

SC059203

Registered provider: Northumberland County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is run by a local authority and is registered for the short-break care and accommodation of up to six children or young people who have learning disabilities.

Inspection dates: 9 March 2018

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

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: 24 March 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 leadership and management are excellent. The registered manager is inspirational and is purposeful in the development of the service. She is

extremely child focused and committed to providing a stimulating, educative environment for all the children and young people who come to the home for short breaks.

- The staff team is highly motivated and meticulous in its planning. The strong relationship with professionals from a range of agencies, parents and families supports positive experiences for children and young people that exceeds the standard for good.
- The children and young people receive bespoke packages of care that ensure that their wishes, feelings and opinions are considered. Their choices are listened to and acted on, ensuring that positive outcomes are achievable on each stay.
- The staff are extremely child centred and nurturing in their approach. Children and young people are encouraged to take part in all aspects of their care. Independence skills are enhanced and a range of activities provided promote their self-esteem and resilience. The children and young people enjoy and experience their short breaks with familiar peers and, as a result, friendships are developed.
- The children and young people make significant progress. The targets set at the beginning of the short breaks are often exceeded and parents describe the transferring of skills learned at the home to the family environment. These are notably in the management of behaviour, an increase in confidence and an acceptance of new situations.

The children's home's areas for development:

- The supervision of staff and management would be enhanced by the inclusion of a stand-alone agenda item relating to safeguarding. This would ensure that safeguarding is discussed on each occasion and would promote the awareness of safeguarding practice, so that it is at the centre of care provided to children and young people.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
24/03/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness
18/11/2016	Full	Outstanding
24/03/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
09/10/2015	Full	Outstanding

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

Recommendations

- A record of supervision should be kept for staff, including the manager. The record should provide evidence that supervision is being delivered in line with regulation 33(4)(b). ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.3)

In particular, safeguarding should be added as a stand-alone item to ensure that it is discussed on each occasion.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children and young people arrive at the home and are instantly provided with warmth and enthusiasm by a committed and nurturing staff team. I observed the professionalism of the staff team's practice throughout the inspection visit. The positive and reassuring response to each child and young person who arrived either via their parent or the adjacent school was excellent. This supports children and young people to feel welcome and less anxious about leaving their parents, and more able to deal with difficult transitions.

The children and young people throughout the inspection visit were clearly happy to be with staff and excited about the anticipated discussion about their stay. They are supported to make choices in terms of activities for the weekend and meals that they would like. Shopping lists are drawn up, with the children and young people eagerly awaiting the weekly Friday night trip to the local supermarket. This is all explained and detailed on a large activity board to show pictures of activities and menus/foods chosen, individually, by them. This is routine practice and children were all aware of the expectations, which promoted a culture of equality and diversity. I was invited to join the group outing, which was a positive experience for the children and young people. They were observed to be comfortable and confident in collecting their shopping. Some less able and younger children were using picture prompts to identify their choices and to tick off their list. One young person happily announced that she would help [Name of staff] to put the shopping away when they return to the home. A level of independence is being supported through this group exercise.

The home recently received a five star rating for food hygiene. The inspectors were very impressed with how children and young people are involved in the whole process inclusive of choosing, purchasing and putting items away appropriately in terms of identifying what went in cupboards, fridges and freezers. This is an additional learning experience that develops independence skills and confidence.

A parent spoke positively about the service, making statements such as, 'He loves it here, loves going shopping and is now able to check sell by dates and eat by dates when

he goes with me. There are small groups, which are great, and the service is fantastic.'

The staff team maximises the amenities and resources in the local community to enhance the whole experience of short breaks for the children and young people. The staff also research activities and events further afield and, if a child or young person chooses an activity that may be a distance away, choice is then down to the group. This develops democratic decision-making based on realistic evaluation, and explanations are always given to children and young people if they are not able to join in.

The manager and her staff communicate excellently with children and young people on all aspects of their care. A range of pictorial aids and photographs of activities and items of food are used to explain to each child in the best way possible. This is inclusive of the formal complaints procedures, fire evacuation procedures and information guides, and so on. Individualised planning and support is paramount. The children and young people thrive as a result of attending for short breaks. Information detailing their experience is captured in the form of personal diaries, which are maintained on a daily basis. This diary tells the story of their stay and is shared with parents to enable them to discuss events with their child on returning home, promoting positive communication. This sharing of the experience develops a sense of safety and security during stays.

The staff are very attentive to the wishes and feelings of the children and young people. For example, one young person had arrived for her stay and staff explained to the inspector that she had some issues with transitions which would impact on her coming straight into the home. The staff team was prepared and immediately set on the task of providing consistent nurturing care to enable the child to enter the home when she was ready. This was completed at entirely the child's pace and, as a result, the child was put at ease quickly and was observed by the inspector to be happy with the staff and her peers thereafter. Children and young people's emotional stability is supported by a skilled and successful staff team.

The staff team has excellent links to health and education professionals. Many of the children and young people who access the service go to the adjacent school, where a school nurse is employed, enabling sharing of information to be dynamic. Additional health needs are detailed within individualised plans supported by information provided by parents and specific health professionals in regards to significant needs. Training to meet those needs is undertaken prior to any child coming to stay, for example training in epilepsy, peg feeding and use of specialist equipment such as a new bed that has been purchased for a new admission to the service.

