

1243962

Registered provider: North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home provides a short-break service for children with learning disabilities and associated complex needs. The home provides overnight short-break care for up to six children.

The home is run by a combined healthcare NHS trust. The manager registered with Ofsted in November 2017 and has a level 5 diploma in leadership and management for residential childcare.

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 February 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 11 October 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/10/2023	Full	Good
31/01/2023	Full	Good
29/11/2021	Full	Good
04/03/2020	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

At the time of the inspection, there were four children having a short break. Due to the children's communication needs, their feedback was assessed through observation. All four children were seen, and were observed to be very happy and comfortable with the staff who were supporting them.

Children enjoy staying at the home for their short breaks. Children receive a warm welcome and settle quickly. Staff ensure that children's bedrooms are personalised for each child's stay, with specific bedding for each child, and children are able to bring their own items to keep in their bedroom. This helps children to feel comfortable in their home away from home.

Children benefit from positive moves in and out of the home. Thorough planning with parents, and short visits, helps staff to learn about the children before they stay overnight. Comprehensive handovers take place with parents at the beginning and end of each stay to ensure that all important information is shared.

Relationships between children and staff are very positive. Staff are energetic and enthusiastic about their roles. They understand each child's individual needs well and ensure that their needs are met. For example, one child has no verbal communication but was able to get staff's attention and show them what they wanted. Staff showed patience and care when interpreting the child's wishes and, as a result, they were provided with the snack that they wanted.

Children are supported to engage in a wide range of activities, both in the home and out in the local community. During the inspection, children were seen engaging in sensory play and painting and having a foot spa. Children also take part in art and craft activities, visit the local farm and park and enjoy meals in a local fast-food restaurant. These activities provide children with enjoyable experiences that they may otherwise not have access to.

Children make good progress during their stays. Work towards individual targets for each child helps to ensure that they are benefiting from their experiences in the home. For example, one child finds having their teeth brushed very distressing. A sensitive plan is in place to help the child reduce their anxieties, and they are now showing some improvement in their care routine. This progress will have a positive impact on the child's future health.

Staff work well with children's families. Communication is strong, and parents are consulted and kept up to date with their child's progress during stays. Parents appreciate the updates they receive during their child's stay, as well as the individual photo books that were given at Christmas to show the positive experiences that their child has when they are away from home.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

The home cares for children with a range of complex needs. Children have comprehensive plans that assist staff to provide safe care. Staff understand the risks associated with each child's care and they manage these risks well. For example, feeding plans are in place for children who are unable to eat orally, and care is taken to plan meals for a child with diabetes.

The home environment is safe for vulnerable children. The children attending the service have limited capacity and understanding of risk, and therefore rely on staff to keep them safe. The home is furnished according to the needs of the children, and changes are made as different children come and go in line with their differing needs and associated risks. Specialist equipment is in place and is maintained well, which allows children to receive safe care.

Children are cared for through high staff ratios, which allows for close supervision and support. Due to the children's varied needs, staff need to be able to manage behaviour well. Staff are well trained and are able to recognise triggers and changes in children's behaviour, and to de-escalate situations. Physical interventions are rarely needed, but when they are used they are done safely by trained staff.

Staff recruitment is not always completed safely. This was identified at the previous inspection, and further shortfalls were identified during this inspection. Managers do not ensure that all staff complete a full employment history; a significant gap had not been recognised or explored. When staff have held several previous roles working with vulnerable people, managers do not always seek references. This limits the manager's ability to ensure that only safe people are employed to work with children.

Staff manage a lot of medication in the home. There are processes in place to ensure that medication is stored and administered safely, and only nurses are allowed to administer medication. There have been several errors made with the administration of medication, and managers have addressed these effectively with the staff concerned, making changes to processes where needed. One child's medication record did not contain accurate information about how often their different medications should be given. Once highlighted, action was taken to correct the form; however, such inaccuracies pose a risk of further medication errors. No children had come to any harm from the errors that had occurred.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The home is managed by an experienced nurse who holds a relevant management qualification. She is dedicated to her role and is keen to provide the best care possible for the children. She is well respected by staff, professionals and children's families.

The home is fully staffed, with a high proportion of staff having worked at the home for a long time. Bank staff are available when it is necessary to cover sickness absence to

ensure that children have the high level of support they need. Staff are happy at work and genuinely care about the children they care for. The positivity from managers and staff helps to create a very welcoming, caring environment for children to stay in.

Staff have the skills and knowledge to meet children's needs. The staff team consists of a mix of qualified nurses, healthcare workers and an activity assistant. All staff have completed extensive training, including specialist training to meet specific health needs.

Management oversight is good. Monitoring tools are used well to assess practice in the home. The manager is committed to providing good, safe care and there has been good learning from incidents that have occurred. Following one incident, the manager felt unable to continue providing care to a child due to the environment no longer being suitable. They worked with other professionals to ensure that the child left the service in a positive way and was supported to receive care that better met their needs.

Feedback from children's families and professionals is very positive. Parents are very grateful for the care provided and spoke about the difference that their child's stays had on the whole family. One parent said, 'We never have to worry about [name of child] when he is on his short break, we know that he is safe, cared for and happy.' Another said, 'The staff are amazing, caring and understanding of both children's and parents' needs.' Such comments demonstrate that the service being provided is having a positive impact on children's families and that they feel confident that their child will be safe and well cared for when they are away from home.

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, The 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
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The registered person may only— employ an individual to work at the children's home; or if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). The requirements are that— the individual is of integrity and good character; the individual has the appropriate experience, qualification and skills for the work that the individual is to perform; the individual is mentally and physically fit for the purposes of the work that the individual is to perform; and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1) (2)(a)(b) (3)(a)(b)(c)(d)) This has been increased from a recommendation at the previous inspection.	22 April 2025

Recommendation

- The registered person must take care to ensure prescribed medicines are only administered to the individual for whom they are prescribed. Medicines must be administered in line with a medically approved protocol. Records must be kept of the

administration of all medication. This specifically relates to ensuring that all medication records contain accurate information about the frequency of medication doses to reduce the risk of errors. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 35, paragraph 7.15)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1243962

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust

Registered provider address: North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust,
Lawton House, Bellringer Road, Stoke on Trent ST4 8HH

Responsible individual: Sharon Parke

Registered manager: Tracey Flanagan

Inspector

Vicky Smith, Social Care Inspector

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