

1241840

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This home is one of four establishments that are operated by a private organisation. It provides accommodation and care for up to four children aged over 11 years who may have emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The organisation also owns a school and farm, which children from this home may attend.

The home's manager was registered with Ofsted on 17 August 2018.

Visit dates: 2 to 3 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 24 February 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Sustained 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 identified the following serious and widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit:

- There has been a failure to understand safeguarding policies and procedures. Specifically, the manager has not been able to rationalise what should and should not be referred to the local authority's designated officer and to Ofsted.
- There have been systemic failures of leadership and management. This has, at times, potentially placed children and others at risk of harm to their welfare.
- There is a lack of understanding of which matters need to be notified to Ofsted and the level of detail required to provide the regulator with an accurate picture of the seriousness of the incident. There are also examples of notifications that have been received outside the 24-hour timeframe detailed in the Guidance to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards.

The care of children

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on this home. Between March and August 2020, the registered manager, on government advice, was shielding and unable to be in day-to-day control of the home. There were deputising arrangements in place, but these were not fully effective. This resulted in an overall decline in the quality of leadership and management of the home. Leaders and managers took some time to recognise that the home could not be managed effectively from a remote location.

All four children and young people have made some positive progress in their education and personal relationships. One child was a proud member of the Army Cadet Force until the COVID-19 pandemic intervened and the group could no longer meet. This child had also begun to build trusting relationships with some of the staff. Other children and young people have learned how to moderate their behaviour. As a result, serious incidents in relation to the two older young people have reduced in frequency and magnitude.

The staff support children and young people's needs to remain in contact with family and friends and encourage them to develop independence skills. Most children and young people have their educational and physical healthcare needs met.

The safety of children

At the time of this assurance visit, neither staff nor the children and young people are safe. Weaknesses in leadership and management have adversely affected safeguarding practice. The registered manager does not have sufficient understanding of the statutory guidance and the company's own safeguarding policies and procedures. For example, she is not always confident about what should and should not be referred to the designated officer and to Ofsted.

When the registered manager was absent from the home, staff felt they needed additional support in their work with children and young people, some of whom were becoming increasingly powerful and assertive. This support was provided, however, one newly admitted child was repeatedly punched in the face by another child. There were incidents of homophobic and racial abuse, combined with highly sexualised threats and behaviour towards female staff. Staff were not confident that managers were managing risks safely.

The home's leaders and managers have worked with other agencies to respond to these incidents. There have been regular multi-agency meetings. In November, the registered person identified that one child's needs could no longer be met safely in this children's home. She gave notice on the child's placement.

It is positive that there have been only four restraints, all of which were proportionate and well recorded. Consequences (outcomes) set for children are fair and appropriate. When children and young people go missing from home, staff follow the correct procedures to help ensure that they are safe.

Leaders and managers

Since 1 April 2020, six staff have left the home, which created further problems for the children, young people and the team that remained. In October and November, sessional or agency staff were employed to cover 16 shifts. This does not provide consistency of care for the children and young people.

The company recruited new staff to fill these posts. There are now seven relatively new staff in role. It takes time for new staff to become experienced and confident in responding to children and young people's complex needs. Because many staff are still on or have just finished their probation, there are very few who have completed their level 3 qualification.

A requirement has been made about notifications to Ofsted. Some serious incidents were not notified to the regulator and others that Ofsted received lacked sufficient detail to be fully informative. Other incidents were notified late, outside the 24-hour timeframe. As a consequence, Ofsted was not made aware of the full risks to children and staff until this assurance visit took place.

Senior leaders and managers have worked with the designated officer and with Ofsted in a transparent manner in identifying and addressing the problems with the home's leadership.

A new deputy manager and a peripatetic manager were put in place to lead the staff team. The deputy manager has worked hard to support the staff team through regular supervision, and they are full of praise for her commitment. In spite of the difficulties over the past few months, the staff interviewed are passionate about their work with the children and young people and are very dedicated to this home.

One requirement was made at the interim inspection and is now met. This related to a member of staff enlisting a young person's help with a maintenance task and allowing him access to a screwdriver. In response, the home now keeps all sharp tools locked in the safe, so that the risk of injury is reduced.

Three new requirements have been made as a result of this assurance visit, relating to safeguarding practice, leadership and management and notifications.

A recommendation first made at the interim inspection has been repeated because the children and young people's bathroom requires a replacement bath. The bathroom has been redecorated and looks attractive, but the bath, which has been ordered, has not yet been installed.

The second recommendation has been made to clarify the timeline for submitting notifications to Ofsted.

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 that staff assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the</p>	15/01/2021

<p>child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child;</p> <p>manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other;</p> <p>understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person;</p> <p>that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(iv)(v)(b))</p>	
<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 lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose;</p> <p>ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate;</p> <p>ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child;</p> <p>ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child;</p> <p>ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child;</p> <p>use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(h))</p>	15/01/2021
<p>The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation;</p> <p>an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious;</p>	15/01/2021

there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there;

a child protection enquiry involving a child is instigated or concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or

there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious.

A notification made under this regulation must include details of the matter and must be made or confirmed in writing. (Regulation 40 (4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e) (5)(a)(b))

In particular, ensure that notifications are made to Ofsted in accordance with this regulation, with sufficient and accurate detail of the incident and that they are submitted in a timely manner in accordance with the 'Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards', April 2015, page 63, paragraph 14.3.

Recommendations

- Ensure that children's homes are nurturing and supportive environments that meet the needs of their children. They will, in most cases, be homely, domestic environments. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards', April 2015, page 15, paragraph 3.9)

In particular, ensure that bathing facilities are updated and that baths are of a suitable size for all the children and young people who live in the home.

- 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. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards', April 2015, page 63, paragraph 14.3)

This is with particular reference to the requirement made under regulation 40.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1241840

Registered provider: Wessex College Limited

Registered provider address: Wessex College Limited, 4 Cedar Park, Cobham Road, Ferndown Industrial Estate, Wimborne BH21 7SF

Responsible individual: Joanne Sams

Registered manager: Louise Knight

Inspector

Heather Chaplin, Social Care Inspector

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Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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