

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 for a maximum of four disabled children at any one time. At the time of the inspection, there were two children staying at the home.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since September 2024.

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 March 2025

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: 20 February 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
20/02/2024	Full	Outstanding
14/03/2023	Full	Outstanding
07/09/2021	Full	Outstanding
03/12/2019	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children receive exceptional care. They enjoy well-planned short breaks that significantly enhance the quality of their life. One parent said, 'They go above and beyond to make my son feel safe and loved.'

Children's introductions to the home are sensitively planned and done at the child's pace and that of their family. Children are given lots of information in an accessible format to help to prepare them for their stay. For example, a different social story is created each time one child visits the home. This includes pictures of the staff who will be on duty. This helps to reassure the child and their parent.

Highly effective planning means that children enjoy their short stays. Managers keep children's compatibility under review to ensure that children spend time with their friends. In addition, children's views about who they would like to stay with are sought and respected. This enhances the children's experience of staying at the home.

Staff are very responsive to the needs of children and their families. A strength of the staff is their ability to respond to the needs of families experiencing times of crisis. The availability of a reliable and trusted short-break service supports families to continue with their caring responsibilities. One parent said, 'I can't praise them highly enough. I don't know how we'd cope without them.'

Staff are creative. They plan interesting, engaging and exciting activities for children to enjoy. As a result, children have opportunities to experience things that they have never done before. For example, staff organise holidays for children who had never had a holiday before.

Children's unique methods of communication are well understood. Staff ensure that their communication with children is supplemented with signs, symbols and photos where this is appropriate. Managers have invested in specialist resources to convert language into symbols for children to use. This total communication approach is helping children to learn the skills they need to make choices about their day-to-day care.

The home is spacious and equipped with specialist resources to maximise the children's enjoyment of staying at the home. For example, there is a well-equipped sensory room and outdoor area that children enjoy playing in. One parent said, '[Name of child] loves the space she has to run about in. It is a safe environment, and she has the freedom to explore. Staying here gives her the chance to interact with other children and have fun.'

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

Children benefit from a high level of supervision and support. This helps to keep them safe during their stay at the home. Parents report a high level of confidence in the staff team's ability to safeguard their child.

The manager has embedded a strong safeguarding culture in the home. In addition, he ensures that independent visitors and advocates spend time with the children to gather their views to form a judgement about their safety and welfare.

Staff understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping children safe. The manager has invested in specialist safeguarding disabled children training. This equips staff with the skills to protect the most vulnerable children and identify signs that children may be at risk of harm. This is particularly important when children are not able to use words to ask for help.

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 helps staff to respond to children's health needs in a consistent and safe way.

Children's stays are carefully planned. As a result, children are generally happy and settled during their stays. Incidents where children are anxious or upset are infrequent.

Physical intervention is only used as a last resort, and staff rarely need to hold a child to keep them safe. Records are kept following incidents where staff have held a child. However, they do not fully capture what staff or children have said or how children have presented after the incident. A recommendation is made to improve this.

All staff have received training to help them manage challenging situations in a safe and effective way. Furthermore, several staff are trained to deliver training to the wider team on the safe use of physical intervention with children. This helps to ensure that staff skills and knowledge are regularly refreshed. It also helps to build and maintain staff confidence in this area, as physical interventions are rarely used.

Robust risk management plans ensure that children's disabilities are not a barrier to participation in community-based activities. Activities are well planned, and risks are balanced and managed to ensure that children can access activities in the local area. Staff understand the risks to children and the steps they should take to minimise these risks.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2024. He had previously worked at the home in the role of deputy manager. The transition between managers has

been seamless. The manager has a clear vision for the home and is enthusiastic about securing the best outcomes for children and their families.

The manager has a comprehensive knowledge of the children's complex needs and the progress they are making. He is committed to ensuring that disabled children receive the highest quality care that is tailored to meet their individual needs.

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. There are vacancies in the staff team, which are being covered by permanent staff. No agency staff are being used. This provides children with continuity of care. One professional said, 'Staff are well trained and experienced and ensure that the children receive the highest level of care. The home is one big family. Staff go above and beyond.'

Parents and professionals value excellent communication with the home. Managers have invested in technology that enables staff to provide parents with photos, videos and updates about the children during their stay. This means that parents can see the activities the children are doing and the progress they are making. This offers parents a high level of reassurance and helps them to feel involved in the service. One parent said, 'I love the photographs and videos they send. I can see she is having the time of her life!'

Highly effective partnership work with health professionals means that children's complex health needs are not a barrier to them experiencing short breaks. Staff receive specialist training to help them to safely monitor and respond to children's medical conditions. Staff are enthusiastic about their roles and have embraced this training.

All 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 children are given the opportunity to express their feelings about the experience of being restrained. In addition, the registered person should keep more detailed records of their discussion with the staff involved in the restraint. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 50, paragraph 9.60)

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: St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council

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

Responsible individual: Paula Swindlehurst

Registered manager: Michael Blood

Inspector

Sophie Thomson, 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 children looked after, 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