

SC065679

Registered provider: Staffordshire County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is managed by a local authority and provides residential short breaks and emergency placements for children who may have experienced childhood instability resulting in trauma and associated complex behaviours.

The manager was registered with Ofsted in 2017.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 24 to 25 August 2021

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **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: 22 January 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
22/01/2020	Full	Good
01/08/2018	Full	Outstanding
23/01/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
05/10/2016	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

This short break service has a vibrant and fun atmosphere, with children sharing friendly banter with the staff. Children say that they enjoy their time spent at the service. One child told the inspector that they would give the service a nine out of 10, with another child saying that she loved being at the home.

Children develop trusted relationships with staff. This means that children feel that they can talk to staff when they feel worried. This helps children to feel safe and reassured.

Staff put children's needs at the centre of everything they do. Children are actively encouraged to share their views and wishes on a regular basis. The registered manager advocates for children and she will appropriately challenge the local authority to ensure that the children's views are understood. This helps children to feel supported, cared for and listened to.

Children participate in a wide range of activities, including trips to the local trampoline park, the cinema and mini golf. During the COVID-19 national lockdown, staff were creative in planning fun activities for children, for example, baking, cooking and games nights. These experiences provide children with opportunities for fun and enjoyment.

The short break service is decorated to a high standard and has a warm and welcoming feel. The living room is the hub of the home and is where children and staff spend time playing pool or watching films together. Children's bedrooms are bright and pleasant spaces in which to spend time. When children stay at the service, they are able to pick their favourite room. This gives children a sense of belonging during their short stays at the home.

The use of the short breaks service for emergency placements has, at times, prevented some children from being able to access planned short breaks. The registered manager has tried to limit the impact of this by providing outreach services for those children and families affected.

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

Children are provided with a safe and supportive environment in which to spend time. Staff understand children's vulnerabilities and risks and take effective action to keep children safe.

Children's personal support plans provide staff with clear guidance on how best to manage children's behaviours and risks. These plans are reviewed regularly and are updated when new risks emerge. Staff work alongside external professionals such as

social workers and the police to gather key safeguarding information. This joined-up approach ensures that children are safeguarded effectively.

Staff respond quickly when children go missing. This is because staff understand what they need to do in such situations. Staff undertake thorough searches for children using their knowledge of the likely places that children will have gone to. When required, staff do not delay in reporting children as missing to the police. When children are located, staff take the time to understand the reasons why children may have gone missing.

Incidents of bullying at the short breaks service are rare. Staff encourage children to form positive relationships. However, when incidents do occur, staff are proactive in managing these situations. For example, during the inspection, the inspector observed staff holding a group session with children as a way of exploring their differences.

Staff use rewards to encourage children to make positive choices. Children respond well to this and enjoy receiving rewards for their good behaviour. This helps children to feel valued and to want to make positive choices.

As staff are successful at managing children's behaviours, staff rarely need to use physical interventions. When they are used, they are proportionate and appropriate.

Staff respond well to allegations. For example, they act swiftly to keep children safe and notify the relevant agencies to ensure that allegations can be investigated appropriately. However, during the inspection, the inspector identified in some isolated examples that staff's recording was not sufficient and key documents had not been completed. This is a recording issue and did not have a direct impact on the safety of children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is appropriately qualified and experienced. She is passionate about the service and the children who use the home.

Staff retention is high because staff enjoy working at the short break service and feel supported by the registered manager. The stable staff team knows children well. This provides children with a level of stability which supports their positive outcomes.

When new staff are recruited, they benefit from a well-planned induction. Staff only get signed off from their initial probation period after they have demonstrated that they have reached the right level of competence.

The registered manager ensures that staff have regular supervision. However, formal annual appraisals are not utilised at the service. Although the service has adapted their own appraisals these are not routinely completed. This is a missed opportunity to formally review staff practice and development needs.

All key staff have completed relevant mandatory training. However, training specific to children's needs has not been completed. For example, not all staff have up-to-date training in relation to child sexual exploitation, self-harm and missing from care. The absence of this training has not affected the safety or welfare of children.

Professionals are positive about the short break service and the support provided to children. A social worker told the inspector that, 'The communication from the home is great.' Another social worker told the inspector that the service had been invaluable to the families she works with.

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 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— ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c)) This specifically relates to staff not having training relevant to children's individual needs.	4 October 2021
The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which— are kept up to date. (Regulation 36 (1)(b)) This specifically relates to ensuring that children's records are kept up to date.	4 October 2021

Recommendations

- The registered person should only accept placements for children where they are satisfied that the home can respond effectively to the child's assessed needs as recorded in the child's relevant plans and where they have fully considered the impact that the placement will have on the existing group of children. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.4)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff must have their performance and fitness to carry out their role formally appraised at least once annually. As

part of the performance management process, poor performance should be addressed by a timely plan to bring about improvement. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.5)

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: Staffordshire County Council

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

Responsible individual: Elizabeth Kelay

Registered manager: Kerry Hutchinson

Inspector

Lydia Isaac, Social Care Inspector

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