

SC035971

Registered provider: St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This is a local authority children's home. It offers short breaks to a maximum of four children.

The provider states in their statement of purpose that they provide care for children with learning difficulties and physical disabilities.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since June 2012.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 7 to 8 September 2021

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: 3 December 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: Outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
03/12/2019	Full	Outstanding
27/11/2018	Full	Outstanding
06/12/2017	Full	Outstanding
11/01/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The short-break service continues to provide exceptional care for children who have complex needs and disabilities. This is underpinned by a consistent staff team that is passionate about the care it provides. The staff speak with pride about the work they do and focus on promoting children's outcomes and experiences.

Although children do not reside permanently at the home, staff support children to attend education during their short-break stay. Staff actively take part in all school annual reviews and are fully aware of the educational needs of each child. This provides children with a consistent approach.

Children's complex health needs are met by skilled staff during their stay. Medication processes are safe, and the staff are trained in first aid. These practices, alongside consistent liaison with children's families, make sure that children continue to receive high-quality care during their stay.

Children's views are gained using communication aids that are individual to each child. Pictorial exchange, electronic devices and the staff team's understanding of each child's behaviour and mannerisms all contribute to this. Furthermore, a newly commissioned advocacy group is providing additional independent support for children to help them understand their rights and to support children to speak up on issues that affect them.

The use of research-informed practice in the home is exceptional and worthy of wider dissemination. The manager has accessed a new mobile application, and this is a fantastic example of how the home has embraced the digital era. The use of this digital platform has meant that staff are able to upload videos and photographs, including a small write-up of how much the child enjoyed activities during their stay. This new platform has enabled parents to have access to information about their child enjoying and achieving at the home. One parent said, 'This has provided us with reassurance that our child is happy and settled and having fun.'

Children are making significant progress during their stays. One parent said, 'Although I initially had reservations about my child coming to stay at the home for the first time, I no longer have any worries and can see that [child] is happy, settled and their sleep routine has improved.' Another parent said, 'Despite my child's complex health needs, the staff understand what they need to do and [child] is really settled and enjoys her short-break stay.'

During the pandemic, the staff have engaged children in creative activities. Children have joined in with activities around national events, including the Euro football tournament 2021. Staff have also arranged themed nights to celebrate different cultures, including Easter events, using sensory stories. Recently, children made

superhero scarecrows in participation of the local scarecrow festival. As restrictions have eased, children have started to enjoy a variety of activities during the summer months. They have accessed specialist swimming pools, gone on trips to the beach and enjoyed visits to local football stadiums.

Children are actively encouraged to be part of the local community. The manager has accessed a local allotment scheme for children to learn about growing vegetables and support healthy lifestyles. The children use this as an opportunity to meet new people and develop new skills.

The home is maintained to an excellent standard. This is evident in the decor and very good-quality furniture which create a homely and relaxed environment. Children have access to a range of specialist equipment that they require to meet their needs. Children's experiences are evidenced by photographs of them taking part in a range of activities alongside pictures of the staff team. This provides children with an outstanding visual aid and gives them a sense of belonging.

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

Safeguarding practice is highly effective with the use of high staffing ratios. Staff have a clear understanding of children's needs, vulnerabilities and the potential risks they may be exposed to. Staff understand how to report and respond to safeguarding concerns, and attend safeguarding training to enhance their understanding of their duties in safeguarding children with disabilities. Parents report that they are happy with the care provided and they feel that their children are kept safe during their short-break stay.

Multi-agency working is a strength of the service. The managers and staff ensure that they work collaboratively with a range of agencies such as schools, complex needs nurses and occupational therapists. Detailed care plans are specifically tailored to identify the needs and support for each child. The plans are compiled in conjunction with a range of other professionals. For example, a child who has complex epilepsy has a plan that has been devised with the child's healthcare practitioners. This sharing of information means that care is consistent and individualised.