Children and young people develop friendships with their peers who attend short breaks, and some of these friendships have been maintained over a number of years and continue after the children and young people leave. Parents and families value the care that is provided to their children and young people. One parent said, 'We all get a break from each other and importantly he has made lots of friends down here.' A staff member stated, '[Name] has been coming for three years now and the big thing for her has been the mixing with other young people and making friends, she has become more confident.' The social experience, as well as the development of independence skills, is highly effective in meeting agreed care expectations and goals that are regularly reviewed.

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

The children and young people are safe. The staff ratios are high, which ensure that children and young people are supervised at all times. The knowledge attained during meticulous planning for short breaks with a number of professionals and other agencies, and essentially relationships with parents and families, supports staff to understand risks associated with individual children and young people. Any changes to behaviours or potential risks are known and staff are able to assess and put appropriate measures in place to minimise these risks. This means that children and young people are effectively safeguarded from harm.

Children and young people do not go missing and are not at risk from exploitation or bullying. Physical intervention has not been required since the last inspection and sanctions are not used. The staff team is entirely focused on the needs of each child and young person from the moment that they are dropped off to the moment they leave. A member of staff said, 'When we are on the bus we sit together, when we eat we eat together, and when in the community staff are always with them. Every child and young person has a risk assessment in place with reference to "stranger danger" and we talk to each one about how they can keep themselves safe.' This ensures that children and young people are kept safe and, where able, educated about relevant dangers.

The staff team receives the training and support required to fully understand safeguarding children and young people who have a learning disability. The staff have already received specialist training associated with the needs of children and young people with more profound physical disabilities. A social worker said, 'They are currently working on providing short breaks for more physically impaired children. They have taken this head on and have looked at this thoroughly. They are taking this on board positively to develop the service, which is fantastic.'

Since the last inspection, there was a shortfall in practice that resulted in a medication error. The registered manager and the local authority responded comprehensively and systematically ensuring that there was a full investigation, which concluded that this was based on human error. Actions that were taken involved a thorough review of practice and staff have undertaken a further qualification in the administering of medication. The response has been effective in reinforcing the system that was already in place to safeguard children and young people. This had not unduly impacted on the child concerned, as the protocols in place ensured that the child suffered no ill effects. The administration and recording of medication was observed by the inspector and was seen to be efficient. Records pertaining to observations carried out by the independent visitor indicated that staff were 'capable and confident' during the administration process.

The home is well maintained and free of any notable hazards. Fire drills are practised and staff are highly competent in their understanding of safe care in this respect. An evacuation 'sledge' had arrived just prior to inspection, following consultation with a parent of a child. It was agreed that this was the right piece of equipment that would be less stressful for the child if it was ever required. Guidance and support was also provided through health and safety specialists. This not only protects children and young people, but also minimises the emotional impact and maintains their well-being.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager is suitably qualified and has significant experience. She is inspirational and an excellent role model to a staff team that is attentive in its provision of care. The registered manager is confident in her knowledge about the children and young people who access short breaks and is enthusiastic in terms of developing the service in order to meet their needs and that of their families.

The registered manager talked about the development of 'disorder leaflets' at the last inspection in conjunction with children and young people. These have now been implemented and are available on children and young people's files and throughout the service. These guides explain a range of health complexities and diagnoses in a child-friendly format and terminology. This supports and enables any child or young person to develop an understanding of their own condition, empowering them to be involved in their care.

The staff receive regular in-depth supervision, training and support. The supervision of staff would benefit from safeguarding being a 'stand-alone' agenda item. This would enable the staff and management to embrace safeguarding at the centre of their practice.

The manager was instrumental in the development of a training programme for a 'supported support worker'. This has enabled this person with additional needs to progress and learn within a supported environment and successfully gain experience through a paid role. The supervision and support provided by staff has promoted equality for this young person. This helps develop aspirations in other young people who attend for short breaks, in their quest for employment later in life.

The manager and her team consistently inspire a culture of working together. Inter-agency working is maintained to a high level. Parents and families are routinely included in decision-making processes in the care of their children and young people and the home. These measures ensure that a high quality of care is effective.

The manager's internal monitoring systems are robust and provide a level of analysis and evaluation of the care that children and young people receive. The registered manager has fully identified through consultation with parents/families/professionals/staff and children and young people areas for development and is able to highlight areas of strengths. The independent visitor positively challenges the home through relevant questions concerning practice. The registered manager welcomes these challenges and responds accordingly to improve outcomes for children and young people.

The staff team is dynamic in its approach to providing a stimulating environment for each child and young person. Staff are confident in their practice and offer support to one another in an environment that is managed by a self-motivated professional that strives for better outcomes for children and young people who access short breaks. A member of staff said, 'I could not speak highly enough of my manager. I really feel supported, I receive regular supervision. We are a small team, but a very supportive team.'

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: SC059203

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 2EF

Responsible individual: John Young

Registered manager: Susan Ghulam

Inspector

Michael Dack, 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: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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