

SC032565

Registered provider: Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is operated by a local authority. It provides residential short breaks for children with learning and/or physical disabilities. There are currently 52 children accessing short breaks at this home. Children attend for short breaks in small groups of up to six children. Significant renovations are currently underway, which mean that only three children can have overnight stays at any one time.

There is a permanent registered manager, who is suitably experienced and qualified.

At the time of the inspection, eight children were having a short break. The inspector interacted with all eight children.

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 October 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
---	-------------

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
---	------

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 17 September 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
17/09/2024	Full	Good
30/08/2023	Full	Good
24/08/2022	Full	Good
11/08/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive warm, nurturing and attuned care from staff who know them extremely well. Interactions between children and staff are positive, patient and responsive to each child's individual needs and communication style. As a result, children are comfortable, relaxed and happy during their time at the home. Two of the children told the inspector that they enjoyed attending short breaks. On one occasion, a placement was ended for safeguarding reasons. This was managed sensitively through a restorative approach that ensured a positive and respectful ending for the child.

Children's views are actively sought and used to shape their experiences and influence the development of the service. Weekly children's meetings, informal conversations and feedback after each visit give children a voice in decision-making about activities, routines and the environment. For example, children said that they wanted to go on more trips and, in response, staff organised visits to Blackpool and other local attractions. These experiences have helped children to build confidence, strengthen social relationships and create positive memories. This demonstrates that leaders listen and respond to children's views, to enhance their enjoyment and quality of life.

Staff and managers provide care and support during visits that improve children's quality of life and wellbeing. Children are given meaningful opportunities to develop age-appropriate independence skills. These opportunities build confidence and enhance children's sense of belonging.

Multi-agency working underpins the support provided to children. Staff attend statutory meetings and other forums where children's health, safety and welfare are discussed. Leaders and staff also ensure that families are fully involved in care planning and decision-making, and that parenting strategies are aligned between home, school and the service.

Regular communication with families, including newsletters and updates after every visit, helps parents to feel informed, empowered and confident in the support their children receive. One parent described the staff as 'superheroes' who have transformed their child's life and improved the family's wellbeing.

Staff are highly attuned to children's non-verbal communication. They interpret gestures, sounds and physical cues sensitively, helping children to feel understood and reducing frustration. Practice would be further strengthened through the consistent use of formal communication systems, such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) or Makaton, as identified in some children's plans. The manager recognises this and is already liaising with parents, schools and partner agencies to ensure that communication approaches are fully aligned across all settings.

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

Safeguarding practice is robust. Despite ongoing building refurbishments, leaders and managers have maintained a safe, welcoming and well-organised environment. Risk assessments are comprehensive and regularly updated to reflect environmental factors and the individual needs of each child. Builders and contractors are appropriately vetted, and work is carefully scheduled to minimise disruption and sensory impact. This demonstrates the manager's strong commitment to ensuring children's safety and continuity of care.

Medication practice is safe. On the few occasions where minor errors have occurred, leaders responded promptly through investigation, reflection and targeted training. This approach promotes accountability and continuous improvement in practice.

When complaints are received, investigations are thorough, timely and overseen by senior leaders to ensure transparency and accountability. The manager keeps parents informed throughout the process and ensures that outcomes are communicated within appropriate timescales. This open and responsive approach promotes trust and confidence in the service and ensures that children and families continue to receive safe and high-quality care.

Children's behaviours are well understood and managed effectively by staff who know them well. Clear behaviour support plans and a consistent, therapeutic approach help staff to de-escalate situations and prevent incidents from escalating. When physical intervention is required, it is used only as a last resort and in line with agreed behaviour management plans, with staff responding proportionately and with the child's welfare at the centre of their actions. Following any incident, children are given the opportunity to reflect with a member of staff, helping them to make sense of their emotions and repair relationships quickly.

Children, staff and managers have not always been provided with an opportunity to reflect on an incident with a person who is independent from that incident. As a result, there have been missed opportunities to review practice and embed learning and emotional safety for both children and staff.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The home is led by a passionate, reflective and child-centred manager who has high aspirations for children and families. The manager is supported by deputy managers who share the same passion and commitment. His leadership fosters a culture of warmth, professionalism and continuous learning. Staff and parents consistently describe the managers as approachable, knowledgeable and deeply committed to improving children's experiences.

The decision to maintain the service throughout major refurbishment demonstrates the manager's resilience, strong leadership and unwavering focus on children's welfare.

Effective planning and oversight have ensured minimal disruption and maintained a consistent, safe and stable service.

Supervision, team meetings and clinical consultations are used effectively to reflect on practice and review children's progress. These sessions enable staff to develop insight into children's emotional and behavioural needs and to refine their approaches. This reflective culture contributes to consistent, high-quality care and measurable progress for children.

Staff are well trained and confident in meeting the individual and complex needs of the children they care for. All staff complete mandatory training and receive additional specialist training that is relevant to children's specific needs. This ensures a skilled workforce that is able to deliver nurturing and therapeutic care. Safe recruitment processes and strong staff retention ensure consistency and stability within the team, providing children with dependable adults and continuity of care.

Leaders and managers have robust systems for monitoring and reviewing the quality of care. Regular audits, reviews of incidents and reflective analysis are used effectively to identify patterns, strengths and shortfalls in practice. This ongoing evaluation ensures that care remains responsive to children's changing needs and that staff receive timely guidance and support. As a result, practice is continually refined, and children experience consistently high-quality, safe and nurturing care that promotes their progress and wellbeing.

Parents and professionals are overwhelmingly positive about the support provided by the staff and management team. They describe the service as life changing for children and families.

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 ensure that— within 48 hours of the use of the measure, the registered person, or a person who is authorised by the registered person to do so ("the authorised person")— has spoken to the user about the measure; and has signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35 (3)(b)(i)(ii)(c)) This specifically relates to the leaders ensuring that children are consistently given opportunity to reflect after incidents with an adult who was not directly involved in the incident. Additionally, managers should ensure that tools and methods used to support reflection with children after incidents are adapted to each child's communication style and cognitive ability, enabling them to express their views and feelings effectively. This also relates to the provider ensuring that when managers and senior leaders are involved in incidents where they have physically intervened to support children, they have opportunities to reflect on incidents with someone who was not involved in the incident to support accountability, wellbeing and continuous learning.	30 November 2025

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: SC032565

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Civic Centre glebe Street, Floor 2, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 1HH

Responsible individual: Tracey Docksey

Registered manager: Christopher Whalley

Inspector

Nateisha Cardoza-Evans, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025