

4 August 2022

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Chair, Education Select Committee

Amanda Spielman
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Sent by email to: educom@parliament.uk



Calcot Services For Children

I am writing in response to the Education Select Committee's recommendation as follows:

'Ofsted must assess its whistleblowing and safeguarding procedures for inspecting children's homes, and must write to us outlining how these have been strengthened in order to prevent future cohorts of children being failed.'

I will describe our Calcot work before addressing your more general question.

Calcot

In an average year, Ofsted receives around 28,000 notifications from or about children's homes: this translates into more than 10 notifications for a typical children's home, of varying levels of seriousness. The number of notifications about Calcot homes in 2021-22, and also the mix of types and themes, were broadly in line with this national picture.

In this case we acted on both whistleblowing disclosures and other notifications to accelerate the normal inspection schedule. One Calcot home had already been reinspected at the time that the BBC made contact with us, and the inspections of Calcot's other homes had been scheduled in quick succession. (The BBC was aware of the imminent publication of the report.) We have since completed all but one of these inspections. Five homes have been judged inadequate, three of which have now closed voluntarily and are no longer registered. Two homes have been provisionally judged as good. One home currently has no children on roll and is non-

operational although it remains registered and will be inspected later this month. For the inadequate homes we have issued regulatory notices with restrictions and requirements that set out areas for improvement.

For obvious reasons, we do not make public what inspections are scheduled and for when. There is also an unavoidable period between an inspection visit and report publication, during which an inspection report is drafted, fact checked by the provider and quality assured.

Calcot's education provisions have also been inspected and reports will be published in September.

We are also aware of a reported whistleblowing concern, relating to a young person living in supported accommodation rather than a children's home. We can take no action on this as the provision is unregulated. We have, however, shared information with the Care Quality Commission, which regulates some other Calcot services.

As you know, the Calcot's children's homes were previously judged good or outstanding, and we have reviewed the likely causes and timeline for the decline. From 2017 until December 2020, Calcot had two experienced operations managers, as well as a long-standing Responsible Individual (RI) for two of the homes. RIs oversee the supervision and quality assurance of the homes. After these staff left, another experienced operations manager left the company in September 2021.

Inspectors who know the settings well report that those operations managers had a significant influence on the practice at all the homes. After their departure, five out of eight registered children's home managers left within three months, leaving the company with very few experienced managers. We are currently processing applications for two registered managers, after which we will be able to risk assess the strength of the new team.

We continue to monitor Calcot's children's homes and will take further enforcement action if necessary. We are also working closely with placing Local Authorities (LAs) and host Local Authority Designated Officers so that there is a shared understanding of the concerns, so that LAs can consider what action they need to take regarding their children's safeguarding and care. Hence, some children have been found alternative places to live by their LA.

From our review of both the recent issues at Calcot and our own practice, we have concluded that many of the concerns at Calcot are linked to the failure of newly appointed managers and current staff to assess risk effectively and to ensure children's safety. The previous inspection findings related to different staff and managers and were based on strong contemporaneous evidence.

Follow up action by Ofsted

We pay close attention to provision where children receive all their education and care from the same provider, such as Calcot.

Notifications from or about children's homes are immediately scrutinised by our Regulatory Inspectors, who take a range of actions including: contacting the provider; seeking information from other parties (such as a local authority designated officer or the police); and reviewing a home's risk assessment to decide whether an inspection or other regulatory event needs to be scheduled. The same robust process is followed for whistleblowing letters. No whistleblowing concern is ever ignored.

We are never complacent and continually learn from reviewing our own practice, as well as gathering insights from national or local learning reviews. We will use this opportunity to revisit core areas of our work with our staff, as we always do periodically as part of our on-going quality assurance. These include using our risk assessment tools to respond appropriately as a regulator, as well as the need to consider patterns of notifications and the cumulative picture, as well as looking at each notification on its own merits.

In terms of systemic issues, we continue to set out publicly the case for the modernisation of the Care Standards Act to reflect current, not historical, provision. This needs to include having the right regulatory oversight for groups as well as for single homes. There also needs to be regulatory oversight of the directors and owners of provision. This is not within our powers at present, so we cannot hold the responsible people to account. We have raised this issue over several years with the Department for Education, which owns the regulations. We remain hopeful that the Care Review and ensuing action by government will be an opportunity for these changes to be made.

I am happy to provide any further information you may want.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Spielman". The script is fluid and cursive.

Amanda Spielman

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector