

# SC409506

Registered provider: Bedford Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this children's home

The home is a short-break provision owned and managed by a local authority. It provides care for up to six children between the ages of eight and 17 years who are diagnosed as having learning disabilities, including autism and/or challenging behaviour. The primary aim is to assist children to develop optimum independence and increased self-esteem in a nurturing environment.

**Inspection dates:** 26 to 27 September 2017

**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 **outstanding**

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

**Date of last inspection:** 15 December 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** sustained effectiveness

**Enforcement action since last inspection:**

None.

## Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- Children have enjoyable and positive stays that they look forward to.

- The children are cared for by staff who are enthusiastic and know them well, and with whom the children have positive relationships.
- The children's achievements are celebrated, and are documented in ways that are shared with the children, their families and professionals.
- The highly effective managers lead by example.
- The staff use creative ways to help the children to learn how to keep themselves safe.
- Parents and professionals are positive about the care that the children receive.
- The staff actively seek the children's views, and incorporate their choices into the running of the home.

## Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
15/12/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
09/08/2016	Full	Good
25/01/2016	Full	Good
12/05/2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

There are currently 22 children receiving short breaks. The children receive an individualised approach to their care. Their targets and goals are set out in their short-break plans. The plans detail the children's routines and provide information about the additional support that they require, such as social stories. The clarity of planning ensures that the staff are clear about how they will work with the children to assist them to achieve their targets and goals.

The children are making exceptional progress from their starting points. Their achievements are celebrated. This is evident through their numerous certificates and pictures, and the positive praise that forms part of their case records. The staff create colourful presentations that show the children undertaking tasks that are linked to their targets, and participating in activities. The staff now create monthly books showing the children's outings and activities, and the fun had at the home. These experiences include intensive interaction and sensory activities. The books, which are available to be emailed to the children, their families and the professionals involved in their lives, provide the staff and children with memories of the events. These presentations and books creatively demonstrate the progress that the children are making, and the enjoyable times that they have during their stays.

One of the staff members is a dedicated transitions worker. The role involves liaising with the children, their families and associated professionals in preparation for the children commencing and ceasing their stays. The staff work with the children to transition in and out of the home at a pace that the children are comfortable with.

The children have access to a new independent advocate who visits the home on a monthly basis. The advocate was present during the inspection, and she said that the staff are always welcoming and that children are gradually becoming familiar with her. The access to an advocate provides the children with an additional source of support.

The staff seek the children's views at children's meetings and during key-work sessions. The staff copy the minutes of the children's meetings in a newsletter format that is shared with the children, their families and professionals. The newsletter is a positive way of sharing the discussions and games, such as the emotions game, that have taken place with the children. This child-friendly approach makes the information more visual and accessible to the children. The staff use the key-work sessions to ensure that the children's views are incorporated into the running of the home. The children used the home's wish book to request activities such as camping, and to request bikes for the garden. The staff promptly purchased the bikes and arranged a camping experience. The children spoke positively about the bikes and camping overnight in the garden.

Parents describe how their children are benefiting from their stays. A parent said, 'Any

significant changes that occur for [child] start at his stays.' The staff work closely with the children's families, schools and other professionals to share positive behaviour strategies that ensure that the children's needs are met in a cohesive way.

Two of the children who were having stays at the time of the inspection met through having stays; they have become good friends. They now see each other when they are at home with their families. One of their parents spoke positively about her child having the opportunity to socialise at the home. She was positive about how this has led to the children maintaining contact outside their stays. The parent said, 'Because of this, this is the first birthday that he has had a friend at his birthday party.'

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

The managers ensure that they consider the children's compatibility when allocating their stays. The managers and the staff base their assessments of compatibility on their knowledge of the children, feedback from previous stays and information from the parents or schools about friendship groups. The staffing levels are adapted according to the children's needs. These processes ensure that the children's stays are positive.

The children are all highly vulnerable and some have self-injurious behaviours. These behaviours are identified in the children's short-break plans and their risk assessments. The children's risk assessments are now discussed at each staff handover. The risk assessments have become 'live' documents, which means that the staff on shift are working with up-to-date knowledge of the current risk factors. The staff identify any changes in the children's behaviours through continuous monitoring, and they update the children's assessments accordingly.

Children do not go missing from this home. The staff understand the protocol that they need to follow should such an incident occur. The staff undertake safeguarding training that incorporates how to recognise the signs of abuse and raises their awareness of aspects of risk such as child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. The staff seek creative ways to impart information about safety to the children. The children have recently had key-work sessions about internet safety. The staff tailored the sessions to the children's individual level of communication and understanding. The children received certificates for their work. Some of the posters that they created have been used on the display board in the computer room. The children's posters detail how they would stay safe. One child said, 'Do not share pictures with people.' These ongoing conversations help the children to develop a better understanding of how to stay safe.

The use of physical interventions is infrequent. Staff successfully use de-escalation techniques. There are no deliberate child-on-child incidents or bullying.

Families and professionals regularly send complimentary messages about the care that the home is providing. There have been no complaints. A parent raised a matter informally. The manager responded to this as though it were a complaint. This thorough response demonstrates that comments from parents are taken seriously and actioned appropriately. The manager applies the same approach to comments that the children

may make about the staff. By addressing the comments as though they are a complaint or allegation, the manager ensures that the children's comments receive an appropriate response.

