

2557361

Registered provider: Worcestershire Children First

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is registered to provide short breaks for up to six children with learning and/or physical disabilities.

At the time of this inspection, 30 children were receiving short-breaks.

The manager registered with Ofsted in October 2019. She is a qualified social worker and holds a leadership and management diploma at level 5. She is an experienced registered manager.

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 January 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 16 February 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
16/02/2023	Full	Outstanding
14/12/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children and their families are overwhelmingly positive about how they are welcomed to the home before they first come to stay. The introduction of new children to the home is tailored to their individual needs. Before a child stays for the first time, staff visit the child to get to know them both at home and at school. Discussions with family members and a wide range of professionals ensure that there is a full understanding of the child's needs and that managers can ensure that staff have the skills and any specific training necessary for the child's support.

As part of their introduction, new children and their families have the opportunity to visit the home, learn about the service and meet the staff team. This is followed by as many day visits as the child needs before they have their first overnight stay. The children who already stay overnight are actively involved in and enjoy welcoming new children to the home. Staff are skilled at using existing friendships and the connections that children have through school to help them feel comfortable and reassured.

As a result of the extensive preparation undertaken by the staff, new children settle in quickly and flourish. Clear lines of communication, and attention to detail by staff in arranging the children's care, mean that families are confident that their children are happy and well cared for. One parent said, 'My child has come on leaps and bounds since attending. The staff are so warm, welcoming and kind.'

The children like spending time at the home and share interests and hobbies and enjoy the social time with their friends. Children build long-lasting, resilient friendships. When children leave the service, they are sent off with a party that is organised and shared with their friends, as well as presents and an album filled with memories and photos.

Staff pay significant attention to understanding children's education, health and care (EHC) plans, their strengths and the areas that they would like to develop. Individual targets are then carefully designed to support children to make progress. Children are creatively encouraged by staff to extend their skills and interests while having fun and growing in confidence. The staff make it a priority to attend children's EHC planning meetings and use these meetings to share and celebrate the progress that the child has made while enjoying their short break. One parent described how her son has learned to try different foods and drinks. They said 'He's also learned to help lift his arms to assist when getting dressed. The staff team also taught him how to hold his toothbrush and to use his sling for a hoist.'

Staff have an excellent knowledge of children's preferred communication styles and systems and use these effectively to support children to express their wishes and feelings. Children's voices are at the heart of their care. Children have the

opportunity to take part in a wide range of activities both in the home and in the local community. Staff ensure that planned activities are informed by children's wishes and their agreed targets and help them to make progress. For example, for one child, shopping trips with staff have increased the child's confidence and have made a valuable difference to the child's family. The parent said, 'Now family life is easier as he's more socially adjusted and as a family we do not feel as though we are tied to the house when he is home. Now we can take him with us, and he will gladly join without the previous anxiety attached to him being in public spaces.'

Staff have in-depth knowledge of the children's health needs. They work closely with children's families, medical professionals and a team of community-based nurses to ensure that children's health needs are met. Staff receive a wealth of training specific to children's individual needs, including feeding and epilepsy. Where necessary, this training includes a competency element that is tested by a community-based nurse annually for each staff member. Staff acknowledge the limitations on the nurse's time and the importance of this training to the continuity of care for children, so they come into the home on their days off to complete this training.

Staff plan themed activities around a topic of the month, and all children are supported to take part during their stay. Staff take great care to adapt and tailor the activity each time it happens to make it accessible for each child. Recent themes have included engaging in group play, current affairs, exploring the garden, look what I can do, cooking and change. These themed activities link to the individual targets set out in children's EHC plans. For example, the theme 'cooking' might support one child to learn about money by buying ingredients, while it might support another child to focus on hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills by weighing and mixing ingredients. These sessions are imaginatively planned by staff and help children to have fun alongside supporting them to increase their skills. Colourful notice boards throughout the home display photos and artwork from the sessions and celebrate the success of these activities.

