

SC391503

Registered provider: Central Bedfordshire Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This service provides short breaks for up to four children or young people who have learning and/or physical disabilities. A local authority owns and operates this setting.

Inspection dates: 21 to 22 June 2017

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: 4 January 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: Improved effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is outstanding because:

- The children are looked after by a strong and consistent team that knows the children's needs exceptionally well.
- The staff know and understand how each child communicates their feelings and wishes.
- The children enjoy having their stays. They participate in an array of activities that they would not access otherwise. This empowers the children's families to try activities with their children that they would never have previously considered, due to the children's needs and behaviours.
- Parents say that their children are learning many new skills because of the extremely consistent care that the children experience when they have their stays.
- The staff provide an outreach service to children who are either new to the service or have ceased having stays. This enables the staff to build and maintain a rapport with the children and their families.
- Families benefit from learning the successful strategies that the staff use to manage the children's behaviours and health needs during their stays.
- The manager and deputy are both very experienced and are ambitious and aspirational for the children and the staff. This includes setting ambitious targets for the children and the staff that encourages their overall development. This approach has enabled a support worker to undertake a relevant level 5 qualification.
- The manager is introducing the Solihull Approach model to further enhance the existing reflective practice model which underpins the work of the home.
- The staff have joint meetings with the local authority's social work team to enable the positive development of joint strategies.
- Feedback from parents and professionals states that the children are receiving an exceptionally high standard of care.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
04/01/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness
15/08/2016	Full	Outstanding
03/03/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
16/12/2015	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The home is outstanding because the children have stays that promote their ongoing development and enjoyment. The staff are extremely knowledgeable about the children and their needs. Children benefit from a strong, consistent and positive environment. The staff know the children exceptionally well. A parent said, 'It does not matter which staff member is on as they all know all of the children and their needs and behaviours.'

The managers expertly coordinate the children's visits to ensure that the children are able to fully enjoy their stays. The children have a number of visits before they commence their stays, and this enables them to settle in quickly. Since the last inspection, two of the children have ceased using the service. The staff have supported these children to make a successful transition to adult services. Three children have commenced having short breaks.

The home has recently offered two children long-term stays due to health and well-being concerns. One child arrived straight from hospital following his spinal surgery. An email from a special needs nurse read, 'The staff are friendly and welcoming. We have had a few times when children have had surgery, and the home has ensured that the children receive the appropriate care and that their families also receive support.'

The home works positively with the parents who want their child to move into long-term residential care. The staff team is demonstrating to parents that the child is responsive to boundaries. He is now easily engaging in aspects of his daily routines, such as showering and preparing for school, that he struggled with at home. The team works with the parents to identify strategies that they can use to help them to provide the consistent approach that the child needs and responds well to. A social worker said, in relation to the child's emergency long-stay arrangement at the home,

'The home has been flexible and accommodating in an emergency. [Child's] situation is unusual, and the home has provided a spontaneous care package. The staff have been exceptionally accommodating. They have also been proactive in addressing the family's concern.'

To ensure that the children get the most from their short breaks, their stays are coordinated to enable them to stay with children whom they know or with children who have similar needs and abilities. A parent described how this approach has enabled her child to participate in activities that she may not have been able to undertake otherwise.

A parent spoke about her child having attachment issues and how her child refuses to stay with anyone, including family members. The parent said, 'It [the home] is the only place that she will go, and she is always happy to go there. 'They [the staff] have set her targets such as learning to brush her hair and make her bed.' The children's targets are set in consultation with parents and school staff to ensure that the children are working on the same aspects of their development in each setting. These targets are

often aspirational at the time that they are set. They focus on helping the children to develop skills that will enable them to undertake their own personal care and independent life tasks. The staff break down each task to make it achievable and to be better able to see the children's progress. The staff continually review the children's progress in order to set the next stage of the target or new goals.

The children continue to attend their schools during their stays, and this maintains their high attendance levels. The staff observe children at their schools, to see how they behave, and to learn from the techniques used by the school staff. The staff observed the children at school using switches that enable them to control items. The staff then successfully introduced these switches into the home. The noticeboards have pictures of the children using the switches to control items such as a mixer when baking and a bubble machine. The use of the switches has facilitated the children's participation in games and activities.

The staff meet the children's needs through their ongoing partnership working with the children's health professionals and families. Many of the children communicate non-verbally or have very limited speech. The staff use a range of communication tools to enable the children to express their views. The children choose and take part in a wide range of activities. A recent trip to a theme park, suggested by a child during a house meeting, was a huge success. There are pictures of the trip on display at the home, which show the fun had by the children and the staff. Seeing their children being part of successful outings with the staff has empowered families to go out with their child to activities, such as the cinema. This has enabled them to do activities that their children enjoy and that other families take for granted.

The home has a calm and relaxed feel and it is equipped to a high standard. The new sensory activity wall offers the children additional simulation. The children make good use of the garden, especially the covered area that allows the children to play outside in all weathers.

The staff offer an outreach service that enables them to become familiar with children while they are at their family home or when they are transitioning to adult provisions for short stays or residential placements. A parent spoke positively about how the staff were working with his child to develop his child's levels of independence. This has included helping the child to access the community, which he had not done for a number of years. This work has successfully helped to secure an adult provision for the child.

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

The children's risk assessments are comprehensive and identify both known and potential risks. The manager and staff are not risk averse. There is a culture of enabling the children to take reasonable risks. This means that the children benefit from experiences and activities during their stays that they cannot experience elsewhere. The staff consider and plan for every eventuality, including additional staffing if required, when arranging trips and activities. A recent trip to a theme park included a child who

suffers from regular epileptic seizures. The child had a seizure on the journey to the theme park. The staff managed this effectively and a member of staff stayed with the child while he slept after the seizure, and the other children and staff went off to enjoy the rides. The child was soon able to join the other children and have a fun-packed day.

