

2615326

Registered provider: Vita Nova NE Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is owned and managed by a private provider. It provides care for up to 3 children who may experience social and emotional difficulties and/or learning disabilities.

At the time of the inspection, 3 children were living in the home. All 3 children were spoken with during the inspection.

The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2022.

Inspection dates: 6 and 7 January 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: 25 February 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
25/02/2025	Full	Outstanding
06/12/2023	Full	Good
15/06/2022	Full	Good
05/10/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

There is significant evidence of change and improvement in the progress and experiences of the children living in the home. This is because they are receiving excellent care and support from staff who know them well. One child, who previously struggled emotionally and displayed significant behavioural challenges, is now much more settled. As a result, incidents have reduced significantly over the last 4 months. One child who previously struggled to go out has been on a foreign holiday with staff and now has a thirst for travel.

Children enjoy trusted and secure relationships with staff who are committed and tenacious in their support of them. Staff advocate on behalf of the children. On one occasion, staff advocated for meetings to discuss one child's education arrangements to be brought forward, and progress is now being made. For another child who does not agree with the local authority's plan for them, staff arranged for the child to have an advocate to support them at meetings to discuss independence planning and preparation.

The home has an array of animals, which the children help to look after. This helps children to develop a sense of responsibility, while also having fun. Some children are undertaking animal care courses to supplement their knowledge. For those children who have moved on from the home to independent living but are unable to take their pets with them, staff continue to care for these animals. This demonstrates an ongoing commitment to these children.

The home is warm and welcoming and furnished to a high standard. The children's presence is visible throughout the home in photographs, collages and other visual displays. Outside, there is ample space for children to play and explore. Children's bedrooms are individualised to reflect their likes and interests. As the children get older and their preferences change, their bedrooms are redecorated to reflect this. Children feel valued and recognised as individuals within their home.

The children engage in a wide range of home-based and community activities. They go on days out, holidays and activities in the UK and abroad. This broadens and enriches the children's life experiences. These activities are then captured in memory books, which creatively document each child's journey since moving into the home. When the children move on from the home, they take these with them.

Children are making excellent educational progress relative to their age and plans. Where some children have previously had barriers to attendance, they are now attending their education placement. Some older children have achieved qualifications that have enabled them to go to further education, with aspirations to go to university. An education professional spoke positively about one child's successful move from primary to secondary school, and the staff's pivotal role in supporting this.

Staff support the children to spend time with the people who are important to them. Staff are key in facilitating these plans, transporting children and providing supervision and support as required. Children enjoy sleepovers at their friends' homes and invite their friends to spend time with them at the home. Staff stay in touch with children when they move on from the home and continue to support them in meetings as well as medical appointments. At Christmas, staff provided these young people with a hamper and presents. Staff are committed to being a lifelong presence in the lives of all children who have been in their care.

The home integrates well within the local community. Staff organise regular celebrations and fundraising events for the whole community. Children donate food hampers to elderly neighbours and have received biscuits in return. This encourages children to understand the importance of social responsibility as well as feeling part of the local community.

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

Children say that they feel safe living in the home. Children feel confident to talk to staff if they have any worries or concerns, confident in the knowledge that staff will help them.

Safer recruitment processes are in place. This helps to ensure that only those people who are safe to care for children do so.

Since the last inspection, there have been no physical interventions, no missing-from-home incidents and only one serious incident. Staff understand children's risks and vulnerabilities and respond appropriately and promptly when needed. Staff undertake work with children to help them to reflect and learn, and this contributes to children's safety.

Children's records, including risk assessments and support plans, are thorough. Risk assessments identify all known issues and are easy for staff to understand and follow. Measures to reduce risks are recorded clearly and understood by staff. Children's records are routinely reviewed.

Consequences are rarely used in the home. However, the person who gives the consequence is the same person who then completes both the record and the management evaluation. This means that there is a lack of independent management oversight as to whether the consequence was proportionate and necessary.

When room searches take place, children are not informed prior to the measure taking place, nor is consent gained before staff go into the children's private space. This is a missed opportunity to engage with children about the rationale for needing to do the room search and working with the child to minimise any identified risks.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The home has a permanent registered manager who is suitably experienced and qualified. An experienced deputy manager supports him. The home is suitably staffed by qualified individuals from a range of backgrounds.

Leaders and managers are very committed to their roles. They are ambitious for the children and influential in their lives. They have high expectations of themselves and their staff. They lead by example and reflect on practice, allowing for continual professional development.

Leaders and managers invest strongly in staff's training and development needs. They also support their staff's emotional wellbeing. There is a clear induction plan in place for all new staff that helps them to settle in and learn about their role.

Staff say that they enjoy working in the home and feel supported by managers. There are monthly staff awards and regular team events held. These are to recognise good practice and promote staff morale.

Staff seek the views of children through a range of forums, including key-work sessions, children's meetings and a suggestion box. However, the same commitment to seeking feedback is not always shown to parents or professionals. Some parents said that they are not routinely updated by staff about what is happening for their child. One parent said that if they did not ring the home, they would not find out anything about their child.

The registered manager undertakes a review of the quality of care every 6 months. The registered manager makes recommendations to help continually improve the quality of care. However, it is not clear how these are acted on and what impact this has for children.

While the registered manager has many monthly management auditing systems in place, none of these have identified the shortfalls raised in the inspection. This raises questions about the effectiveness of these processes.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that they oversee the welfare of the children in their care through engagement and seeking regular feedback from each child's family/carers where appropriate. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 54, paragraph 10.23)
- The registered person should ensure that they have effective internal monitoring and auditing systems in place and make best use of this information to ensure that there is continuous improvement. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 55, paragraph 10.24)
- The registered person should ensure that all incidents of control and discipline, including the use of consequences, are subject to systems of regular scrutiny by a manager not involved in the consequence to ensure that their use is fair and proportionate. The recording of all consequences should meet regulation 35. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 46, paragraph 9.36)
- The registered person should ensure that when completing the quality of care report and recommendations are made to help continually improve the quality of care, it is clear how these are acted on and what impact this has for children. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 65, paragraph 15.4)
- The registered person should ensure that a child's bedroom is only searched if the child has been informed or asked for their permission. Immediate searching may be necessary where there are reasonable grounds for believing that there is a risk to the child's or another person's safety or wellbeing. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 16, paragraph 3.20)

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: 2615326

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Vita Nova NE Ltd

Registered provider address: Vita Nova N E Ltd, 58 Lanchester Road, Maiden Law, Lanchester, Durham DH7 0QS

Responsible individual: Kathryn Cowen

Registered manager: Lee Heron

Inspectors

Paula Shepherd, Social Care Inspector (lead)
Jon Collins, Social Care Inspector

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