

SC375911

Registered provider: Staffordshire County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The service is operated by a local authority and provides short-break care for up to 4 children who may have special educational needs and/or disabilities, physical disabilities and/or sensory impairments.

The manager registered with Ofsted in August 2023 and is suitably experienced and qualified.

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 February 2026

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 20 January 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
20/01/2025	Full	Good
25/07/2023	Full	Good
11/02/2020	Full	Outstanding
28/02/2019	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The service is currently supporting 21 children and their families. Each child receives a tailored support package designed to meet their individual needs, including overnight stays and outreach sessions. Since the last inspection, one child has left the service, and 2 children have been newly referred. At the time of this inspection, one child was receiving short-break care.

The child who left the service did so in line with their agreed short-break plan. Staff encouraged the child to participate in planned goodbye activities and held a farewell party, during which the child received personalised cards. This enabled the child to say goodbye to their peers and experience a positive and well-supported transition from the service. The child's parent said, '[Name of child] really enjoyed coming to this centre and always returned home happy.'

The manager plans transitions for new children meticulously and with sensitivity. Staff visit children beforehand to introduce themselves and invite the children and their parents to visit the centre. This approach helps reassure children and enables them to settle in quickly.

Children experience positive relationships with the staff who care for them. During the inspection, staff were observed to be nurturing and patient with the child on their short break. Staff know the children well and use their preferred methods of communication, including the Picture Exchange Communication System, Makaton, and signs and symbols. They are skilled at interpreting children's vocal tones, facial expressions and body language to understand their wishes. Communication boards around the building further support children with communication difficulties in expressing themselves and being heard.

Children have positive experiences when they stay overnight at the service or attend outreach sessions. Staff encourage children to participate in a range of activities at the centre and in the community, including trips to the cinema and day visits to the beach. These activities help children interact with their peers, build confidence and develop their self-esteem.

Staff help children develop independence skills in line with their age and individual needs. They assist children with shopping; choosing and buying ingredients; and preparing and cooking meals using the items they have selected. Staff provide help according to each child's needs, including hand-over-hand support when appropriate. This enables children to build practical skills and develop a sense of achievement.

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

Staff keep children safe and provide good levels of supervision. Each child has a detailed plan that gives staff clear guidance on how to minimise potential risks and protect them from harm.

Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities in protecting children and keeping them safe from harm. As a result, there have been no allegations, complaints or incidents of children going missing from the centre.

Children participate in regular workshops with staff on topics such as anti-bullying and using 'kind hands'. These sessions help children understand how to keep themselves and others safe, make positive choices and build respectful relationships.

Staff and children participate in regular fire drills. Each child has a personal emergency evacuation plan, which helps staff understand the level of support the child requires to evacuate the centre safely. These measures ensure that everyone at the centre remains safe in the event of a fire or any other emergency requiring immediate evacuation.

Children are actively supported in understanding their behaviour and using effective strategies to help them remain calm. This approach has been largely successful, with only one physical intervention taking place. However, the same staff member who performed the physical intervention spoke to the child after the incident. Furthermore, post-incident discussions were carried out with staff outside the required regulatory time frame. This means that discussions are not independent and do not support safe practice, effective safeguarding or reflective learning. This shortfall remains a concern from the last inspection.

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

The service is led by a registered manager who is enthusiastic and committed to achieving positive outcomes for the children who use the service. Staff speak positively about the manager, describing her as 'approachable' and 'hands-on'.

Leaders have established monitoring systems; however, they do not apply these with sufficient rigour or robustness to drive effective improvement. For example, the manager's monthly monitoring reports identify shortfalls but do not clearly set out the specific actions required, who is responsible for them, or the timescales for completion. In three consecutive reports, the manager did not detail the mitigation strategies in place to manage long-term staff sickness or evaluate its impact on the quality and continuity of care. In addition, there is no senior leader oversight or scrutiny of these reports. As a result, leaders do not demonstrate how their monitoring leads to sustained improvement or strengthens accountability across the service.

Staff say they enjoy working in the service and feel well supported by the registered manager. However, they do not report the same level of support from senior leaders. One member of staff did not know who the service's responsible individual is, and

another said they do not feel that senior leaders provide consistent support to the staff team. This does not demonstrate effective leadership oversight or clear lines of accountability, both of which are essential for good practice and strong governance.

Long-term sickness absence has led to ongoing staffing challenges, resulting in the manager being required to cover shifts. This reduces the manager's capacity to fully carry out all management responsibilities, including providing regular supervision for staff. Furthermore, the manager does not receive consistent supervision. This does not support effective leadership, reflective practice or the continued development and support of the staff team.

In addition to the above, staff shortages affected one child's short-break service. Due to insufficient staffing, one overnight short-break session was cancelled. The child's parents described this as 'very frustrating'.

Staff do not have the required training to meet each child's individual needs. For example, for one child using the short-break service, staff are not trained to meet two of their diagnosed needs. Another child was accepted as an emergency referral, although staff lacked training to meet one of their complex needs. This has the potential to significantly increase the risk of unsafe practice and does not ensure that children's needs are consistently understood, assessed or met.

Despite the shortfalls identified during the inspection, external professionals reported effective communication with the manager and staff and said that children are supported well.

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, The 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— 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 has sufficient staff to provide care for each child; understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home; use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c)(d)(f)(h)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that the senior leadership team provides support to the manager and staff in line with the service's statement of purpose, that all staff receive the necessary training to meet each child's individual needs, and that the home's monitoring and review systems are effective in supporting sustained improvements to the quality of care provided to children.	27 April 2026
The registered person must ensure that all employees—	27 April 2026

receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33 (4)(b)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that all staff receive regular and effective supervision.	
The registered person must ensure that— 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. (Regulation 35 (3)(b)(i)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that appropriate individuals speak to staff following any physical interventions and within the required regulatory time frames.	27 April 2026

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: SC375911

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Staffordshire County Council

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

Responsible individual: Joanne Spender

Registered manager: Joanne Heath

Inspector

Jas Nahar Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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