The managers have been proactive in advocating that the local authority reviews its procedure for assessing the risk to children of child sexual exploitation. The social workers are currently completing these assessments on a case-by-case basis. However, the managers believe that due to the children's overall level of vulnerability that all of the children should have this particular risk assessment. This approach ensures that all of the children benefit from having all aspects of their levels of need and vulnerability assessed.

The staff use house meetings and key-work sessions to discuss personal safety, using topics and materials such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's PANTS campaign. An example of this showed that children are able to identify areas of their bodies and know which of those areas are private. This enables the children to learn about their bodies and discuss who they would alert if they had any concerns.

Although the children do not go missing from home, the staff understand what they need to do should an incident occur. When out on activities, the staff carry information cards that would enable them to immediately share vital information and contact details with the police should a child go missing.

The use of physical intervention is extremely rare as the staff successfully use de-escalation techniques, such as diversion, to calm the children when they are displaying heightened behaviours. The staff work creatively with the children to reduce negative behaviours. In one case, a child's aggressive outbursts have significantly reduced in frequency and intensity. The staff are working with this family to share the strategies that the staff are using. The staff are extremely sensitive to the fact that some parents find it difficult to accept that other people can more easily manage their child's behaviour.

The staff have all undertaken the relevant mandatory training, including safeguarding training. They are aware of the home's whistle-blowing procedure. The staff have no concerns about any of their colleagues working at the home, and they say that they would have no hesitation in reporting any concerns should they arise.

The manager has arranged for the local authority designated officer to attend a team meeting to discuss the designated officer's role. The managers use team meetings to have discussions about research and topics such as missing from care and the social care common inspection framework. This enables the staff to continually develop their understanding of how their work safeguards children and to remain aware of current legislation.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The manager holds a relevant level 5 qualification. Both the manager and the deputy manager are very experienced, they have worked at the home for many years. The staff team provides consistent care as many members of the team have also worked at the home for several years. The two newest staff members are currently undertaking a relevant level 3 qualification. All of the other care staff hold a relevant level 3 qualification. The home will have a full staff team when the new starter commences work in the coming month.

The staff benefit from enthusiastic leadership and management of the home. The managers are ambitious for, and have high aspirations for, the children and the staff. The managers consistently seek to incorporate the children's views into the running of the home, and the activities that are offered. At a recent children's meeting, the staff asked the children what qualities they would like to see in a new staff member. The managers held the suggested traits in mind during the recruitment process.

The staff undertake mandatory training and they are encouraged to undertake developmental training. One support worker is currently completing a level 5 qualification in residential care. The managers believe that seeing their colleague complete the qualification will encourage other support staff to feel confident enough to undertake the qualification too. The manager's recognition of the team member's potential is enabling and supporting the staff to consider their future career progression.

The managers are gradually integrating the Solihull Approach model of containment, reciprocity and behaviour management into their work with the children and their families. The model closely reflects how the staff already work with the children and their families, such as encouraging the families to find their own solution but supporting them with strategies to achieve it. The staff are currently using this approach to engage with a family who are seeking long-term care for their child. The staff can demonstrate to the parents that the child is very responsive to the structure and routine provided at the home. The child's parents are in discussion with the staff about the best way to achieve this at home. The managers are working sensitively to empower the parents to mirror the boundaries that the team has established with the child to prevent him from needing a long-term care placement.

The staff receive regular supervision that facilitates reflective practice. The team benefits from quarterly reflective practice meetings with the local authority social work team. This enables the staff to discuss how they are working with the children and their families using each other's shared knowledge. This information, coupled with the staff's learning from observing the children in school, enables the managers to identify any additional individual/group training needs to better facilitate the joint-working approach.

The managers conduct regular file audits. When records lack information or detail, the

manager asks the relevant staff member to update the record. The independent visitor also monitors the children's files and records. The managers acts on the findings in the reports from the independent visitor, in conjunction with her own internal audits, to drive up standards in the home.

There were no shortfalls identified at the previous inspection or at this visit. Parents and the professionals spoken with were exceptionally positive about the care that the children receive, the flexibility of the staff and the positive difference that the home is making to the children.

The feedback from parents and professionals included:

- 'The home's open door policy is fantastic, and I love that I can phone at any time.'
- 'Communication is good. The placement is working really well for [child]. He is not showing any of the behaviours that indicate that he is not happy. He is calm and content there.'
- 'The managers are exceptionally good, very supportive, understanding and considerate. They care about the children and the staff. The staff work well as a team and they have the spirit of the child at heart.'
- 'The staff are professional and really know all of the pupils [that use their service] well. Staff attend reviews (academic and social care) and contribute to discussions about individual pupil progress, target setting and working collaboratively with parents. Staff also attend behaviour meetings to enable consistent approaches, to support pupils in the management of their behaviour and also support them in developing independence.'
- '[The home] has created a wonderful atmosphere. Children and their parents tell me that they feel at home and that the staff know their children well. Relationships are strong and children enjoy staying in such a warm and welcoming environment.'
- 'The creativity of the staff to address the issues of diversity and the impact of barriers to the children achieving is impressive. No one goes to the home and comes away feeling anything other than encouraged by the quality of the care, the [staff's] knowledge of the varying needs of the children or the aspirational approach to only do the best for the children who have short stays, and the positive partnership that they [staff] have with the children, parents, carers and professionals.'

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 difference 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 who 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: SC391503

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17 5TQ

Responsible individual: Kenneth Harvey

Registered manager: Joyce Hunnibell

Inspector

Sonia Hay, 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
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

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