

2684203

Registered provider: Durham County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

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

The manager registered with Ofsted in August 2023.

Since the last inspection, one child has moved out of the home. There was one child living at the home at the time of this inspection. The inspector observed this child during the inspection.

Inspection dates: 31 January and 1 February 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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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 effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 13 February 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
13/02/2023	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children make good progress because of the supportive relationships that they have with the staff. One professional said that the child currently living in the home has 'made unbelievable progress in recent months'.

The child who has moved out of the home was well supported by the manager and staff. At the time of moving out, the staff supported them to attend college. The staff kept in contact with the child after they moved out. This helped to provide the child with a wider support network.

The manager is diligent when considering if the staff team can care for a child. Prior to the current child moving in, the manager consulted with the child's previous carers and attended statutory meetings. This provided her with sufficient information to make an informed decision.

The child who lives in the home is making significant progress with their education. They attend school daily and are meeting expectations. The manager and staff liaise well with school professionals to help to provide consistent approaches across the settings.

The staff forge good relationships with family members. This helps staff obtain the necessary information to complete life-story work with the child. This helps the child to have an improved understanding of their identity. It also supports a better relationship between the child and family members.

The child is supported by staff to contribute to the local neighbourhood. The child has donated a food parcel to the local church. Furthermore, because of the manager's intervention, the child now participates in healthy activities with the staff at a local leisure centre. This helps towards the child's sense of belonging to a community.

The home is well decorated and furnished. There are photos of the child participating in activities with the staff throughout the home. This helps to give it a homely feel. The choice of food available for the child was microwavable burgers. This hinders the staff from supporting the child to eat a healthy and balanced diet. The fridge contents were replaced with healthier options once the manager was made aware of the concern.

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

The manager is a strong advocate for children. The manager successfully escalated the need for one child to receive expert assessments. This resulted in diagnoses that helped the manager, staff and other professionals to better understand the child's behaviour, to better meet their needs and improve their safety.

Further examples of the manager advocating for children include the instruction of a solicitor. This ensures that the child had consistency of legal representation. This, alongside the submission of the expert assessments, contributed towards the child not being criminalised. This helps the child to understand that staff care for them and gives the child improved life opportunities.

Staff only physically intervene when necessary. This, together with bedroom searches, are proportionate to the situation and help to keep the child and others safe.

Complaints are taken seriously. When a child makes a complaint, the manager takes steps to address the complaint quickly and provides feedback to the child. This helps the child to feel supported and valued.

The staff team's approach to routines, boundaries and behaviour management techniques has not always been consistent. Some staff have not followed the child's plan and have needed police support to manage the child's behaviours due to their own lack of confidence. On one occasion, this resulted in the child being held in custody. Additionally, the high turnover of staff has resulted in inconsistent care for the child.

The manager has worked hard to recruit skilled and experienced staff who meet the child's needs well. There has been a stable staff team for the past four months. This has coincided with a reduction in the number of incidents and police call outs to the home.

Risk assessments are up to date and reflect clear strategies to help the staff to support the child. There are child-friendly versions that the child has contributed to. This helps the child to have an input into how staff support them when they are upset.

However, the manager and staff are not consistent in reviewing the risks as outlined in the behaviour management plans, for example in respect of the child's request for reduced staffing levels, or to no longer have plastic cutlery. When these requests were identified, they were agreed by the manager, which demonstrates that behaviour management strategies are not kept under regular review. This does not support the child in understanding the progress they have made.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is committed to supporting children. Staff say that she is 'inspirational', 'passionate' and that they feel incredibly well supported.

The manager has developed positive relationships with neighbours. Those who had previously complained about the children living in the home, now comment about the improvements made.

The manager is selective in her recruitment of staff. She follows safer recruitment procedures and employs individuals who share her vision for the home. She employs those who can embrace the approach required to help to keep children safe, while building positive relationships with them. This has resulted in a new staff team that is cohesive, committed and stable.

The manager nurtures the staff's individual skills and supports them well to develop professionally. When there are concerns about a staff member's practice, she adopts a reflective approach to help staff to improve their practice. Equally, when there are significant concerns about their conduct, she follows the provider's investigation and disciplinary procedure appropriately. This helps to keep children safe.

The manager arranges training for the staff to meet the changing needs of the child. This has helped improve the staff's responses, helped to build positive relationships, and has improved the child's safety. Team meetings are regular and are also used as a forum to provide opportunities for developing practice. When staff have found their work challenging, the provider's senior leaders and responsible individual have attended these meetings to help to support the staff.

Supervision sessions are reflective. However, although 'job chats' have been held consistently with staff to support them in their role, reflective supervision sessions have not been held in line with the provider's policy. This prevents staff from reviewing their practice and prevents them from being afforded the opportunity to consider what could have been done differently or better.

The accuracy of staff's recording and management oversight of documents is inconsistent. Records of physical interventions, rooms searches, consequences and care plans do not all contain full information, particularly dates of completion or review. Some documents evidence that management oversight is significantly delayed. These shortfalls prevent the manager from being assured in a timely manner that documents are accurate, and that staff have taken the necessary steps to support and help the child safely.

The children's guide is helpful to children. It clearly sets out the expectations and rules of the home. However, it states that children should only smoke in the designated area. This contradicts the manager and staff's ethos of a healthy lifestyle and encourages children to break the law. Furthermore, the statement of purpose does not contain all the required information. This may prevent an individual from accessing the home's complaints procedure, safeguarding policy, and behaviour management policy.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person 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 must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The registered person must ensure that— within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a child in the home, a record is made which includes— details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of the measure; the date, time and location of the use of the measure; a description of the measure and its duration; details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure; the name of the person who used the measure ("the user"), and of any other person present when the measure was used; the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and within 48 hours of the use of the measure, the registered person, or a person who is authorised by the registered person to do so ("the authorised person")— has spoken to the user about the measure; and has signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35 (3)(a)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(b)(i)(ii)(c))	15 March 2024
The registered person must compile in relation to the children's home a statement ("the statement of purpose") which covers the matters listed in Schedule 1.	15 March 2024

(Regulation 16 (1)).

In particular, the registered person must ensure that the statement of purpose contains details of who to contact if a person has a complaint about the home and how that person can access the home's complaints policy.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure staff continually and actively assess the risk to each child and the arrangements in place to protect them. In particular, the registered person should be proactive in reviewing risks and responding to reduced risks. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 42, paragraph 9.5)
- The registered person should ensure staff consistently follow the home's policies and procedures for the benefit of the children. Each home must have clear arrangements in place to maintain effective management when the manager is absent, off duty or on leave. In particular, staff should consistently follow a child's behaviour management plan, and there should be a clear process in place for management oversight of documents when the registered manager is on leave. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.20)
- The registered person should respond to children's views about changes to staff and be aware of the potential impact this may have for the child's stability and emotional well-being. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.12)
- The registered person should ensure that systems are in place so that all staff, including the manager, receive regular supervision so that they can reflect on their practice and the needs of the children assigned to their care. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2)

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: 2684203

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Durham County Council

Registered provider address: County Hall, Durham City, Durham DH1 5UJ

Responsible individual: Paul Rudd

Registered manager: Nicole Spoons

Inspector

Julia Hagan, Social Care Inspector

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