

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

The manager was registered with Ofsted in 2017.

Inspection dates: 22 to 23 January 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 1 August 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
01/08/2018	Full	Outstanding
23/01/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
05/10/2016	Full	Good
02/02/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness

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, 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 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— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child. (Regulation 12(1)(2)(a)(i))	09/03/2020
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home. (Regulation 14(1)(a))	09/03/2020

Recommendations

- Regulations 35-39 detail the records that must be kept in children's homes. All children's case records (regulation 36) must be kept up to date and stored securely whilst they remain in the home ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3). In particular, ensure that behaviour management plans are consistently updated, and children's one-to-one sessions are completed in line with their needs.
- Staff should understand the system for rewarding and celebrating positive behaviour and recognising where children have managed situations well. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 47, paragraph 9.39)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Most children really enjoy their short breaks in this warm and nurturing environment. They form strong and secure relationships with staff and their peers. The short breaks provide children and their families with valuable time to reflect during periods of stress and crisis.

As a result, children learn how to manage conflict and rebuild family relationships. A social worker told the inspector, 'She [child] was at crisis point. Her short breaks made an amazing difference. It really helped to repair her relationship with her mother.'

Staff take the time to get to know each child. Children complete a 'likes and dislikes' form before arrival. They complete tea visits alongside their families to meet staff and learn about the support on offer. Staff use the information gained from these activities to plan each child's care. For example, children enjoy their favourite foods and sleeping in their chosen bedrooms. This effective and individualised care helps the majority of children to settle quickly and get the most out of their short stays.

Children enjoy a wide range of planned and spontaneous activities and experiences. This includes trips to local parks, the cinema and cycling. The large and spacious environment allows children to relax or take part in activities as they wish. A child took great pride in playing the keyboard for the inspector. Other children enjoy cooking and baking alongside staff. These fun and enriching experiences have a significant impact on children. A child told the inspector, 'I love it here. I just feel calmer. I don't want to stop coming. It really helps my mum too.'

Children have lots of opportunities to express their views. For example, children take part in group and individual discussions to decide on activities and events. Staff also involve children in more complex and emotive discussions. For example, children review their behaviour management plans and work alongside staff to set targets. This inclusive practice gives children a sense of ownership of their care.

The aspirational and committed staff team understands the importance of children's education. The staff work closely with teachers and parents to set targets and agree upon areas of support. Children receive support with their homework and enjoy quiet time to study during their short breaks. This promotes their learning.

The management and administration of medication are safe and robust. Staff share important health information daily during handovers. All medication is safely locked away and accounted for. A senior member of staff has lead responsibility for managing medication. This well-planned practice ensures that children's health needs are met.

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

Shortfalls in effective care planning placed one child, an emergency placement, at potential risk of harm. This vulnerable child displayed complex behaviours, which placed her at risk in the local community. Despite this, senior leaders instructed that the child be admitted. Unfortunately, the child subsequently went missing from the service on two occasions. During one of these incidents, the child required police support to keep her safe. It is acknowledged that the registered manager was on annual leave during this admission. However, she has worked with leaders to revise the policy on emergency admissions to the service. This new protocol clearly identifies the decision-making process for admissions.

A poorly planned and inconsistent staff response placed this child at potential risk when she went missing. For example, staff pursued the child and maintained sight of her during the first missing incident. They worked alongside the police to safely return her. However, this robust response was not evident when the child went missing for a second time. On this occasion, staff did not search for the child and therefore missed opportunities to return her safely. The registered manager has updated the missing protocol in response to these shortfalls. This now provides staff with clear guidance to keep children safe.

Staff listen to children and offer them guidance when they are anxious or unsettled. This supportive approach encourages children to speak about their challenges. As a result, children learn new strategies to help them manage conflict and repair family relationships. Staff also reward children for positive behaviour. However, this practice is inconsistent. The registered manager is addressing this shortfall through ongoing staff meetings.

Staff work effectively with families and social workers to gather key safeguarding information. As a result, children's behaviour management plans and risk assessments are in line with their needs.

Staff recruitment is safe. The registered manager ensures that all necessary checks on potential new employees are completed. This helps to protect children from possible harm or abuse from unsuitable adults caring for them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is aspirational and innovative. She has continued to develop the service since the last inspection. For example, she has formed links with neighbouring local authorities and shares examples of best practice. The registered manager has also introduced new forms to ensure that children receive targeted support in line with their needs. This means that most children's care continues to evolve and improve.

A well-resourced, experienced and diverse staff team provides children with good care and nurture. Children enjoy access to staff with a range of expertise and interests. For

example, one staff member is a skilled musician, and another has expertise in outdoor pursuits. These skills help to enrich children's experiences during their short breaks.

The registered manager has effective monitoring systems in place. As a result, she can identify the service's strengths and areas of development. Regular and detailed file audits support staff to continually improve their practice. The registered manager ensures that the development plan is up to date and in line with the overall aims of the service.

A healthy learning environment equips staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet most children's needs. The registered manager strikes a healthy balance between staff support and challenge. She ensures that staff receive regular and effective supervision and appraisal. Staff feel supported by managers and their peers. This positive and enthusiastic environment enhances children's experiences. A member of staff told the inspector, 'We [staff] are really passionate about our role. This shows in the quality of care we provide children [with].'

The service has been refurbished since the last inspection. New paintwork and decorative touches provide children with an exceptionally warm and welcoming environment. Parents told the inspector that the service feels like a 'home from home'. Children enjoy choosing their favourite bedrooms and playing in the spacious outdoor areas.

The registered manager uses her strong working relationships with families and agencies to gather key information. As a result, children's plans are comprehensive and clearly capture their needs. However, some plans require updating and therefore do not reflect children's progress. In addition, some children do not receive the regular one-to-one support outlined in their care plans. The registered manager has identified these shortfalls through her internal auditing systems. She has plans in place to improve the quality of children's one-to-one support.

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: SC065679

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Staffordshire County Council, Wedgwood Buildings, Tipping Street, Stafford, Staffordshire ST16 2DH

Responsible individual: Elizabeth Kelay

Registered manager: Kerry Hutchinson

Inspector

Gareth Leckey, social care inspector

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