

SC034849

Registered provider: Cheshire West and Chester Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This local authority-run home provides short breaks for up to three disabled children.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since March 2018.

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: 13 and 14 January 2022

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

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

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: 2 May 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
02/05/2019	Full	Good
19/07/2018	Full	Good
22/02/2018	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
18/05/2017	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The home closed for overnight stays for children until September 2020 due to COVID-19. As an alternative, the staff offered outreach support to families, including practical tasks such as shopping and taking children for walks or drives, in line with government guidance during periods of restriction. As restrictions lifted, children were able to enjoy activities at the home before overnight stays restarted.

The staff also helped children with bespoke pieces of work. For example, a comic strip workbook, using social stories, was created to help a child to establish a better morning routine. As a result, the child is now accepted back into school, and is making excellent progress. The range of support offered by the staff was vital in helping to prevent crises for children and their families during a very challenging time.

The home also introduced a new activities club during some of the school holidays. This enhances the local offer for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The clubs are open to all children with SEND, including those who do not usually use the short-break service. This further develops, and raises awareness of, the service to help more children. As a result, one child is now also accessing short breaks.

Parents attend virtual coffee mornings to discuss children's needs, fundraise and provide feedback for improvements to the service. For example, the team now provides an overview report of what children do during their visits, with photos of children enjoying activities. The staff now have even closer relationships with parents, which improves support for children. The staff are an important source of information and signpost families to other resources to help their children.

The staff are creative and find new ideas to improve experiences for children with the most complex needs, so that they make sustained progress through innovative approaches. In addition to the newly refurbished light sensory room, music therapy is being developed following successful informal sessions with children. Close partnership work with schools informs the development of this research.

Children celebrate cultural diversity through regular inventive arts and crafts sessions. This helps to develop their social awareness. Children enjoy numerous activities and trips to parks, nature trails, safari parks and zoos. Activities build children's self-esteem, confidence and growing independence.

Children develop their independence through clearly set and measurable targets. The staff review plans regularly with each child and create special individualised certificates when children achieve their goals. This helps children to prepare for their futures.

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

The staff team works closely with parents, children and professionals to identify and understand children's needs and vulnerabilities. Parents complete initial assessments which highlight children's likes and dislikes. Diligent pre-admission planning and clear transition plans help to safeguard children and provide tailored support which reduces risk during their stays.

Safeguarding is a clear priority and risk assessments are robust and reviewed by all staff. This means that children thrive in a safe environment and do not go missing. Each child has a comprehensive plan that identifies how the staff are to respond to any episode of going missing. A parent said that their child sees the short-break service as 'a second home' and is confident that he is safe when he visits.

Although there are minimal safeguarding concerns, the staff have a strong understanding of their roles and responsibilities to keep children safe. A delay in the administration of medication to a child was managed well, with advice sought from a pharmacist. The child's parent was informed, and the member of staff completed refresher training to minimise further errors.

The staff understand the triggers that may cause children distress. This prevents incidents and accidents occurring through proactive and effective planning. However, one record following an accident was not clear about the specific child's details. This was identified by the manager and did not have any negative effect on the child's care. Restraint is not required to manage children's behaviour because staff respond quickly and de-escalate issues. This promotes a safe and healthy environment.

The staff celebrate children's positive behaviour. Children receive rewards and creatively designed certificates when they achieve their goals. Certificates often include a photo of the child. Children are also awarded the title of 'Star of the Month'. This is in recognition of their achievements and retained in their records as part of their journey of using short breaks.

The staff team has excelled in safeguarding children throughout recent periods of lockdown, in consultation with parents. The manager has been creative with developing 'bubbles' for children coming to stay at the home. This minimises risks of transmission of COVID-19 but still allows for some flexibility to support families' changing needs. It promotes children's emotional and physical well-being and provides parents with reassurance. Children sustain their development because of this creative approach.

Members of the staff team continue to develop a safe and nurturing physical environment. As a result of their determination, they have created an outstanding sensory room. This provides a calm and relaxing environment which children use during their stays. Children now have a broad range of safe environments to experience at the home.

One area of the home is underused. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, this was developed as a self-contained area to provide any child looked after in the local authority's homes a safe place to self-isolate. Although it has not been used for this purpose, the provider has, in consultation with Ofsted, used this area for brief periods for children when they have been moving to other homes, to keep them safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

An experienced manager leads the staff team. The team is well established and has a wide range of skills and experience. This enables the staff to build highly effective relationships with children. The team shares the manager's aspirations for promoting and broadening children's experiences and opportunities during short breaks. Children respond by making substantial progress with their personal development.

The manager is aware of how COVID-19 affects her staff team. She has undertaken research into emotional well-being and how this can affect staff practice, to encourage greater self-awareness among the team. The staff confirm that this is an area of discussion during supervision. The manager strives to ensure that the staff are well supported so that they can provide the best possible care and experiences for children enjoying short breaks.

There are excellent working relationships between the staff, families, social workers and other external professionals. This ensures that children enjoy a consistent approach during their short breaks which aligns with and builds on their experiences in other settings, such as schools. The manager communicates effectively with schools, particularly when there are delays in reviews of children's education, health and care (EHC) plans, so that staff follow the same strategies to promote children's development. The manager has escalated her concerns when there has been delay to children's EHC plan reviews.

Feedback from professionals and parents is highly positive about the opportunities that children can access as part of their short breaks and the benefits they offer them. Communication is extremely effective in ensuring that children's changing needs and vulnerabilities inform practice in the home. Parents welcome the opportunity to discuss their children's needs before they come to visit, as well as the support offered to them when children were unable to access overnight stays during periods of COVID-19-related restrictions.

There are robust internal and external monitoring systems in place to promote continuous improvement in the home. The staff access a range of training opportunities to support their ongoing professional development and practice.

A video has been developed to introduce the service to new children and their families. This provides a wealth of information about what children can enjoy and how they will be cared for, as well as an introduction to the home environment, so that children and their families know what is available.

Children are at the heart of practice. Their views are valued and contribute to the development of the service. For example, the soft play area now has an under-the-sea theme in response to children's feedback. The staff take great pride in supporting children to fulfil their potential and speak with genuine warmth about children's achievements. They now develop video montages of photos of children's experiences during short breaks as an additional lasting memento of their journeys.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that records about children are clear and include required details to identify the specific child referred to. ('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: SC034849

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Cheshire West & Chester Council

Registered provider address: Council Offices, 4 Civic Way, Ellesmere Port,
Cheshire CH65 0BE

Responsible individual: Sarah Banks

Registered manager: Sarah Pay

Inspectors

Karen Willson, Social Care Inspector

Mark Woodbridge, Social Care Inspector

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