

SC030967

Registered provider: Hartlepool Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home provides care and accommodation for children and young people who have learning disabilities. The home offers respite care for six children and young people, and care and accommodation for two longer-term placements. It is owned and operated by a local authority. The manager has been registered since April 2008.

Inspection dates: 30 to 31 July 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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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: 6 November 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
06/11/2018	Full	Outstanding
11/09/2017	Full	Outstanding
28/02/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness
24/08/2016	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

An excellent admissions process introduces children and young people and their families to this warm, inviting and well-equipped home. A talking photograph book and a children's guide written in pictorial symbols help to give children and young people information about the home before they arrive. Parents are also reassured by discussing their child with the home's managers at a child appreciation day. This provides the staff team with full information so that there is a shared understanding of the child's or young person's needs.

Introductions to the home go at the pace of the child or young person so that they are fully prepared. This helps to make their stays even more enjoyable. Parents are also reassured. Ongoing communication between the staff team and parents continues as a result of the trusting relationships developed from the beginning of a child's or young person's stay at the home.

Children and young people receive excellent care and support from the experienced and skilled long-standing staff team. As well as providing respite care, some children and young people stay at the home for longer periods of time. Staff have more involvement in their health, education and care needs. When a child or young person needs more specialised health support, such as having blood tests carried out at the home, staff explore the different options available. However, this has so far proved unsuccessful and one child is still waiting for an appointment.

The staff team has a close working relationship with the schools that the children and young people attend. This offers a consistent approach across the different settings. Additionally, the staff help young people to obtain recognised awards so that they can develop skills for learning, work and life.

All the children and young people make progress in different areas of their lives. Their life experiences are enhanced, and they transfer the skills they develop to home and school. This includes improved sleep patterns, more tolerance towards others and improved personal-care skills. The child-friendly care plans provide a clear measure of the progress that children and young people make in respect of their development and self-management skills.

The use of symbols, objects of reference, pictures and talking door-signs, together with the active use of sign language, gives children genuine choice. Children and young people, including those who have communication difficulties, feel understood and able to influence the care they receive. Speech and language improve and, as a result, negative behaviours lessen.

Children and young people enjoy a wide range of exciting and sensory activities at the

home. In the large garden area, play equipment and a hot tub offer physical exercise and stimulation. Activity plans are tailored for each child and young person. This gives them a balance between individual time with staff and group trips with their peers. Children and young people build new friendships, which helps them with the development of their social skills. The children and young people spoke of the fun they have at the home. The support and supervision from staff allow them to have new opportunities, such as going swimming, eating out in restaurants or going on train journeys. Their enjoyment is captured in the many photographs displayed around the home, and in their personalised memory books.

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

The high staffing levels keep children and young people safe and allow them to be closely observed and supervised as needed. The staff team has an extensive knowledge of the children's and young people's vulnerabilities. As a result, the children and young people do not go missing from home. They stay safe and have the support they need to make progress.

The staff team is well versed in how the children and young people communicate their needs. The staff quickly recognise and respond to changes in presentation and the different vocalisations of non-verbal children and young people. The intuitive staff are excellent at noticing when children and young people are distressed. Parents spoke of the trust they have in staff to keep their children safe and well cared for. This includes those who have complex health needs.

There are robust and effective risk assessments in place which enable the staff to anticipate risks and de-escalate behaviours before they become dangerous to the child or young person or the staff. On the rare occasions when children and young people need to be held to keep them safe, these interventions are well documented and include a clear rationale. The manager reviews each incident and supports staff to reflect on their response. If needed, the positive behaviour management plans are changed, with new strategies included to prevent further episodes.

The staff team provides a flexible service and staff go over and above to make sure that children and young people are kept safe. The staff have excellent working relationships with safeguarding professionals. This provides an important multi-disciplinary approach. The children and young people share information with the staff due to their trusting relationships. Staff remain vigilant and feed back relevant information to social care professionals.

Staff educate children and young people about issues such as e-safety and bullying, using material that is appropriate to the individual's age and stage of development. This provides children and young people with the knowledge of how to keep themselves safe from harm and abuse. Children and young people are empowered to complain and said they would speak to either the manager or other staff if they were worried.

The staff use their training and research effectively to promote the safety and welfare of young people. Following sensory training, there has been a programme of redecoration to softer, neutral colours, to promote a calm environment. This has had an immediate, positive impact on the behaviour of the children and young people. However, some bedrooms are looking dated and are due for redecoration to bring them in line with the high-quality decor of the home.

Staff use a reward system to promote positive behaviours. Children and young people are fully involved in this system and are proud of their photograph and the points they have been awarded, which are maintained on the display board. Rewards are tailored to their individual goals and capabilities. This allows all children and young people to achieve and make positive progress.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager is a highly motivated, inspirational leader. She leads by example and is child focused and aspirational for children and young people to reach their full potential. This filters down to the staff, who are equally committed and are enthusiastic about making sure that children and young people have the best possible time when they stay.

The manager and staff are creative and forward-thinking and continue to make improvements at the home, such as in the sensory room and with the development of personalised communication packs and individualised sensory aids.

The home has a stable team of staff, many of whom have worked at the home for a number of years. This provides continuity of care for the children and young people. The staff have a diverse range of skills and some have additional responsibilities that make the best of the team's abilities, such as a positive-behaviour worker. They share their knowledge during team meetings and group discussions, helping others to develop their own insight.

The manager considers staff development and training as essential to maintaining the exceptionally high standard of care provided for children and young people. Staff benefit from receiving good-quality ongoing training which is tailored to their service and informs their practice.

Staff feel valued and supported by managers and receive regular supervision. However, as supervision sessions are delivered by different members of the management team, the quality of these discussions is not consistent.

The staff team attends regular team meetings as well as having monthly meetings with an external clinical team to discuss the children and young people who are being cared for. This offers the team opportunities to have regular reflective discussions.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- For children's homes to be nurturing and supportive environments that meet the needs of their children, they will, in most cases, be homely, domestic environments. Children's homes must comply with relevant health and safety legislation (alarms, food, hygiene etc.); however, in doing so, homes should seek as far as possible to maintain a domestic rather than 'institutional' impression ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9). In particular, the programme of redecoration needs to continue in the bedrooms, to match the high-quality decoration in other parts of the home.
- A record of supervision should be kept for staff, including the manager. The record should provide evidence that supervision is being delivered in line with regulation 33(4)(b) ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.3). Specifically, the manager should ensure that supervision is consistently delivered to the same standard by all supervisors.
- Children's homes staff should encourage children to take a proactive role in looking after their day-to-day health and well-being. Where children have specific health needs or conditions, they should be supported to manage these, subject to their age and understanding. When a child needs additional health or well-being support, staff should work with the child's placing authority to enable proper and immediate access to any specialist medical, psychological or psychiatric support required, and challenge them through regulation 5 – engaging with the wider system to ensure children's needs are met, if this doesn't happen ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 34, paragraph 7.10). In particular, if there is delay with a child's blood tests, the manager to escalate their concerns to the placing authority.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC030967

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Hartlepool Borough Council, Civic Centre, Victoria Road, Hartlepool, Durham TS24 8AY

Responsible individual: Danielle Swainston

Registered manager: Sylvia Lowe

Inspectors

Tina Ruffles: social care inspector

Deb Duffy: social care inspector

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