The staff team helped children create a social story on 'coronavirus' containing voiceovers from the children. This helped children learn about the virus and eased their anxieties about staying safe. The video was also promoted on the local authority's own website.

Children receive excellent help and support when they become upset. Staff understand the triggers and functions of children's behaviours. The detailed recording systems in place and information-sharing sessions have ensured that all staff understand their role in keeping children safe. When physical intervention has been required, this has been minimal, necessary and proportionate. Incidents are well managed and all appropriately recorded.

Recruitment procedures and practices are safe and effective. Managers have completed safer recruitment training. All staff are checked and vetted prior to starting work. These checks ensure that only suitable adults are employed to work with children in the home. Good-quality induction programmes ensure that staff are fully equipped to care for children safely, in a manner that protects their rights and dignity.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

This is an exceptionally well-led short-break home. A deputy manager supports the experienced and qualified registered manager. Together, they inspire a strong and nurturing child-centred culture. There is a stable staff team in place and staff support one another well. Staff state they are 'like a family'.

The management team continually strives to improve the service and its own practice. Managers lead by example, innovating and generating creative ideas to sustain the highest quality of care for children. The management team consistently considers and implements learning from research to support disabled children to have the same opportunities as their peer group. The latest research into digital technology has already improved practice.

The management team consistently reviews paperwork in the home to ensure that it is of a high quality and identifies children's needs. The managers have recently reviewed and updated children's plans in consultation with new members of the staff team and utilised their previous skills and experience. This has strengthened communication and behaviour plans with the introduction of sensory profiles. This demonstrates a forward-thinking team which enhances the quality of care for children.

Children have built some excellent relationships with the staff. From observations and speaking to staff, the home provides a warm and nurturing environment where children can thrive. A parent said, 'It is an amazing service. I do not know how we would survive without it.'

The feedback from professionals and parents is very complimentary. A social worker said, 'The staff have gone above and beyond in their work, especially with the difficulties faced during the global pandemic. They have often done things that are outside their remit to support children and their families.' The social worker gave as examples: picking up vital medical supplies to be delivered to parents, supporting parents to complete a range of forms, and facilitating an informal forum where families can talk about their worries.

Staff training has brought a more blended approach to learning. For example, the use of videos from other professionals has supported training in Team Teach and enteral pump feeding. Alongside this, there have also been small group sessions on sensory approaches. These practices demonstrate greater flexibility and have shown creativity during the pandemic. This means that the children are supported by staff

who have the up-to-date knowledge, skills and experience to meet their complex needs.

Managers and staff are receiving regular practice-related supervision by a suitably experienced person. Annual appraisals have taken place and team meetings have been well attended, using 'Microsoft teams' to reduce footfall in the home during the pandemic. There are detailed handovers taking place where there is effective sharing of information about the children's care and the support they receive.

Robust risk assessments, missing from home and fire procedures are all in place. Staff are aware of children's known risks and how best they are supported. The manager recognised work that could be undertaken to strengthen documentation in the home.

The manager has in place appropriate monitoring and reviewing systems. These are supported by external monitoring through an independent visitor. However, the visitor has not consistently spoken to parents or stakeholders to give them opportunities to provide feedback on the quality of care in the home. A recommendation has been made to address this.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should actively seek independent scrutiny of the home and make best use of information from independent and internal monitoring (including under regulations 44 and 45) to ensure continuous improvement. In particular, the independent visitor must consult with parents and stakeholders to gain feedback on the quality of care the home provides. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 55, paragraph 10.4)
- The registered person should ensure that children's case records (regulation 36) must be kept up to date and stored securely whilst they remain in the home. Be clear about distinguishing between high, medium and low risk within children's risk assessment and when a child is missing. Additionally, ensure that all documents are signed. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)

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: SC035971

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Children & Young Peoples Services, Atlas House, 2 Corporation Street, St Helens, Merseyside WA9 1LD

Responsible individual: Linda Evans

Registered manager: Paul Spencer

Inspector

Judith Birchall, Social Care Inspector

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