

SC035380

Registered provider: Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is operated and managed by a local authority. It provides care and support for children with physical and/or learning disabilities. The home offers short-break care for up to five children, and one long-term placement.

The manager registered with Ofsted in July 2022. She holds suitable qualifications for this role.

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 February 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 1 February 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
01/02/2022	Full	Good
26/02/2020	Full	Good
12/11/2018	Full	Outstanding
01/08/2017	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children live in a home that is spacious both inside and out. It is nicely furnished and clean and comfortable. The outside areas are private and provide a safe place for the children to play and socialise with their peers. The children enjoy picking apples in the adjacent orchard with the staff. They have helped make apple pies and shared the crop with their neighbours and community groups. This creates positive links for the children to their local community. It also gives them a sense of social conscience.

The children have formed trusting and secure relationships with the staff. Children look forward to their visits to the home. Children's visits are planned in line with their needs and wishes. For example, friendship groups attend together. Children benefit greatly from these interactions.

Children's views are integral to the running of the home, and are sought in a variety of ways. Several staff commented on the importance placed on the children's wishes and feelings. As one staff member said, 'They [the children] always come first.' The recently implemented postbox is particularly popular with the children. Letters are regularly posted, and staff do their best to make the children's requests happen. For example, one child has been given a baby doll with a bottle, and plans are in place to take three children to the airport to see some aeroplanes take off and land.

The use of consequences is rare. There is a far greater focus on encouraging, praising and celebrating children's positive behaviours. An incentive system is in place where children earn rewards of their choosing for their achievements. Photographs of the children enjoying their rewards are captured and placed in each child's record of achievement folder. This creates a special memory for the children to look back on and take with them when they move on from the home.

One child has made exceptional educational progress with the support of the staff team. The child, who had been out of education for a significant period of time, is now attending and engaging every day and on an increasing basis. One professional described herself as being 'blown away' by the progress '[name of child] has made and how well the staff understand [name of child]'.

When children move on from the home, the quality of their transition varies. For one child, a significant amount of planning and preparation have taken place in line with the child's needs. Weekly reviews take place and the child's wishes and feelings play an integral part in the progression of the plan. However, for another child who is soon to move on from the service when he turns 18, there has been poor preparation for this important change in his life. This does not help children feel important or cared for. The child's parent was particularly disappointed about this, given ten years of 'good care, support and help' from the staff team.

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

Risk assessments are detailed yet concise. Staff find them easy to read. They make clear the children's main risk issues and what staff need to do to reduce those risks. Helpful guidance is provided around how staff should communicate with the children. This also ensures that the children receive a consistent approach from staff, which prevents feelings of confusion and frustration for the children.

Staff know the children well. Care plans are clear and individualised. They help staff understand the children and their behaviours. This means staff are better able to meet the children's needs. New staff are provided with a good period of shadowing experienced staff, which they find particularly helpful. This provides staff with time and space to learn about the children.

Staff are alert to safeguarding concerns and act swiftly by informing the appropriate people. They attend and contribute to multi-agency meetings. This keeps staff up to date with important issues involving the children. As a result, additional safeguarding measures are implemented to protect the children. One professional said, 'Staff always share information with me. They also challenge me if they feel a family needs more support.'

While the manager generally communicates well with Ofsted, informing the regulator of serious incidents, there has been one incident that was not notified. This oversight prevented Ofsted from having a full understanding of this incident. It also prevented Ofsted from being assured that all the necessary actions had been taken to safeguard the child.

Managers take action to improve staff practice when concerns are identified. Staff are provided with particularly good support. A debrief takes place, where staff are given the opportunity to reflect on what happened and what they have learned. Staff are provided with one-to-one training to improve or refresh their skills. The registered manager will sometimes deliver this training herself so that she can be fully assured of a staff member's competence. Managers will improve and simplify policies where necessary to make them more easily understood, and this leaves less room for error.

Restraints take place as a last resort. Appropriately trained staff hold the children. For those children who are unable to provide a view following an intervention, staff will comment on their presentation. This ensures that any signs of distress are recorded, and responded to. Managers oversee this practice to ensure that it is proportionate and safe.

Learning has been achieved following a safer recruitment oversight involving an agency staff member. Immediate action was taken by managers to ensure that other agency staff who work at this home have been subject to the same checks as

the permanent staff members. This provides assurance that the adults who work in this home are suitable to care for the children.

Appropriate monitoring equipment is in place to safeguard the children during their short-break stays. This is in line with their risk assessments and care plans. However, for one child, the required consent has not been obtained. This prevents those who have a critical say in the care of the children being aware of restrictive practices.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager has a clear vision for the service and how to achieve her goals. She understands where development is required. Now that she has a full management team, she feels in a better position to make progress in the areas she has identified. The management team makes its values and expectations clear, and staff share them. Staff feel confident under the strong leadership that is in place.

Staff like working here. They feel welcomed into the home and quickly realise that 'the children are at the centre of everything'. Staff learn a lot from the management team. They are supported to develop and progress, through good-quality supervision and training. Staff have completed all mandatory training. They also obtain additional skills through a programme of ongoing training. This enables staff to better understand and respond to children's specific needs and risk issues.

Staff feel trusted and valued by the managers. The manager's door is described as 'always open'. Managers are visible and interactive in the twice-daily handovers. This helps ensure that managers know what is happening in the home. It also means managers can provide advice to staff and take action in a timely way.

Managers understand the impact that the nature of the work can sometimes have on the staff. Staff talk to managers when they are having difficulties and managers are proactive in the help and support they provide. One staff member spoke of how grateful she was for this.

Team meetings are held regularly and are well attended. The children are discussed in detail and staff are updated with important information. Alternative behaviour-management strategies are discussed and adopted by staff to better meet the needs of the children. Guest speakers regularly attend, with a focus on staff health and well-being. This helps staff feel valued.

The management team has good monitoring systems in place so that they know what is happening in the home. Good practice is identified. This demonstrates the managers' awareness and understanding of the progress children are making.

The six-monthly reports undertaken by the manager do not include the views of the children about their home and the care they receive. This could prevent the manager from identifying all areas for improvement.

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, 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 care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b))	23 March 2023
The registered person may only use devices for the monitoring or surveillance of children if— the child's placing authority consents in writing to the monitoring or surveillance. (Regulation 24 (1)(b))	23 March 2023
The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children ("a quality of care review") at least once every 6 months. In order to complete a quality of care review the registered person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating— the quality of care provided for children; the feedback and opinions of children about the children's home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it; and any actions that the registered person considers necessary in order to improve or maintain the quality of care provided for children. (Regulation 45 (1)(2)(a)(b)(c))	23 March 2023

Recommendation

- The registered person should inform Ofsted if there is an incident relating to the protection, safeguarding or welfare of a child in the care of the home which the registered person considers to be serious. ('Guide to the Children's Home Regulations, including the quality standards', page 63, paragraph 14.10)

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: SC035380

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered Provider: Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Registered provider address: Municipal Buildings, Church Road, Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland TS18 1LD

Responsible individual: Rhona Bollands

Registered manager: Dawn Coyle

Inspectors

Emma Ridley, Social Care Inspector
Jo Birtwhistle, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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