

2508513

Registered provider: Cumbria County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The children's home is owned and run by a local authority. It provides short breaks for up to six children who may experience emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is part of the local authority's Edge of Care service.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), and the limited availability of emergency placements, some placements have been of longer duration to meet the need for emergency care. This was in response to the growing demand on this local authority service from March 2020.

A new manager interviewed with Ofsted prior to this inspection and was registered on 26 July 2021.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 21 to 22 July 2021

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: 13 September 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
13/09/2019	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the home's statement of purpose was amended to include children in need of emergency care and support that was likely to exceed the short breaks usually provided at this home. For some other children during this period, when government restrictions were eased, this has meant missing out on planned weekend activity breaks at the home.

As the home is now open seven days a week, this change has also reduced the time that staff have available to provide outreach support to children and their families in the community. For instance, most staff are only able to see families once a week, when before the pandemic some were visited three times a week. Despite this, staff have been successful in keeping most children known to them at home with family members.

The home is comfortable and welcoming. Children are treated with dignity and respect and are encouraged to contribute their ideas, views and wishes for their planned time living at the home. Because of this, children generally enjoy spending time at the home and quickly develop positive and trusting relationships with staff. One child commented, 'The staff have been really good to me. I really like [name of staff member]. He is firm but fair. I can't think of anything that would make the home better.'

Staff have cared for several children with highly complex needs and some with challenging behaviours that are associated with diagnosed conditions. Staff have sought the help of other relevant professionals to ensure that they have sufficient knowledge and skill to support those children effectively during their time in the home.

Care planning is highly individualised to each child living at the home. Children's health needs are well documented and prioritised to ensure children's physical, emotional and mental health is appropriately promoted. However, it was noted in one child's file that consent for medical care and treatment had been inappropriately signed by a social work manager rather than a parent. This is a practice that could potentially delay a child getting emergency treatment and is inappropriate when the child is not a child looked after.

During COVID-19 restrictions, when children were unable to attend school, staff assisted with home tuition when this was possible. For some children, this helped them keep up with their learning by completing work provided by teaching staff. However, for some children, their learning was less formal and focused more on developing their own independence skills. This helped both their confidence and resilience to grow.

Most parents have spoken positively about the care and support their children have received. One parent commented, 'I have to say the home is well focused for children where families are in crisis. The home itself has a welcoming atmosphere. My son loved being there, he loved the activities and he felt safe.'

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

Children have a strong sense of safety in this home. They are trusting of staff and know that staff will act to keep them safe and protect them from harm. Children are encouraged to contribute to every part of their care planning. Children and staff agree safety plans which consider known risks and how these can be minimised. As such, children feel included and tend to be more invested in working with staff to keep themselves safe.

Staff are fully trained and experienced in good safeguarding practice and child protection issues. Their knowledge and experience ensure that they can confidently mentor and help children learn to become more aware of the possible dangers they may encounter and how they can stay safe in their community.

Prior to the pandemic, the home did not experience any incidents of children going missing from the home. Children felt safe and enjoyed their short breaks, so they had little reason to leave the home without permission.

Since the change in the home's function, there have been many incidents of children going missing, most of short duration. However, this number has significantly declined over the last few months and the trend for individual children shows a marked decline from their starting points.

Children understand the home's rules and boundaries and in the main respect these. They value time spent with staff and keeping the home looking nice and free from damage. During challenging situations, staff have demonstrated their skills in using therapeutic crisis intervention techniques to avoid physical interventions that may have placed children and staff at greater risk of harm.

Children in this home thrive on praise and encouragement given by staff. Sanctions are not used as they are understood to be punitive and less effective than restorative measures.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The home, one of two previously managed by the Edge of Care manager, has a new registered manager, due to the capacity of the service increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The new registered manager previously worked as an assistant manager in the service. She is passionate to maintain a service that ultimately prevents children becoming looked after by the local authority. She has almost completed her level 5 diploma in leadership and management in children's residential services.

Staff feel valued and well supported in their roles. They identify the registered manager as very approachable and supportive. Staff supervision has been regularly provided and good use has been made of technology to ensure team meetings take place. Staff have been proactive in completing online training to ensure their knowledge remains up to date.

Staff acknowledge feeling some frustration that the current need for emergency care is limiting the outreach service they normally provide. However, staff have shown considerable flexibility in working with children and their families and have adapted well to meet recent challenges that ordinarily would not have come their way.

The manager and staff work in close partnership with social workers, parents and other professionals to minimise the likelihood of children requiring long-term care. One social worker commented, 'They are preparing [child's name] for semi-independence. I can't fault them. I have had other children there previously. The outreach work is brilliant and the way they work with the family as a whole is really good. They don't disempower parents, they model what is required.'

Children's records are generally well maintained and provide a comprehensive account of their time at the home. However, some records reflecting on the child's day at the home were incomplete. Scoring was used in most cases to evaluate the success of the day. This appeared to be somewhat arbitrary as there was no common guidance for the scoring. In addition, some records also failed to provide an evaluation to inform staff of what could be improved.

Since the last inspection, the home has received a complaint from a parent. This was dealt with swiftly and effectively to the parent's satisfaction, in accordance with the home's procedure. The parent commented, 'I was impressed by the management of the home, the willingness to listen and rectify what they could do immediately. They took ownership of the mistake and showed that they can learn.'

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
The health and well-being standard is that— children receive advice, services and support in relation to their health and well-being. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff help each child to— take part in activities, and attend any appointments, for the purpose of meeting the child's health and well-being needs. (Regulation 10 (1)(b)(2)(a)(iii)) This relates specifically to staff obtaining parental consent in a timely manner to ensure children can receive emergency medical treatment if required.	3 September 2021

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that staff maintain children's records, understanding the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

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: 2508513

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Cumbria County Council

Registered provider address: Cumbria House, 117 Botchergate, Carlisle CA1 1RD

Responsible individual: Lynn Berryman

Registered manager: Kayleigh Gregory

Inspector

Gillian Walters, Social Care Inspector

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