

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 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 and their families. The home is in the process of reviewing their service offer.

Since the last inspection, the home has supported 92 families with short breaks and outreach. There have been 40 children using the service, as an emergency.

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

Inspection dates: 9 and 10 September 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 8 May 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
08/05/2024	Full	Outstanding
23/05/2023	Full	Good
09/11/2022	Full	Requires improvement to be good
04/05/2022	Full	Inadequate

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

At the time of the inspection, one child was staying in the home. They have been staying in the home for two weeks. They were present, and spoken to, during the inspection.

Most children, particularly those who receive short breaks and outreach support, have positive experiences. However, there has been an increase in the number of children staying in the home in an emergency. Not all staff have the necessary skills or experience to meet the complex needs of children admitted in crisis. Consequently, some children have not received the consistent care and support they require during these periods. In addition, more recently, there has been a reliance on agency staff to support staff to manage children with complex needs. They are not yet integrated into the team, which has impacted on the continuity of care for children and has contributed to shortfalls in leadership and management oversight.

The increase in emergency moves into the service has adversely affected children who access short breaks and outreach support. These children have experienced last-minute cancellations of their planned stays, which has the potential to leave them feeling unsettled and rejected. This disruption undermines the consistency for children, who rely on routine and structure.

On occasions, leaders have moved children into the home whose primary needs are not in line with the home's statement of purpose. In addition, some children have remained in the home beyond 17 days. While these decisions were made in the best interests of individual children, they represent a breach of the home's conditions of registration. Leaders and managers are aware of these issues and have taken steps to review the service. At the time of the inspection, short breaks and outreach support were not being provided.

Despite some of the challenges, children share and develop positive relationships with staff. Staff are nurturing and non-judgemental, which provides children with an environment where they can relax. The child currently staying in the home said that they were 'happy' and 'safe'.

The home's environment is spacious, beautifully decorated and suitably furnished. There is a games room and craft room, and children's bedrooms are comfortable. This provides children with a welcoming and nurturing environment in which they can have fun and want to spend time in.

Staff support children to have positive experiences and try new things. For example, children have been out for meals and to theme parks. These opportunities support children to build relationships, have fun and make memories.

Staff support children to learn new skills in preparation for their transition to adulthood. Staff help children to learn to cook, clean and budget. This helps children to be more independent and builds their self-esteem and confidence.

Staff ensure that children have opportunities to contribute to the development of the service. Staff seek feedback from children after every stay, to ensure that they are happy and safe. Feedback from children receiving short breaks is overwhelmingly positive. Staff also talk to children about their worries and fears. As a result, children's risks reduce and relationships with family improve. One child said that they were calmer, due to the help that they had from staff during their short break stays.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Managers have failed to take appropriate action when a child made a recent complaint and allegation following a physical intervention. Managers did not identify the concern in their oversight of the incident, and they did not follow safeguarding procedures. They did not notify the child's social worker or the local authority designated officer, and there is no evidence of any action being taken. This lack of robust safeguarding practice has the potential to compromise children's safety and does not support children to feel valued or listened to.

Staff do not always respond effectively to reduce children's risks. On two occasions, staff failed to remove items, which a child later used to ligature. These shortfalls in practice have led to high-risk incidents which potentially could have been avoided. However, following these incidents, managers have acted. All risky items have now been removed and there is also clearer guidance for staff to follow to keep the child safe.

On one occasion, restrictions put in place to keep one child safe had a negative impact on another child, who was prevented from freely accessing all areas of the home. Although social workers, leaders and managers were aware of the situation and took some steps to reduce the impact, this resulted in a child being subject to unnecessary restrictions on their liberty.

Staff use physical intervention as a last resort to keep children safe. However, written records require improvement, and incidents are not always recorded in accordance with regulation. In addition, there have been delays in records being completed and it is not clear if managers have ensured that staff and children are always spoken to. These delays and omissions impact on the manager's ability to effectively review the incident and ensure that, when used, physical intervention is necessary and proportionate.

Staff take prompt action when children are missing from home. Staff follow detailed missing-from-home protocols, which includes searching local areas and liaising with police, to ensure that children are quickly found. When children return, staff warmly welcome children back. However, managers have not ensured that all children have been offered a return home interview. This is a missed opportunity to give children the chance to talk to someone independent about any worries or concerns that they may have.

Working with external agencies is a strength of the service. Managers and staff collaborate well with partner agencies to ensure that children receive well-coordinated care that meets their needs. When children's risk increases, managers and staff have regular risk management meetings so that strategies can be implemented to reduce risk and keep children safer.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The service is managed by an experienced and competent leader. She has a good understanding of the service's strengths and areas of development. The manager acknowledges that changes to the way the service has been operating have, at times, had an impact on the quality of care that children receive. In addition, the manager has been supporting another service in the organisation, which has also had an impact on their capacity to ensure that management oversight is consistently effective.

