown resilience. Some have overcome their own concerns about the pandemic, to make sure that the home was ready for children to return to. Staff expressed concern that they were prevented, due to the imposed suspension, from maintaining contact with families and social workers. They recognise that even if children could not access the building, telephone and video support would have still been of value to many parents and children.

Managers have ensured that staff have had good opportunities throughout this period to maintain and improve their knowledge and skills. Essential training has been completed online and, when possible, in smaller socially distanced groups. Staff support has been maintained with regular professional supervision and staff meetings. This has been with the support of computer video technology when face-to-face contact has not been permitted.

Internal and external monitoring has been successfully maintained throughout this period despite children not attending the home. No further concerns have been identified.

There were no requirements made at the home's last inspection. From this visit, one requirement is made in response to the seriousness of the safeguarding incident that occurred. However, the inspector was satisfied that managers have already responded appropriately to this concern.

## 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 registered person must make arrangements for the handling, recording, safekeeping, safe administration and disposal of medicines received into the children's home.</p> <p>In particular the registered person must ensure that—</p> <p>medicines kept in the home are stored in a secure place so as to prevent any child from having unsupervised access to them;</p>	23 January 2021

medicine which is prescribed for a child is administered as prescribed to the child for whom it is prescribed and to no other child; and

a record is kept of the administration of medicine to each child.

Paragraph (2) does not apply to medicine which—

is stored by the child for whom it is provided in such a way that other persons are prevented from using it; and

may be safely self-administered by that child.  
(Regulation 23 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c) (3)(a)(b))

## Children's home details

**Unique reference number:** 1247885

**Registered provider:** Carlisle Mencap Limited

**Registered provider address:** Carlisle Mencap Limited, Unit J3, Duchess Avenue, Kingmoor Park North, Carlisle CA6 4SN

**Responsible individual:** Sheila Gregory

**Registered manager:** Scott Henry

## Inspector

Gillian Walters, Social Care Inspector

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