

SC042978

Registered provider: Lincolnshire County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This local authority children's home is registered to provide short breaks for up to five children and young people at any one time. The home provides short breaks for children and young people who have learning disabilities and/or physical disabilities.

Inspection dates: 20 to 21 September 2017

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: 28 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: improved effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is outstanding because:

- Children and young people benefit significantly from a range of very positive experiences that enhance the quality of their lives. They enjoy coming to this home for a short break, and they have excellent relationships with staff.
- Children and young people make progress in a number of areas, including personal care skills, socialisation, communication and the self-regulation of their behaviour.
- Staff know the children and young people exceptionally well. Staff understand the children's and young people's complex needs, and this enables staff to provide a very high standard of individualised care and support.
- Children's and young people's participation in all aspects of their short break is promoted and highly valued.
- The provision of short breaks is carried out exceptionally well, from the point of referral to the end of the service. Detailed information sharing and comprehensive care planning inform an individually tailored package of care. Beginnings and endings are managed with high degrees of sensitivity.
- Partnership working with parents and other agencies is well established and highly effective. Communication is excellent, and this promotes a consistency of care that has very positive outcomes. The home is as flexible as possible in its efforts to support families, often going 'the extra mile'.
- Children and young people are safe. High staffing levels, good security measures, detailed risk management plans and trained and knowledgeable staff contribute towards the provision of a safe service.
- Behaviour is extremely well managed, and there is minimal use of physical intervention or sanctions.
- The manager is an inspirational leader who is constantly striving to improve the service. Staff share this passion, and an ethos of creativity and innovation permeates throughout the home.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
28/03/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness
15/11/2016	Full	Outstanding
11/01/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
22/09/2015	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children and young people receive an outstanding service from this home. From the very start, each child or young person is seen as an individual, with their own diverse needs. However, staff are also very mindful of the needs and wishes of the parents, and they take these into account in a very sensitive and professional way, while keeping the child or young person at the centre of their practice. The home provides a flexible response to the needs of the family. For example, staff have provided an outreach service, working with a young person and the family in the community. Parents sometimes ring the home for advice and support if they are having difficulties at home. In times of family crises, the home will do its best to accommodate additional requests. The staff's calm and responsive approach can be instrumental in maintaining a child or young person within the family.

The provision of the short break is extremely well planned. Parents are often anxious about their child having an overnight stay. Staff work exceptionally hard to provide reassurance. One parent said: 'I couldn't have asked for any more. They did what they said they would. They even came to a review at school to get more information.' From the outset, staff obtain as much information about the child's or young person's needs from all sources. Parents are involved fully in drawing up the care plan, which has a clear emphasis on replicating the routines of home. Children and young people visit for a few hours before they stay overnight. All this is done at the child's or young person's pace. The bookings take account of a whole range of factors, such as friendship groups, the needs of the whole group, required bedroom facilities and the skills of staff. This meticulous planning contributes to successful short breaks that promote the positive experiences from which children and young people benefit.

The staff's knowledge of the children's and young people's needs is impressive. Parents recognise this, and one commented: 'Our son's complex needs are understood, and staff not only ensure he is safe in their care, they also take the time to explain to us anything to do with his care.' Staff know the children and young people extremely well, and staff talk with passion and warmth about children's and young people's achievements and idiosyncrasies. Staff care deeply about the children and young people, and they really like them. The atmosphere in the home is one of fun and laughter. There are really positive relationships between staff and the children and young people. One parent said: 'My child is very happy when he attends and he wants to go more.' Another parent commented: 'Our child enjoys new experiences, friends and independence in a supportive environment, and as parents, we get a chance to do things with his older siblings and activities we would not normally get the opportunity to do.'

Children and young people benefit from a whole range of experiences that enhance their lives and develop their skills. These include experiences within the home as well as trips into town or further afield. The home has a minibus that can be used for outings. Children and young people are enabled to experience everything that their peers would do. For example, one young person who loves books was supported to visit the library.

This required extensive and detailed planning, due to the needs of the young person, and the outcome for the young person was very positive.

Children and young people not only have experiences that they may otherwise not have, they also make progress towards carefully agreed targets. These targets correspond with those in the education, health and care plan, so that everyone is working towards the same outcome. Progress includes developing their socialisation skills, becoming more confident in their communication styles, developing their independence in relation to personal care and improving the self-regulation of their behaviour. These targets are carefully monitored formally at reviews, but also more informally after each short break.

The relationships that staff have with parents are exceptionally positive. Parents are very complimentary of the home and the impact that it has on their child and their family life. Communication is excellent. The preferred method and timing of communication are agreed with the parents. At the end of the short break, staff prepare a detailed report with photographs to show what happened during the child's or young person's time away from the family home. At the end of each year, each child and young person is provided with a portfolio of photographs as a reminder of their short breaks and their achievements.

Children's and young people's participation is extremely important, by whatever means they are able to communicate. Their voice is evident throughout the home. The implementation of social pedagogy has enhanced this, by providing a structure and a theoretical underpinning for the already existing practices. The use of 'my voice' ensures that children's and young people's wishes and feelings and the response of staff are regularly recorded. For example, a member of staff was able to assess by a young person's reaction that the children's guide was not engaging. This then generated a piece of work to improve this document, using the children's and young people's responses as a guide. As a result, the new document is far more child-friendly, colourful and engaging. It is used to give children and young people information about the home prior to their short stay.

