

SC065679

Registered provider: Staffordshire County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is managed by a local authority and provides residential short-breaks for children and young people who may have experienced childhood instability resulting in trauma and associated complex behaviours. The short-break service provides planned overnight stays for children on the edge of care and short-term emergency placements.

The home also provides outreach services to support children, young people and their families.

The home is currently supporting 14 children.

At the time of the inspection, two children were receiving overnight care and one child was receiving outreach support.

The home is led by an experienced manager, who registered with Ofsted in June 2023.

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 May 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: 23 May 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
23/05/2023	Full	Good
09/11/2022	Full	Requires improvement to be good
04/05/2022	Full	Inadequate
24/08/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children receive exceptional care that adds to their experiences, progress and development, either through planned care, with overnight stays and/or outreach, or through emergency placements. As a result of staff's high-quality support for children and their families, when they are in crisis and/or on the edge of care, staff have been extremely successful in preventing further family breakdown, and children going into long-term care. Most children can remain in the care of their families.

Children were observed to have fabulous relationships with staff. It was evident how children have built trusting relationships with staff which have enabled them to talk about how they are feeling, as well as any worries or concerns they may have. This has enabled children to build their confidence and self-esteem. As a result, children have improved relationships with their families and peers. Professionals and parents alike are extremely complimentary about how the support from staff has helped both children and their families to have improved relationships.

The manager's approach to care planning is highly effective. She has developed a group risk assessment, which makes it easy to see how risks are considered. The manager ensures that the matching is reviewed and amended as required after any incidents in the home. Transitions into and out of the home, where possible, are carefully planned. Children are encouraged to visit the home before attending and, when the support is due to end, the service gradually withdraws to help children have a positive ending.

Children really enjoy coming to the home and have an abundance of positive experiences. For example, children have time and freedom to be themselves, meet friends and try new experiences in a non-judgemental, relaxed and comfortable environment. Children say they feel 'happy' and 'safe', that they like coming to the home and the best thing about the home is the 'staff'.

Children participate in a range of activities, both in the home and in the community. For example, children have participated in activities such as go-karting, bowling and going to the cinema, as well as baking, cooking, playing pool and beauty nights. These experiences give children opportunities to have fun and enjoy themselves. One parent said: 'I like the range of activities. They try and understand the child and find out what they like to do.' Another parent said: 'Staff do activities that fit [name of child]'s mood.'

Staff support children to develop their independence skills, such as cooking, cleaning and gardening. These activities help children to prepare for the transition to adult life.

The home environment is fabulous. Children's rooms are comfortable, welcoming and suitably furnished. The home is spacious, with ample areas where children can spend time together or alone. Communal spaces are comfortably furnished and there are

games rooms with a pool table, games, and arts and crafts. The home is designed so children can both relax and have fun. Children say that they like the bedrooms.

Staff encourage children to share their views, wishes and feelings. When children raise concerns with staff, staff ensure they respond quickly. For example, one child made a disclosure to staff. This was promptly shared with the social worker. In addition, children are also encouraged to participate in decision-making around the home and make suggestions for changes. For example, children said they wanted a pet; the home now has two pet fish. The responses from staff make children feel heard and valued.

Feedback received from parents is consistently outstanding. One parent said: 'They are a ray of light, when you need it.' Another said: 'They have made a dramatic difference. We were in critical situation, close to edge of care. Staff have played a significant role with rest of the network to turn things around. They are phenomenal. I am impressed in every way.'

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

Safeguarding arrangements are highly effective. Professional practice results in sustained improvements to the lives of children and has been highly effective in preventing children from needing to go into longer-term care. Children say they feel 'safe.'

Staff have excellent understanding of all the children's needs, and the progress children make while attending the service. Staff follow individualised and concise children's care and behaviour management plans. They fully understand their roles and responsibilities to keep children safe. As a result, staff are effective at managing children's behaviours and incidents in the home are rare. There have been no incidents requiring staff to intervene physically.

