

1254835

Registered provider: Together for Children Sunderland

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is operated by a local authority. It provides care for up to 6 children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

At the time of the inspection, 6 children were living at the home. The inspectors spoke with all the children during the inspection.

The manager registered with Ofsted in March 2017.

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 March 2026

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	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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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: 29 May 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
29/05/2024	Full	Good
23/05/2023	Full	Good
03/10/2022	Full	Good
11/01/2022	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are thriving in this home. They make excellent progress because of the close, positive relationships that they have with staff. Children talk about staff fondly and the home is filled with laughter. Children joke about their favourite members of staff and little quirks that the staff have which mean something to the children. Children play out with their friends that come knocking at the door for them. There is a homely atmosphere in the home.

Staff listen to children and involve them in all aspects of the home. This includes their day to day lives such as plans for mealtimes and activities but also the plans for their care. Staff have listened and advocated for a child's wish for alternative living arrangements. Their openness and transparency have provided external agencies with an understanding of the child and resulted in the child moving to a home that they felt more comfortable in. A review of the child's care was completed by the local authority which recognised the exceptional understanding staff had of the child and the positive outcome the child experienced due to this support.

Staff know children's health needs. They help children to understand their own health and comfort them when they find these experiences difficult. One child has a medical condition and staff have devised comforting rituals to help manage important medical procedures. The consistency that staff have provided has resulted in the child accessing technology to manage their condition. One professional shared that the support staff have provided has resulted in them having a better quality of life.

One child has made significant progress with their substance misuse. They previously misused drugs daily and struggled with vaping. They have not taken any drugs in several months and have reduced their vaping. They are working on stopping vaping altogether and are now confident this is something that they will achieve. The child said that if it was not for the home and the support staff have provided, they believe they would now be taking more substances.

There is a focus on supporting children to attend education that is meaningful for them. Children who are not in school are supported to access alternative forms of education. One child has secured a volunteering role in a local charity shop, having excellent attendance and enjoying their responsibilities. Another child who previously did not attend school has now secured 5 GCSE's and is attending college. They are also searching for part time jobs relating to their college course. Staff have supported another child with their understanding of road safety. Their gradual approach to this has resulted in the child now walking part of the way to school independently, like that of other children their age.

The registered manager has completed essential, detailed life story work with a child, supporting their sense of identity. The child has led the process ensuring that their

experiences are shared with them in a way that is meaningful to them. The registered manager has provided a safe space for the child to explore their own personal memories and emotions. While also providing new information to them about important people that have been in their life and aspects of daily life such as walks to school and friendships. This is presented in a way that is meaningful for the child and provides a sense of autonomy over their life experiences. One professional said the work completed is beyond their expectations.

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

Staff help children understand their own risks and learn how to keep themselves safe. They complete individual work with children as well as group work, encouraging discussions and peer support. Staff demonstrate professional curiosity, with consistent efforts to gather additional information to fully understand children's risks and devise strategies to keep them safe.

Risk assessments are individualised and give direction to staff on how to help children at risk. These are reviewed regularly and updated when appropriate. However, they are lengthy meaning that there can be detail lost in the information.

Complaints are taken seriously. These are investigated by appropriate leaders and managers, with learning identified and implemented to develop staff practice. People who complain are made aware of the outcomes without compromising the privacy of children.

External meetings are utilised to share concerns and risks where needed. Extensive work has been completed regarding one child and their risks of exploitation. This included mapping of associates and collaborative working with a wide range of professionals and external agencies. Information shared following a meeting helped to keep the child safe.

When incidents occur, staff speak with children to reflect on these. Children share their views and staff adapt their practice to mitigate the risk of further incidents. One child has shared what they would like staff to do if they become upset to reduce the risk of them being held, also promoting trust.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager has high aspirations for children. They have developed a model of care that is specific to the home. The management team have a clear understanding of the experiences that have led to the children making progress. The registered manager ensures that staff understand this model of care through regular reflection and implementing identified improvements, meaning support to children is intentional and understood. This model of care has been recognised at the social worker of the year awards.

The registered manager has high aspirations for the children. They are child-focused, providing challenge and scrutiny to external services to securing positive outcomes for

children. One professional said that they advocate for children to ensure that other professionals are doing their best for children.

Staff feel supported by managers, both professionally and personally. They have opportunities to develop their practice and learning through specialised training, often relating to their own interests. Staff who have had absences due to ill health commented that the support they have received from managers is more than they have ever previously experienced. The support managers provide has created a close staff team who are in tune with each other's working, resulting in consistency to children.

There are areas in the home that need attention to keep the environment in line with the homely atmosphere felt when in the home. Leaders and managers have acknowledged the need for some renovation work and have plans in place that they are currently escalating. Children's bedrooms reflect their personalities and children enjoy these spaces. However, there is a lack of attention to detail in some areas of the home such as incomplete decor and untidy wiring. There is an acceptance of this from all those working in the home.

Leaders and managers oversight of the home is not fully effective. While staff are supported to develop in their roles, the registered manager does not have full oversight over the progress of these roles. Although medication practice and medical procedures are completed appropriately, one aspect of a routine medical procedure had not been recorded, affecting the oversight of appropriate practice.

Training around children's current risks have not been fully identified and kept up to date. Concerns were identified regarding trafficking for one child. Specialist training regarding this risk has not been explored and refreshed to enhance staff's knowledge and understanding of the risk while also developing their practice.

Fire doors are routinely propped open with doorstops, which means in the event of a fire, these doors will be unable to close, which is a hazard. While the registered manager has identified this and sought advice from relevant services, they have not provided staff with direction to manage these interventions in the event of an emergency.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the home is a nurturing and supportive environment that meets the needs of their children. The environment should be homely and domestic. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- The registered person should ensure that medicines are administered in line with a medically approved protocol. Records must be kept of the administration of all medication. In particular, ensure that all steps of medical procedures are recorded when administered. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 35, paragraph 7.15)
- The registered person should ensure that staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs and should understand the key role they play in the training and development of staff in the home. In particular, they should provide staff with training that supports their understanding of the needs of their children. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 53, paragraph 10.11)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff consistently follow the home's policies and procedures for the benefit of the children in the home's care. Everyone working at the home must understand their roles and responsibilities. In particular, the registered person should ensure the fire risk assessment provides clear guidance to staff to mitigate any risk identified in relation to fire safety. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 54, paragraph 10.20)

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: 1254835

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Sunderland City Council

Registered provider address: City Hall, Plater Way, Sunderland SR1 3AA

Responsible individual: Sharon Willis

Registered manager: Mark Christie

Inspector

Sarah McGow, Social Care Inspector (Lead)

Gary Smithson, Social Care Inspector

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