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

The staff consistently promote the safety and well-being of the children. Careful assessment and planning mean that staff understand the children's risks and work effectively to reduce them. Children benefit from high staffing ratios. This means that children are able to spend time safely both inside and outside of the home. All children benefit from an approach to risk management that enhances their independence according to their abilities and understanding.

There have been no significant safeguarding incidents. Staff are alert to the children's vulnerabilities and are clear about how to respond should they have any concerns for a child's safety or well-being. The supportive approach of staff encourages children to behave well. Consequently, there have been no physical restraints. Staff support children to understand how to complain. There have been no complaints from the children, parents or professionals.

Staff have expert insight and understanding about children's emotional needs. Staff foster positive relationships with children. This supports children to feel a sense of safety and helps them to navigate any anxieties and develop emotional resilience. A parent commented, 'My daughter loves going; she feels safe and trusts all staff. There is always a happy, big smile to greet you with at the door.' Another parent said, 'My son has established friendships with the staff and has become far more comfortable with social situations. He is given a home-from-home experience, which we are very grateful for as he is routine reliant.'

Staff organise activities that help to raise children's awareness about safety and well-being. Topics have included fire awareness, summer safety and internet safety, and activities are developed to suit the ability and understanding of individual children. For example, fire awareness activities included children going through the fire drill, to watching safety videos and responding to a roll-call.

The registered manager ensures that all of the necessary recruitment checks are carried out when new staff come to work at the home. This means that children benefit from having staff working with them who have been safely vetted.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager is a passionate and committed practitioner. She has in-depth knowledge of the children and staff. She is highly committed to ensuring that the children's needs are accurately identified and met. Her enthusiasm and dedication provide a positive role model and strong leadership for staff.

The registered manager and staff team challenge other professionals when their decision-making or practice is not child focused. For example, as part of their assessment, staff queried why a child was being lifted when he needed to be moved at home and in school. Close working with the school's physiotherapist resulted in a strategy being implemented at the home where play is used to encourage the child to move and bear their own weight independently. This strategy has since been adopted at school and at home by the child's family. Strong advocacy on behalf of the child has helped to promote the child's independence and increase his physical mobility.

The registered manager ensures that the team work hard to ensure that children and their families receive the best service possible. Having become aware of research relating to EHC plans, the registered manager has focused the team on supporting children's holistic development. Consequently, the team tries hard to ensure that all aspects of the daily life of the home work to support the children to develop and progress against their targets and plans. As a result of their short breaks, children enjoy a range of life experiences and make considerable progress. The registered manager carefully monitors children's progress and continues to reflect and consider how to develop this initiative further through consultations with partners, in planned team days and ongoing development plans.

The staff team is stable, very skilled and knowledgeable. Staff benefit from regular team meetings, supervision, appraisals and training. A new staff member was highly complimentary about the induction she received, which was specific to this service. The registered manager continues to ensure that the staff team's knowledge and expertise meet the needs of the children. In addition to the mandatory training and training made available through the provider, the registered manager has purchased another training platform. She uses this to allocate specialist training to staff to keep them up to date with current developments and research and ensure they can meet any new needs that emerge for children. In addition, staff members take it in turns to research topics and deliver presentations and workshops in team meetings. Sessions are diverse and have included topics such as mealtimes and supporting children to eat, intensive interaction, assessing compatibility at a short-breaks service and gross motor skills. In concluding each session, the staff team reflect on their own practice and make commitments to new practices as well as practices specific to individual children.

The registered manager has clear plans for the future of this home. She has researched, and has on order, a new purpose-built minibus that will increase access to events in the local community for children who are wheelchair users. She is also continuing to research strategies to recruit experienced and skilled new staff to enable her to expand the service and offer more short breaks to more children.

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: 2557361

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Worcestershire Children First

Registered provider address: County Hall, Spetchley Road, Worcester WR5 2NP

Responsible individual: Daniela Carson

Registered manager: Beverley Harris

Inspector

Dawn Bennett, Social Care Inspector

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