

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 at any one time. At the time of the inspection, there were two children accessing the service.

The home provides care for children with learning difficulties and physical disabilities.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since June 2012.

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 February 2024

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: 14 March 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/03/2023	Full	Outstanding
07/09/2021	Full	Outstanding
03/12/2019	Full	Outstanding
27/11/2018	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are exceptionally well cared for. They form strong and positive relationships with staff and feel safe and secure. One child's parent said, 'I can't praise them enough. They are like family.'

The manager and staff are committed to working together with parents, placing authorities, specialist health advisers and the positive behaviour support team. They attend child-in-need meetings and reviews. These positive and effective working relationships make sure that children consistently receive a high level of exceptional care. As a result, children make progress in line with their individual targets.

The manager and staff ensure that children's wishes and views are valued, listened to and consistently acted on. There is a strong emphasis on using each child's preferred communication method. This means that children have the opportunity to contribute to day-to-day decisions about their care. They have a choice about their meals and activities and are supported to understand important information about their lives.

The manager supports staff to use research in practice. For example, one member of staff has completed some research with the positive behaviour support team as part of their work towards a qualification, which has been used to improve communication opportunities for one child.

Staff make sure that they provide children with opportunities which expand their life experiences. Staff give children a chance to experience a wide range of stimulating and age-appropriate activities to meet their sensory needs and interests. These include going on drives out, going to the cinema and theatre, to beaches, on boat trips and going shopping and to local parks. This means that children have the opportunity to enjoy experiences which they may not otherwise be able to have. They benefit greatly from spending time at the home.

The manager and staff arrange regular family days, including coffee mornings and summer celebrations. This means that children and their friends and families can spend time together at the home. This helps family members to feel involved in the home and to build positive relationships with staff.

When children are new to the home, they are made to feel welcome. This is done with the best possible planning, taking into account the children's individual circumstances and the staff's skills and training. There is a child-centred approach to deciding if the home and the staff team are suitable to meet children's needs before they start their stays.

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

The staff know the children in their care very well. Each child's individual risks are detailed in their risk management plans. These are robust documents which are frequently reviewed and updated. They give clear information, guidance and strategies to staff to ensure that there is a consistent response to children's behaviours.

One child's plan includes information on the use of a wrist strap and a walking harness. However, there is no clear advice for staff in the plan of how and when this equipment needs to be used or whether it is still required. A recommendation has been made to include more detailed guidance about this.

Parents and professionals are highly complimentary about the care and support that children receive. One parent said, 'I know that [name of child] is 100% safe when they are there.'

Children receive high levels of close care, support and supervision from the staff. There have been no occasions when it has been necessary to physically hold a child to keep them safe. However, all staff are fully trained to physically intervene in a safe way when it is appropriate to do so. Any significant events or incidents are recorded appropriately and include the manager's oversight.

The manager has researched training specifically for children with complex needs. All staff have attended this additional training to give them a more specialised approach to supporting the safeguarding needs of the children they care for. There have been no allegations, disclosures or safeguarding concerns since the last inspection. Staff were able to explain the correct processes they would follow should they be made aware of any concerns or allegations.

Medication is stored in a safe place, and records are detailed. When there are queries about the prescribed medication for children, staff ensure that these are followed up with parents, or they seek advice from the relevant healthcare professionals.

The physical environment for children is safe and secure and protects them from harm. The home is warm and welcoming, with photos of the children displayed throughout. Equipment in the sensory room has recently been upgraded and the children have also benefited from new jacuzzi baths in each upstairs bathroom. This helps to meet some children's sensory needs and provides children with a safe place to relax and unwind.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

There is an experienced manager, who is supported by a skilled and qualified deputy manager and team leader. They are positive role models for the children and the team. Staff described the management team as available, approachable and always willing to offer support and guidance.

Leaders and managers know the children well and have an ambitious vision for what the children can achieve. The manager has successfully created a culture in which staff place the needs of children at the heart of their practice and aspire to improve the lives of the children who stay in the home.

There are systems in place for the effective monitoring and review of the quality of care in the home. These systems ensure that the leaders and managers have oversight and that they can identify strengths and areas for development. This supports continuous improvement. However, the review of the quality of care is not always sufficiently evaluative and actions identified are not consistently measurable and specific to the needs of the service.

The service is held in high regard by families, social workers and other professionals. They all report that the care and support provided at the home are child-focused and that there are excellent levels of communication.

Staff receive regular formal and informal supervision. This is used well to support and develop staff. However, staff have not had their performance appraised in the past year, although this has not had any impact on the care children receive.

There is a consistent and stable staff team. Despite some vacancies in the team, the planning for children's stays and rota planning are well considered. This ensures that children's individual needs are well met by staff who they know and who know them well.

Staff have completed mandatory training and further training to meet the children's individual needs. This has been innovative, such as inviting one child's mother to the team meeting to deliver a cooking workshop to the staff to make them aware of the child's very specific dietary needs. There has also been additional training from The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, oxygen training and training from epilepsy nurses to meet children's specific needs.

The ethos of the home is to provide a warm, welcoming environment that supports and promotes positive outcomes. This is something that the whole team embraces and achieves well.

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, The 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 registered person must ensure that all employees— have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. (Regulation 33 (4)(c))	30 April 2024

Recommendations

- The registered person should make sure that staff continually and actively assess the risks to each child and the arrangements in place to protect them. Any mechanical restraints such as wrist straps and walking harnesses should be detailed in children's plans, with clear guidance for staff on how and when to use them. They should be frequently assessed to make sure they continue to be necessary and effective. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 42, paragraph 9.5)
- The registered person should actively seek independent scrutiny of the home and make best use of information from independent and internal monitoring. When completing the quality of care review, the registered person should make sure that the report is evaluative and that any actions identified are measurable and specific to the needs of the service during the time frame of the report. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 55, paragraph 10.24)

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: Paul Spencer

Inspector

Katie Tomlinson, Social Care Inspector

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