

SC032838

Registered provider: Appletree Treatment Centre Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is owned by a private company. It is registered to care for up to eight boys, aged between six and 12 years, who have suffered early childhood trauma and are likely to experience emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The manager, who is highly qualified and experienced, has been registered with Ofsted since April 2014.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 3 to 4 August 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: 12 February 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
12/02/2020	Full	Outstanding
30/05/2018	Full	Outstanding
27/06/2017	Full	Outstanding
09/03/2017	Interim	Declined in effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children thrive at this home. Children grow in confidence and self-esteem and enjoy their time at the home. The considerable progress they make from their starting points is outstanding.

The home is completely child-friendly and welcoming. Visitors are in no doubt that children live here and enjoy being outdoors as well as in the home. The garden symbolises how children can be children in this home. For example, colourful children's garden ornaments fill the front garden and there is also a toadstool seating area where children enjoy early evening storytelling with staff, while safely toasting marshmallows in the firepit.

Children share meaningful and trusting relationships with all staff and enjoy spending time with them. Children have excellent attachments with staff. Children enjoy the care and affection shown to them by staff and instinctively seek out hugs and cuddles from staff. One professional commented, 'Their cook is amazing and there is always a warm, nurturing feeling in the home. It doesn't feel like a children's home; it's just like a family home.'

Children regard each other as friends; they get along well together and show care and concern for each other. Individually, they are very proud of their home. Together, all children have achieved a real sense of belonging at this home.

Great care is taken to ensure that children are well matched in this home and that their personalities and needs are compatible. Care planning is highly personalised and effective in meeting children's individual and often complex needs.

Children enjoy a healthy lifestyle. Staff encourage children to keep active, to learn and understand how to manage their self-care and eat healthily. Children enjoy plenty of healthy and nutritious meals provided by the home's cook, who is an integral part of the care team. Children say that they love her cooking.

Children's emotional health and well-being are prioritised as all children have suffered some early childhood trauma. Staff work closely with a local group of play and music therapists, who offer them advice and guidance, and work directly with the children to make sense of their past experiences. Staff encouragement and support ensure that children engage well with their therapy and value the help and support of therapy. An IRO Independent reviewing officer commented, 'He's a totally different little boy from when he arrived at the home. He has really grown in confidence. He has made good educational achievements. His emotional well-being is the priority and is well managed.'

The supportive culture at the home encourages children to use their imaginations and enjoy fantasy and make believe. Children enjoy lots of play and activities. Some play with trains and construction games, while others enjoy biking and exploring.

The home's location provides children with lots of opportunities to try new activities and new adventures. For example, some children have recently experienced fun and shown skill in paddle boarding, so the home has made sure children have their own boards to use when going out with staff.

Children's educational achievements are excellent. For example, one child has made up 21 months of lost education in 10 months. Children attend the organisation's independent school attached to the home and really enjoy going to school. Staff are fully involved in supporting their educational achievements. Staff regularly spend time with children reading and keeping their minds stimulated with discussions about issues such as their local environment, home, and world events. One parent said, 'His education has improved. He didn't want to learn, and now he is reading all the time; he has come on leaps and bounds.'

During the COVID-19 pandemic, children were helped to keep in touch with family members and those who are important to them by using video technology and making frequent telephone calls. When restrictions eased, a huge canopy was erected in the garden to ensure that there was a suitable outside space for visitors to spend time with children, safe from bad weather.

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

Children say they feel safe and know that staff will keep them safe. Staff are knowledgeable, experienced, and well trained in caring for young children who have experienced childhood trauma. Staff place importance on understanding each child's past experiences and not to simply focus on their presenting behaviours.

Risk assessments are thorough in capturing information about children's individual vulnerabilities and how their safety can be maintained. Children are closely supervised by staff and taught to understand about risky situations, which also helps to minimise those occasions when they may be vulnerable to risk. For example, children are encouraged to learn about road safety but also take an adult's hand when walking near busy roads.

Staff dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic sensitively to ensure that, while educating them about the virus and how to stay safe, they did not raise their anxieties or make them scared. Staff used child-friendly literature to help them understand their current situation and how they could help the government's campaign to prevent the spread of the virus.