The home provides a good standard of accommodation. It has a number of adaptations, for example ceiling tracking, assisted bathing and sensory facilities, so that it can meet the varied and complex needs of the children and young people who use the service. The home has a lot of displays that show children's and young people's experiences and achievements while at the home. These are changed regularly, so that recent experiences are on display. This creates a very child-focused environment.

When young people have to transfer to adult services, staff facilitate a positive ending. For example, young people choose what sort of party they would like, they invite their friends and they are given a gift and mementos of their time at the home. Staff will engage with the adult service provider to share information, and staff will also support parents and the young person in visiting the new resource.

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

Safeguarding children and young people from harm and promoting their welfare are at the heart of this service. Children and young people who have the most complex needs are protected from harm because the staffing ratios are high, the building is safe and secure and staff understand and minimise any potential risks. One parent reinforced this by saying: 'I am extremely impressed with the care they take to look after our daughter to keep her safe.' Children and young people have the potential to be at risk of harm from many everyday situations, for example busy roads or domestic appliances. All risks are carefully considered, and detailed risk management plans provide staff with the necessary strategies to minimise the potential dangers. This does not curtail children's and young people's activities or prevent them from taking part, but it enables them to do it safely.

The manager and staff have a detailed understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. All staff have comprehensive training that includes the risks from radicalisation, sexual exploitation and online safety. The manager and staff also demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the additional vulnerabilities that children and young people who have disabilities may have. Safeguarding is always addressed in handovers, in supervision and within shift planning and recording. If children or young people are on child protection plans, staff work closely with the social worker, and they attend core group meetings in order to share information and be an active part of the safety plan. The staff work flexibly to support families in crisis, for the benefit of the children and young people, and the strong relationships that staff have with parents enable staff to do this very effectively. The local authority uses the 'signs of safety' model of social work and this home has embraced this within its own safety plans and assessments.

Behaviour is exceptionally well managed in this home. Despite the many challenges that some of the children and young people bring, physical intervention has only been used on two occasions in almost one year. This is testament to the robust crisis management plans that staff implement, their proactivity in de-escalating situations and their in-depth knowledge of the triggers and signs that precede incidents. When physical intervention is used, it is well recorded and subject to managerial oversight.

All incidents are regularly monitored by the manager. She is able to track themes and drill down to find out if there is a particular cause, for example if there is a sudden increase in aggressive outbursts. This enables her to modify the environment or discuss alternative staff responses.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The home is led and managed by an efficient, knowledgeable, experienced and appropriately qualified manager. She is extremely child-focused, and she displays an enormous amount of passion about providing the best service possible. Although the home has been judged an outstanding home for a number of years, the manager is always looking for ways to improve and develop the service further. Staff recognise this,

and one member of staff commented: 'The manager has always got some ideas buzzing around her head. She has a vision, a path and a course. She is passionate about the children and that is contagious.' However, the manager recognises, respects and uses the ideas, knowledge and skills of the whole staff team. This increases the staff team's sense of worth, and enhances their enthusiasm to deliver the service to the highest standard. For example, a recent team day was used effectively to consider a number of projects from the home's development plan, with each project led by a member of staff. A member of staff said: 'We don't rest on our laurels. We are always looking at ways to improve. We are not complacent or static.'

Staff feel very well supported. They have regular, good-quality supervision, and this gives them the opportunity to reflect on and improve their practice. Staff receive regular feedback on their performance, and the culture of the home is one of openness. This facilitates safe and professional practice, as staff are not afraid to comment constructively on each other's performance. Staff also have access to a wide range of training to enhance their knowledge and competence. Social pedagogy is used very effectively to underpin a service that has children's and young people's well-being at its heart. A social worker said: 'Staff are enthusiastic and keen to develop their skills and knowledge. They have a 'can-do' attitude. This gives parents confidence in the service.'

Effective monitoring enables the manager to have a realistic and up-to-date knowledge of the service that is being provided. She has daily feedback on anything that has happened in the home, and all incident reports have managerial oversight. She uses the information from external monitoring to develop the service, and she is in the process of obtaining more formal stakeholder feedback. Her detailed internal monitoring and analysis of the data inform the home's development plan. The response to any concerns or comments is indicative of a service that strives to improve. The manager is not defensive or blaming. She understands that mistakes happen, and that there is always learning to be gained from things that did not go as well as planned.

Partnership working is excellent. One social worker said: 'Communication is excellent. Staff attend all the reviews and they provide very detailed reports.' A recurring theme is that all staff go 'above and beyond' or 'the extra mile'. Another stakeholder said: 'We all work together. There is a high level of consistency between the school, home and short-breaks service. In one particular case, we achieved a lot and had a fantastic outcome.' The manager is part of the local authority's resource allocation panel, and her involvement in this is another factor in good partnership working. She knows the families, children and young people well, and can use this knowledge to support the provision of additional services. This collaborative working and mutual professional respect are instrumental in improving outcomes for children and young people.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC042978

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Lincolnshire County Council

Registered provider address: Lincolnshire County Council, County Offices, Newland, Lincoln LN1 1YL

Responsible individual: Janice Spencer

Registered manager: Margaret Nowland

Inspector(s)

Ros Chapman: social care inspector

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