Monitoring systems are not consistently effective. They have failed to identify significant shortfalls in staff practice. This limits the manager's understanding of the day-to-day care children receive and impedes their ability to improve the quality of care for children.

The quality of children's records is mixed. Records completed by agency staff are completed on different recording systems and are not always recorded in line with regulation or in timescales. This impacts on the timeliness and manager's ability to scrutinise, identify and address shortfalls in staff practice.

On one occasion, the manager did not notify Ofsted of a serious safeguarding concern. This means that Ofsted was not made aware of the concern. Consequently, Ofsted's oversight was reduced, and they were not able to assess if managers and staff had taken appropriate action to keep children safe.

Staff said that managers are approachable and supportive. Staff receive regular supervision and an annual appraisal. There are also regular team meetings. This allows for discussion and reflection on incidents to improve staff practice, and to improve the quality of care that children receive.

Overall, feedback from parents and professionals was positive. They were complimentary about staff's communication, and how the service has supported children and kept them safe. One parent said, 'The service has been very helpful to [name of child]. She enjoyed being there and staff kept her safe. Staff helped her with coping mechanisms, helped her feel better about herself. It enabled her to remain at home.'

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person 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 must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies; and that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(iii)(v)(vi)(vii)(b)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that staff and managers proactively safeguard children. This includes ensuring that all concerns of harm are promptly acted on and strategies for managing incidents with children are effective in a way that does not cause harm to children. Leaders and managers must ensure that safeguarding procedures are consistently followed, and safeguarding concerns and allegations are promptly shared with the appropriate professionals. Managers must make a record of all actions taken in response to allegations raised by children.	10 October 2025

The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate; ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child; and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(c)(e)(h)) In particular, leaders and managers must ensure that they monitor the service effectively in order to provide clear oversight of the quality of care provided to the children in their care. The registered person must ensure that staff have the skills to effectively manage children's risks and keep them safe, and that the use of agency staff does not impact on the continuity of care that children receive.	10 October 2025
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—	7 November 2025

that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home's statement of purpose. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that the children they plan to care for in the home are within the range of needs set out in the home's statement of purpose and conditions of registration.	
The registered person must ensure that— the privacy of children is appropriately protected; children can access all appropriate areas of the children's home's premises; and any limitation placed on a child's privacy or access to any area of the home's premises— is intended to safeguard each child accommodated in the home; is necessary and proportionate; and allows children as much freedom as is possible when balanced against the need to protect them and keep them safe. (Regulation 21 (a)(b)(c)(i)(ii(iv))) In particular, the registered person must ensure that the impact of any restrictions placed on children in the home is minimised for other children.	10 October 2025
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy ("the behaviour management policy") which sets out— how appropriate behaviour is to be promoted in the children's home; and the measures of control, discipline and restraint which may be used in relation to children in the home. The registered person must keep the behaviour management policy under review and, where appropriate, revise it. The registered person must ensure that—	10 October 2025

within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a child in the home, a record is made which includes— details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure; the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and a description of any injury to the child or any other person, and any medical treatment administered, as a result of the measure. Within 48 hours of the use of the measure, the registered person, or a person who is authorised by the registered person to do so ("the authorised person")— has spoken to the user about the measure; and has signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)(a)(v)(vii)(viii)(b)(i)(ii)(c)) The registered person must ensure that when staff use a measure of control, an accurate account of the measure is recorded within timescales. Managers are to review records and ensure that all children and staff are spoken to afterwards.	
The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which— include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child; are kept up to date; and are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36 (1) (2) (3)) The registered person must ensure that all children's records are accurate, recorded on one system and completed in a timely manner.	10 October 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that when a child returns to the home after being missing or away from the home without permission, the responsible local authority must provide an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. Leaders and staff should take account of information provided by such interviews when assessing risks and putting arrangements in place to protect each child. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 35, paragraph 9.30)
- The registered person should ensure that they notify Ofsted and other relevant persons if one of the situations specified in regulation 40(4)(a)-(d) occurs, or if there is an incident relating to the protection, safeguarding or welfare of a child living in the home which the registered person considers to be serious (40(4)(e)). ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 63, paragraph 14.10)

Information about this inspection

The inspector has 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: Staffordshire County Council

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

Responsible individual: Post vacant

Registered manager: Susan Dodd

Inspector

Sonia Sullivan, Social Care Inspector

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