Staff understand how well children benefit from structure and routines. During periods of lockdown, staff were creative to ensure children were kept busy when their usual activities had to be suspended. Together, children and staff recreated and

filmed their own popular television talent shows. Children had great fun in taking part in these shows and now enjoy being able to replay the videos of these enjoyable times.

Children were assisted by staff to safely incubate and care for some chicks that successfully hatched. This helped children to develop their own nurturing skills and enjoy the responsibility of having pets. Some chickens have been kept and two ducks have also been acquired to join them. These pets provide a positive sensory experience for many of the children and have had a very calming influence on some.

Children's positive behaviour is clearly a reflection of the standard of care, support and compassion they receive from staff. Children understand the house rules and boundaries and seldom challenge these. When they do, staff take time to explain and remind them of how certain behaviour may affect others. This restorative approach has proved more effective and encourages children to consider not only their feeling but those of others. Staff perceive sanctions to be punitive and therefore do not use them.

Physical intervention is only used as a last resort and therefore the number of occasions it is used is low. Its use is also closely monitored to ensure that it is safely practised when used and to ensure that numbers continue to reduce in frequency over time. Staff are skilled in de-escalation techniques and using language that is therapeutically soothing. Children respond well to this approach and feel safer not being held. A social worker commented, 'Staff know him inside out. They know the triggers and can help him regulate his emotions. He has had very few physical interventions in this home.'

Recruitment practice is robust and ensures that all staff are appropriately checked and vetted before coming to work in the home. This helps to ensure that children are not exposed to adults that may harm them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The home is led and managed by a passionate and dedicated manager who holds high aspirations for all the children in her care. She is well qualified and skilled in selecting children whose needs can be met by staff but also those who will match best with the other boys in the home. Because of these factors, children flourish at this home and enjoy a settled childhood that closely resembles family life.

The registered manager is eager not to become complacent with the standard of care and support provided. She consistently challenges her staff team to look for new creative and innovative ways to give children what they deserve. She is a strong advocate for what the children need and how to enrich their lives. In her own words: 'We are about making memories and having fun, fun, fun.'

Staff enjoy working at this home. They say they feel well supported and valued by their manager, the children and senior management. Staff and managers made good use of available technology to ensure that staff supervision and staff meetings were

maintained throughout the pandemic. Delivery of staff training was more difficult, given the government restriction in place. However, staff kept up to date with online training and have returned to more face-to-face training since the restrictions have been relaxed.

Staff morale is high, and staff are completely invested in the organisation's therapeutic approach to care and support and how to achieve the aims that will ensure that children build resilience, enjoy learning, and feel valued and loved. Although professional, staff take great pride in children's progress and achievements and treat children with positive unconditional regard. One staff member said, 'It's amazing to work here. Seeing the children blossoming and growing in confidence is very rewarding.'

Considerable investment has been put into the home. Since the last inspection, the home's kitchen and dining room have been extended and fully refurbished. Bi-folding patio doors from the living room onto a new decked area have improved the living space for both children and staff.

The manager has kept up to date with quality-of-care reviews and has ensured that these reports have been shared with Ofsted on a six-monthly basis. Internal monitoring is well maintained and tracks the home's continued progress. The home's current external monitoring arrangement has been identified as a potential weakness so, accordingly, the manager is actively looking at an alternative arrangement that will provide her with more challenge and more rigorous scrutiny.

Managers and staff work together with many professionals including local therapists, health professionals, the local authority and placing authorities. They are held in high regard and speak positively about the home, knowing the successes they have had previously. One social worker commented, 'I'm loving the dedication shown to him. It's unconditional and staff have claimed him. [Name of child] has told me about the home. He tells me everybody is brilliant, and that he likes the other boys.'

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: SC032838

Provision sub-type: Residential special school

Registered provider: Appletree Treatment Centre Limited

Registered provider address: Meathop Park, Meathop, Grange-over-Sands,
Cumbria LA11 6RF

Responsible individual: Rowan Knapton

Registered manager: Amanda Fishwick

Inspector

Gillian Walters, Social Care Inspector

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