Children have made two allegations against staff working in the home since the last inspection. The manager has ensured that information is promptly shared with appropriate professionals and has sought guidance from the local authority designated officer. The manager has completed detailed chronologies of all the actions they have taken. They have also ensured that staff reflect following allegations to identify any learning and improve practice. These practices help to safeguard both children and staff.

Staff's diligence in medication administration prevented a child being administered the wrong medication, which had the potential to cause harm to the child. Staff noticed that one child's prescription label was incorrect and therefore did not administer the medication. Staff reported this to the child's mother and the manager reported the error to the local health board. This is an excellent example of how effective systems and staff practice have kept a child safe.

Managers and staff take prompt appropriate action when children are away from the home without authority. Staff search for children and report them missing to police. There is a multi-agency approach when risks increase to ensure strategies are in place to

mitigate risk. When children return to the home they are warmly welcomed by staff and are given the opportunity to speak to an independent person so that they can share the reasons for them going missing, and any issues or concerns they may have. Managers ensure that they always act when children have raised an issue. For example, one child said that they did not want to stay at the home because it was too far from their friends. The manager raised this with the social worker. As a result, the child moved closer to home.

Staff are sensitive in their approach when talking to children about important topics, such as relationships and self-injurious behaviour. Staff will also quickly address children's actions when they say something unkind or inappropriate. This approach supports children to be more informed, helps to keep them safe and promotes tolerance and inclusion.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

An inspirational, confident and ambitious registered manager leads the home. She knows the home extremely well and understands how the care that the staff provide impacts on children on the edge of care and in crisis. She is ambitious and child-focused. She has made amendments to the service offered to children, so that the service can be more tailored to individual children's needs and bespoke care packages can be delivered to improve outcomes for children. An equally resolute and competent deputy manager supports the manager. Together, they make a formidable management team that inspires staff to have high aspirations for children.

The manager's oversight and monitoring of the service are highly effective. She has an exceptional understanding of the home's strengths and areas for development. She makes effective use of external monitoring of the home and is enthusiastic about completing the six-monthly review of the home, to continually strive to improve the quality of care for children.

The manager is creative and shares good practice with others, having an impact not only on the service she provides, but on others. For example, she has shared the group matching risk assessment with another short-break service in the organisation. This has enabled managers to assess the impact of new children more effectively.

Managers have embedded reflection into staff practice. This has supported improvements in practice, ensuring that children consistently receive the highest quality of care.

Leaders and managers use research to underpin changes in practice which make a significant difference to the lives of children. For example, the manager has used research from the NSPCC to change children's case records, so that they are more restorative and child-focused. She also has plans in place to further expand the service, based on research. This encompasses a multi-agency, joined-up approach, working with the wider network to support children and their families as not only a step-up service but

also a step-down service which can support reunification with families. This is currently in its infancy and is being further developed.

Staff say they feel very well supported by the managers. They feel managers are approachable and that they received a good induction into the home which has prepared them for working with the children. Staff receive regular, high-quality, practice-related supervision and annual appraisal. In addition, there are regular reflective team meetings. These practices support staff development and help the team to deliver high-quality care that consistently exceeds the standards of good.

There are some gaps in staff training. Most staff have completed their mandatory training. However, not all staff have completed additional, child-specific training, such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or self-harm. While this is a shortfall, the impact is minimal, as staff have transferable skills from other roles that ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to meet children's needs. The manager is aware of this and has plans in place to address this shortfall.

Managers and staff have excellent working relationships with partner agencies and work collaboratively with the Intensive Prevention Support team to ensure children receive well-coordinated care and support. All professionals are particularly complimentary about the communication from the manager and staff, and how the care children receive has significantly affected not only children's but also the wider family's lives.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs and should understand the key role they play in the training and development of staff in the home. The registered person should ensure that child-specific training is provided to staff in a timely manner. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.11)

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: SC065679

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: 1 Staffordshire Place, Stafford, Staffordshire ST16 2DH

Responsible individual: Justine Bishop

Registered manager: Susan Dodd

Inspector

Sonia Sullivan, Social Care Inspector

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