

SC034849

Registered provider: Cheshire West and Chester LA

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is managed by a local authority. It is registered to provide short break care for up to three disabled children.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since March 2018.

Inspection dates: 27 and 28 February 2025

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: 25 January 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
25/01/2024	Full	Outstanding
02/03/2023	Full	Outstanding
13/01/2022	Full	Outstanding
02/05/2019	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are making excellent progress because of the exceptional care that they receive. One professional said, '[Name of home] is an amazing place; children thrive there.'

Children are learning skills that will increase their independence and improve their long-term outcomes. For example, staff are supporting children to make choices, communicate their feelings and to be more independent with their personal care.

Highly effective planning means that children enjoy their short stays. Children who stay together are well matched. The manager keeps children's compatibility under review to ensure that children spend time with their friends and children that they like. This enhances the children's experience of staying at the home. One parent said, 'I am so happy; she is having fun and widening her circle of friends.'

Admissions to the home are sensitively planned and done at the pace of the child and their family. Children are given lots of information in an accessible format to help to prepare them for their stay. For example, the manager has produced a film about the home so that children and their families can see pictures of the home's facilities and the staff team.

Staff plan lots of interesting and engaging activities for children to choose from. High staff ratios mean that children have the choice to do activities on their own or as part of a group. On parent said, '[Child's name] misses out on the usual childhood activities like sleepovers. Staying here replicates that for her. As a result, she is showing more interest in spending time with other children.'

Children's unique methods of communication are well understood. Staff generate creative ways to maximise children's participation and engagement in activities. For example, they have sourced specialist communication tools for children to use. Staff ensure that their communication with children is supplemented by signs, symbols and photographs where this is appropriate. This total communication approach is helping children to learn the skills they need to make choices about their day-to-day care.

Children are cared for by an experienced and consistent staff team. Most of the staff team have worked at the home for a long time. This helps children to build trusting and lasting relationships.

Staff seek opportunities to praise children and celebrate their achievements. For example, staff and children nominate a child for a 'Star of the Month' award. This is in recognition of an achievement and/or progress that a child has made. The children get the certificate to take home, so they can celebrate their achievements with their family.

Managers have invested in specialist resources to maximise the children's enjoyment of staying at the home. For example, there are well equipped soft play and sensory rooms as well portable sensory toys that children can use throughout the home. Children's bedrooms are personalised for them in advance of their stay. Staff take great care to decorate bedrooms with children's favourite toys and accessories. However, despite staff efforts to create a warm and welcoming home, some areas of the home and garden are starting to look a bit tired and institutional. A recommendation is made in relation to this.

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

Children benefit from having high levels of supervision and support. This level of support is in line with the children's complex needs. Parents express a high level of trust and confidence in the staff team's ability to meet their child's needs.

The manager ensures that any restrictions on children's liberty are necessary to keep them safe and are the least restrictive option. Consent for these restrictions is obtained and the manager ensures that the necessity for them is kept under review.

Children are mostly happy and settled during their stays at the home. Incidents where children are upset or anxious are infrequent. Physical intervention is a last resort, and staff have not had to hold a child to keep them safe.

Staff have a detailed knowledge of children's complex needs and behaviours. This helps staff to anticipate situations that children may find difficult and to take early action to offer the child reassurance and comfort. This helps children to feel safe.

Staff create bespoke social stories to help children to understand how to keep themselves safe. Using this method, staff have supported one child to learn how to keep herself safer when using the internet. This work has helped to reassure the child's parents, and they have bought them a mobile telephone. This is an important step in the child's preparation for adulthood.

Children's complex health needs are exceptionally well understood by the staff team. There are comprehensive health plans in place that give staff clear instructions. The plans include signs to look for that may indicate a child is unwell. This is particularly important when the child cannot communicate this using words. This helps staff to respond to children's health needs in a consistent and safe way.

The manager has forged strong partnerships with health professionals. This means that staff can consult them about strategies to support children's behaviours without the need for referrals to specialist services.

All children have personalised plans that detail how staff should support children to leave the home in the event of a fire. Children are involved in creating these plans. They are encouraged to talk about any anxieties they may have so that staff can reassure them and help them to prepare.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The home is led by an experienced and qualified manager. She inspires a culture that nurtures and empowers children. The members of the staff team share her commitment to securing the best outcomes for children.

Children are cared for by an experienced and skilled staff team. Staff enjoy working at the home, and as a result, staff retention is high. Agency staff have been used to cover gaps in the staff roster. However, the manager has used consistent agency staff to ensure that children still receive continuity of care.

Managers and staff are committed to ensuring that children's voices are sought and acted on. The manager has created an environment that maximises opportunities for children to communicate. This enables children to make choices and have more control over their day-to-day care.

The manager generates new and creative ideas to improve the children's experience of staying at the home. She is constantly looking for ways to improve the home and sustain the highest quality of care for children. For example, one member of staff has liaised with education colleagues to introduce music sessions to the children. He has researched purposeful musical activities which are designed to teach children about turn taking and cause and effect.

Parents and professionals value excellent communication with the home. Parents are contacted prior to their child's stay to ensure that staff have up-to-date information about the child's needs. Photographs and newsletters are sent home with the child so that parents can see the activities the child has been doing and the progress they are making. This helps parents to feel involved in the service.

Staff receive regular supervision that helps them to reflect on their practice. In addition, staff receive an annual appraisal of their performance. The appraisal could be strengthened by capturing and considering the views of professionals and children. A recommendation is made in relation to this.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that appraisals of staff performance take into account, where reasonable and practical, the views of other professionals who have worked with the staff member over the year and children in the home's care. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.5).
- The registered person should ensure that the home is a domestic, homely environment. Specifically, broken items in the garden area should be replaced in a timely manner and changes should be made to bedroom doors to ensure all children's privacy. Children and their families should be involved in identifying improvements. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)

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 and Chester LA

Registered provider address: Cheshire West & Chester Council, The Portal, 4 Civic Way, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire CH65 0BA

Responsible individual: Sarah Banks

Registered manager: Sarah Pay

Inspector

Sophie Thomson, Social Care Inspector

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