

SC372511

Registered provider: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This local authority children's home provides a short-break service for up to five children at any one time. The service provides care for children who may have learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities and other complex healthcare needs.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted to manage the home since 2015.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 30 November and 1 December 2021

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: 26 February 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
26/02/2020	Full	Outstanding
30/01/2019	Full	Outstanding
03/10/2017	Full	Outstanding
28/03/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children have enriching and life-enhancing experiences when they access this short-break service. They thrive and benefit from the exceptional care and opportunities that are offered by dedicated staff.

Staff offer care that is highly sensitive to children's individual, and often complex, needs. Relationships that develop between staff and children are sustained over many years.

Collaboration between staff and parents is particularly strong. Extremely thorough planning and ongoing liaison ensure that all children benefit from their stays. Staff take great care to ensure that children are given familiar and comforting surroundings, alongside new and fun activities.

Children benefit from a home that is welcoming and very child-focused. The walls are decorated with their photographs and achievements, and the environment is maintained to the best possible standards. When children visit, they have access to a large and well-equipped indoor environment. This offers children good space for play and exploration. The large garden also offers a lot of play equipment, including a new wheelchair swing and newly installed sensory garden. This provides children with greater opportunities to explore and play outside.

Parents expressed the highest level of trust in staff to care for their children. They said that their children express excitement when they go to stay. A great deal of attention and thought are given to matching children's skills, interests and vulnerabilities. This careful matching forms the basis of children's very successful and rewarding stays.

Introductions to the service are carefully planned, in collaboration with parents, schools and other professionals. The introductions move at the child's pace and are informed by detailed observations and feedback by staff and the views of parents.

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

Staff overcome any communication difficulties children have and engage children sensitively. As a result, children develop trusting relationships with staff and feel safe. The service offers children well-planned opportunities to spend time away from their family home. This increases their confidence and, in turn, reduces their vulnerability.

The environment is arranged so that children can explore freely while remaining safe from hazards or accidents.

Children's vulnerabilities and means of communication are understood very well by the staff. Staff are attuned to how children express themselves and are vigilant to any changes that may indicate discomfort or distress and respond quickly.

Staff are well trained in safeguarding matters. They receive enhanced training to ensure that their skills in communicating with children are well informed and correspond to children's needs. For example, staff receive training in a unique language programme, and all staff have recently undergone accredited advanced training in autism spectrum disorder.

The home has a newly converted area that provides a well-furnished, discrete living space. This area is used creatively to slowly introduce children to the service and avoids children becoming overwhelmed. From here, children can freely choose to join the main group of children staying that night. This area also allows staff to fully assess children's abilities and interests and, in turn, informs the matching process with other children already accessing the service. It has also provided extended stays for children when there have been serious safeguarding concerns. For example, it provided a safe and known place for one child to stay until safeguarding issues had been addressed.

Care provided to children is regularly discussed in detail in both supervision and team meetings. This ensures that any changes to plans, behaviours or concerns are regularly explored by staff and managers. Plans detailing children's vulnerabilities are extremely detailed and offer staff advice on how best to respond to children.

The manager has high expectations of the care staff offer children. On one occasion, when supervision of a child was not as expected, the manager acted quickly and decisively to address the issue. This oversight, which provides a rapid response, keeps children safe.

Staff use their knowledge of children to de-escalate distress or heightened behaviour. This is done successfully and, as a result, physical intervention is rarely required. However, when it is used, records do not capture the names of individual staff who were involved at certain times during the incident.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The manager is very ambitious for the service to continuously evolve and develop. He is confident in his role and has high expectations of staff to provide the best possible care. He leads a stable and highly experienced staff team that is committed to providing children and their families with an exceptional service.

Alongside securing the additional facilities, the manager has organised for parents to meet informally. This is in addition to the more formal parental group. Parents have found this beneficial, with one parent describing it as an opportunity to talk to other parents 'about our struggles'.

A particular strength of the service is the wrap-around support that is offered to parents outside children's stays. Parents spoke very highly of this ad hoc and responsive support. One parent described the service as a 'life saver'.

Liaison with parents of children who access the service is excellent. This open and frequent communication forms the basis of exceptionally strong partnership working. The strength of these relationships was described by a parent as being 'like family'.

Professionals consider the short-break service to be an integral and important part of the services offered to children and families. They find the managers to be knowledgeable, flexible and responsive. A professional described the service offered to children as 'absolutely fantastic'.

There are well-developed monitoring systems in place, which are robust and ensure that all aspects of the service function to the highest standards. Feedback is continuously sought from parents, children and professionals. These strong relationships ensure that the best possible care is offered.

A great deal of attention and care are given to recording children's stays. This offers both insight and assurance to parents and forms an essential part of monitoring the success of children's stays.

Staff receive regular formal and informal guidance and support. Staff supervision, daily discussions and team meetings centre on the needs of the children accessing the service. This ensures that staff are confident in their roles and are continuously motivated to be ambitious for children and a positive influence in their lives.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that records of restraint detail individual staff's involvement. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 49, paragraph 9.59)

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: SC372511

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Registered provider address: Town Hall, King William Street, Blackburn BB1 7DY

Responsible individual: Elizabeth Mannion

Registered manager: Jeremy Wood

Inspector

Pauline Yates, Social Care Inspector

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