The home's location risk assessment is comprehensive and addresses the known risks in the area. Children's personal emergency evacuation plans comprehensively detail how the staff will support them in the event of an emergency evacuation.

During the summer holidays there was an increase in the number of incidents. This peak mirrors a similar pattern to previous years. This is attributed to the change and/or lack of routine for the children during holiday times. The managers review each incident and map out the actions and outcomes to reduce the possibility of future occurrences.

One medication error occurred earlier in the year. The staff error was speedily identified and the error was addressed effectively. The managers conducted an investigation into how it occurred. This is a rare occurrence and was addressed appropriately.

The managers have created pen pictures of the children that detail their needs when being transported. Behavioural issues are highlighted in red for easy recognition. These pen pictures ensure that members of the transport team are fully aware of the children's needs, and help to ensure that the children are transported safely.

There is a programme of works to redecorate the home, and these form part of the development plan. The house is well maintained, has a homely feel and is a safe environment for the children. The walls are adorned with display boards, including an achievement rainbow, a feelings tree and a diversity board. These displays provide the children with visual information about the home and specific topics.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The current manager, who was acting as interim manager, registered with Ofsted in August 2017. He has worked at the home for over a decade. He has an in-depth knowledge of the home and the staff team. The manager works closely with the deputy manager, who has also worked at the home for many years. The manager's appointment has provided the home with a greater level of security and stability. The two managers have successfully run the home in the lengthy period that the home was without a permanent registered manager. The managers both hold a relevant level 4 qualification, and they are both enrolled to commence the level 5 diploma course. They are focused on driving up standards to ensure that the children's achievements are recognised and celebrated. The managers are working with the staff to set ambitious targets for the children. They are aspirational for the home and the staff. The managers have a clear understanding of the progress that the children are making, and they are streamlining paperwork and processes to more easily demonstrate this.

The staff, many of whom have worked at the home for several years, are enthusiastic and excited about their work. One staff member spoke about how thoroughly she enjoys her job. She said, 'I can't believe that I get paid for this. I should have done this

[changed jobs] years ago.’ This enthusiasm was mirrored throughout the staff team. Another staff member said, ‘He [the manager] listens and is as passionate as when he first started and you become as passionate too.’

The staff describe the managers as supportive and say that they better understand the issues that the staff may encounter because they still cover shifts. The staff state that supervision is regular and helpful, and that they have the opportunity to reflect on practice and have discussions about any issues that may arise. The staff members each hold a relevant level 3 qualification or equivalent. This addresses the sole requirement made at the last inspection.

The managers now have a complement of staff with a wide range of knowledge, experience and skills. The managers incorporated questions from the children and parents into the staff interviews. These questions highlighted the aspects of care that are important to the children and their families. This innovative approach to recruiting staff provides the managers with an opportunity to gauge the candidate’s responses to unconventional interview questions such as, ‘Can you cook?’ and ‘How would you care for me if I was upset?’

The manager has allocated staff to oversee various aspects of the children’s care, such as advocacy and transitions. This provides staff with an opportunity to build their knowledge and enhance the children’s experiences. The manager praises the staff for the way that they go over and above to ensure that the children have enjoyable stays, particularly during the summer holidays when children stay for longer periods. The manager said, ‘I cannot praise them enough.’ He added that the staff have provided emergency care for three children whose families were in crisis.

The managers have a strong understanding of the way they are seeking to drive improvement in the standards at the home, and to ultimately provide the children with an excellent quality of care. Positive relationships and partnership working enhance the children’s all-round development. Managers challenge services and responses that they feel are ineffective, to ensure that the children receive the support that they need. Diversity and equality are interwoven into the service and are shown through the individualised care that the children receive, with a focus on the children’s abilities.

The managers issued questionnaires to the children, professionals, parents and staff. The managers analysed the responses and created an action plan incorporating the views. This self-analytical approach is shaping the service. The development plan for the home includes an order of works that will be progressed over the coming year. The managers are continually identifying aspects of the service that they wish to develop.

The managers are reviewing the format of their internal monitoring as they recognise that the reporting would benefit from being more evaluative of the events at the home. The home has had a recent change of independent visitor. The monthly reports are more detailed and child centred, and give a fuller overview of the events in the home each month. The location risk assessment is comprehensive. The managers use external agencies and/or guest speakers to attend team meetings and team training days. This

provides the staff with information about the roles of multi-agency professionals.

The positive feedback from the social workers demonstrates that they have good working relationships with the home. The social workers say that they can see the way that the children are benefiting from their stays.

The parents are very happy with the care that their children receive. They say that their children are happy and that they look forward to their stays. A parent said, 'He loves his stays and always comes back calm, even if he did not arrive calm.' The parent went on to say, 'He has lots of lovely gentle adventures. We couldn't be happier. The staff understand autism and they get [child], as we do at home.'

## **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:** SC409506

**Provision sub-type:** Children's home

**Registered provider:** Bedford Borough Council

**Registered provider address:** Borough Hall, Cauldwell Street, Bedford MK42 9AP

**Responsible individual:** Martin Purbrick

**Registered manager:** Alexander Milligan

## Inspector

Sonia Hay, social care inspector



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