

SC030713

Registered provider: Wokingham Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is run by a local authority and provides short breaks for children. The home is registered to provide care for up to five children with learning and physical disabilities.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since June 2023.

Inspection dates: 9 and 10 August 2023

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 good

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

Date of last inspection: 14 March 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/03/2023	Full	Good
30/06/2021	Full	Outstanding
10/12/2019	Full	Outstanding
18/03/2019	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The home currently provides short breaks to 22 children. A maximum of five children can access overnight short breaks at any one time. During this inspection, there were seven children accessing the service across the two days. The children attend the home for day visits or overnight stays, or a mixture of the two.

Children are cared for by staff who they share positive relationships with. The staff actively seek to ensure that children's time is spent engaged in enjoyable activities or being introduced to new experiences. The varied opportunities provided to the children include creative play in the art space, spending time in the sensory room, being out in the garden or enjoying day trips out in the community. Consequently, children have positive experiences that also support their development.

The detailed children's plans provide staff with clear guidance on how best to meet children's complex needs. Staff know the children well. They quickly recognise how the children are feeling, through changes in their facial expressions and body language, and they respond appropriately. Staff regularly encourage the children to use their communication aids to express themselves. This ensures that children feel listened to and valued.

Staff are aspirational for the children, yet mindful of their vulnerabilities. Consequently, the staff set realistic targets for the children in line with their individual capabilities. Staff recognise the importance of children being supported to thrive academically. They work closely with educational professionals. Therefore, children are well supported to progress in their learning and development.

Professionals value the care and support staff provide to the children. They recognise the individual progress children have achieved as a result of the support provided by the staff. One social care professional reported that a child had made great progress with their verbal communication since accessing the short-breaks service.

Children's time is spent in a spacious home which is equipped with specialist equipment that meets the children's needs. Some bedrooms were personalised with children's choice of bedding and other personal items, which conveyed a sense of belonging. However, the carpet in some areas of the home was worn and detracted from the homely feel.

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

Children are well supported during their stay in the home. The staff ensure that children have access to their different communication aids. These are used regularly to explore the children's wishes and feelings, and to also offer them choices. The staff also pay keen attention to the children's facial expressions and body language.

Staff quickly recognise signs of the children becoming unsettled and offer support. This allows children to feel a sense of security and well-being.

Staff have great insight into the children's complex needs, gained in part from relevant training. In addition, staff practice has been enhanced by effective partnership working with external professionals. The staff have attended the children's schools and implemented strategies that have proved successful with supporting the children. School staff have also visited the home and provided guidance to staff on using a child's communication aid. This has led to an individualised, consistent approach to the care given to children across school and the short-breaks service.

Staff are attentive, caring and patient in their approach when supporting the children. When incidents occur, they use de-escalation techniques to support children and to offer reassurance. Staff physically intervene only when necessary to ensure the safety of children and others. However, reports of these physical interventions do not consistently indicate why it was not appropriate for debriefs to take place with some children following incidents.

Staff ensure that the children's health needs are met. The effective processes in place ensure the safe management of the children's medication. As a result, medication errors rarely occur. Video and audio monitoring systems are used in line with children's support plans. Sometimes, this relates to the management of complex health needs and, on other occasions, to ensure the safety of children at risk of self-harming. However, the children's plans do not indicate that the use of the monitoring systems is subject to review. Therefore, systems in place do not take account of the children's needs potentially changing.

Children are cared for by a committed staff team, supplemented by an agency staff member. While leaders and managers have ensured that pre-employment suitability checks are in place, they do not currently have oversight of checks carried out for agency staff. Consequently, leaders and managers do not have access to all relevant information to inform decision-making about agency staff's suitability to work with children.

Social care professionals are confident that staff take appropriate actions to support children, including when managing behaviours that challenge. A parent also reported that they have no worries while their child is in the home.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers strive to ensure that the children's needs remain at the forefront for staff. They have instigated care review meetings focused solely on the children's needs. This allows staff to fully understand any changing care needs and adapt their approach accordingly.

Leaders and managers understand and see first-hand the progress children achieve. This is gained from discussions with staff and working alongside them. There is

close oversight of staff practice, as well as the opportunity for leaders and managers to model good practice to staff.

Staff feel well supported and valued by their managers. They receive regular supervision sessions, there is reflective practice-based discussion in team meetings and they are provided with good development opportunities. For example, one staff's qualification as a mental health first aider was funded. This demonstrates leaders and managers' commitment to investing in and up-skilling their staff team.

Leaders and managers are aware of the home's strengths and areas for development. Continuous development is a feature in the home, with a key area of focus being on developing a strong senior team. The home is currently experiencing staffing difficulties. However, the committed staff team has worked together to ensure that the children have not experienced any disruption to the services they receive.

Leaders and managers ensure that staff have access to training programmes specific to the children's needs. While staff training was up to date, this was not reflected in the staff training log. This could potentially undermine the managers' oversight of staff training needs and lead to training not being completed when due.

Leaders and managers have fostered effective partnership working with external professionals, which staff have successfully maintained. Social care professionals spoke positively about being kept well informed by staff in the home.

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

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.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the recruitment of staff safeguards children and minimises potential risks to them. This includes ensuring that they have oversight of employment checks carried out by agencies for agency staff. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)
- The registered person should ensure that a child who is physically restrained by staff is given the opportunity to express their feelings about the experience of the restraint as soon as is practicable, ideally within 24 hours of the incident. When debriefs have not taken place, the reason for this is to be clearly recorded. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 50, paragraph 9.60)
- The registered person should ensure that limits on privacy, including the use of monitoring systems, are only put in place to safeguard each child in the home. All decisions should be informed by a rigorous assessment of that individual child's needs, be properly recorded, and be kept under regular review. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.10)
- The registered person should ensure that the children's home provides a nurturing and supportive environment that meets the needs of the children. The home should be a homely, domestic environment. To help to maintain the homely feel, redecorating and maintenance should be carried out in the home when needed. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)

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: SC030713

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Wokingham Borough Council

Registered provider address: Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End,
Wokingham RG40 1BN

Responsible individual: Kelli Scott

Registered manager: Michelle Humphries

Inspector

Sasha Reid, Social Care Inspector

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