

SC446003

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The home is owned by a registered charitable organisation. It provides short breaks for up to four children and young people who have physical and/or learning disabilities. All placements are made under short-break arrangements.

The manager of the centre has completed his Level 5 qualification and has been registered with Ofsted since January 2018.

Visit dates: 10 to 11 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 20 February 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

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and serious safeguarding incidents involving other homes 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.

During the home's closure, managers were creative in providing outreach support where this was appropriate and facilitating group video calls so that children could keep in touch and maintain their friendships. Parents agree that for those children involved this has been extremely positive.

Staff are clearly familiar with children's needs and individual care requirements. Staff also have a good grasp of children's individual communication needs which helps them to understand children's wishes and assists them in making choices relevant to their care.

A parent commented of the home, 'I have no concerns about how [name of child] is looked after while she is there. She is safe and well looked after. She is given choices and opportunities to have fun with other children.'

Children enjoy coming to the home, and those that have attended since the home has reopened have had fun spending time with staff in surroundings they are familiar with. One child, on her arrival at the home, was delighted to see photographs of her friends, taking pride in naming them and pointing them out to staff.

Parents value the services which the home can provide. For some, who have had to shield, the pandemic has significantly increased their isolation and reduced the help and support that staff could previously offer.

The safety of children

The safety of children is a clear priority in this home. Staff have a thorough knowledge and understanding of children's individual health needs and vulnerabilities. This includes individual protocols to be followed in the event of an emergency. For example, for a child that suffers from seizures, their individual protocol clearly identifies the steps staff must follow at each stage.

Staff have also been instructed and trained in the additional infection control measures to be followed as a result of this pandemic. For example, children are encouraged to wash their hands, along with staff, on their arrival. Masks and gloves are worn to minimise the possibility of infection transmission.

A high level of staffing ensures that children are well supervised during their short breaks and receive plenty of attention and stimulation. Regularly reviewed risk assessments ensure that staff have a clear understanding of children's potential for harm and how to minimise and mitigate such risks.

Parents feel very reassured that their children are safely cared for during short breaks. One parent commented, 'The staff are always so friendly, and I know my son is in good hands.'

The arrangements for medication storage and administration is safely managed in this home. Staff work together to check and record all medication coming into the home and ensure that arrangements are confirmed with parents prior to a child's short break at the home. The manager has implemented a practice of regular and intermittent observations of medication administration as part of the staff competency procedure.

Leaders and managers

The home's activity is well organised and coordinated by the home's registered manager, who is qualified and experienced in working with children with disabilities and complex health needs.

During the home's closure and where it was safe to do so, staff have provided outreach support for children and their families. This has enabled staff to stay in touch with some children and provide much-needed respite during this very difficult time.

With the help of some additional funding, the manager and his deputy have provided a telephone support service to those families whose children would ordinarily use the home for short breaks. For some families, just having someone to talk to that understands their child's needs has been welcomed and appreciated.

The manager has ensured that staff have continued to access regular training opportunities and supervision while working in the community and other sectors of the organisation. Although a lot of training has been online, some critical training has occurred, with staff being able to socially distance in small groups.

External monitoring of the home has continued, despite several months of closure. Regular reports sent to Ofsted identify how health and government advice has been successfully implemented to minimise the threat of COVID-19, and the value and benefits achieved of maintaining contact with children and their families during this pandemic.

The registered manager has been proactive in reviewing and revising children's plans and has successfully embedded some new procedures and recording systems at the home. This ensured that the home was able to respond quickly to children's and families' needs once the home could be reopened.

The one requirement made at the last inspection has been met. No further requirements or recommendations are made following this visit.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC446003

Registered provider: Carlisle Mencap Ltd

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

Responsible individual: Sheila Gregory

Registered manager: Stuart Cowper

Inspector

Gillian Walters, Social Care Inspector

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