

# 2719516

Registered provider: Soteria Children's Services Group Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this children's home

This home is privately owned. It is registered to provide care for up to five children with learning disabilities.

The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2025.

At the time of the inspection, three children were living in the home. All children were spoken to during the inspection.

### Inspection dates: 7 and 8 October 2025

|                                                                                           |             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account | <b>good</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|

|                                                             |      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 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:** 28 January 2025

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Recent inspection history

| Inspection date | Inspection type | Inspection judgement |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 28/01/2025      | Full            | Outstanding          |
| 24/10/2023      | Full            | Outstanding          |

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Since the last inspection, one child has moved into the home, and there are currently three children living at the home. Leaders and managers make certain that, when children move into the home, moves are well planned and ensure that they are smooth and effective. One child is on a journey to eventually move from this home to an adult provision. The manager and staff team are strong advocates to ensure this move is to the right provision and that the child's progress is sustained.

Children thrive because of the secure, trusting relationships they have with staff who know them well. These consistent and nurturing connections form the foundation for emotional well-being and healthy development. Through responsive care and strong attachments, children gain confidence and resilience, supported by the staff's thoughtful and compassionate approach.

Staff understand and respond to each child's way of communicating. This is clearly recorded in the children's care plan. The staff know how children express their wishes and feelings. There are creative versions of the children's guide to the home. This includes a lovely, welcoming video guide of the home with staff commentary.

Staff have a good understanding of children's health and well-being needs. They support children to attend their routine appointments and are proactive in meeting their wider health needs. For example, staff make referrals to specialist support services for children when they have identified needs. Staff monitor health outcomes effectively and respond promptly to emerging concerns.

Staff support children to try new activities, which helps children to become more socially confident. Staff also acknowledge children's worries about trying new things. In response, staff provide reliable support at times when children need the reassurance of care from a familiar adult.

Family time is promoted in line with the children's individual plans. Staff have built positive and supportive relationships with the children's families. One parent said, 'Staff are amazing. [Name of child] is thriving and has come on leaps and bounds since moving here. They are everything to me all of the time, and I would truly be lost without them.'

Children make good progress in education. Staff support this progress through being aspirational for children and advocating for them effectively. They scaffold learning outside the school environment, providing lots of opportunities for informal learning and developing life skills, alongside their formal education, which provides the encouragement that a conscientious parent would.

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

Physical intervention within the home is rare. This is a result of staff's thorough understanding of each child and the strong, trusting relationships they cultivate. Behaviour is effectively managed through a child-centred approach, with incidents handled sensitively. Staff use a range of strategies to reduce anxiety, including the use of social stories to support emotional awareness and self-regulation. To maintain best practice, the manager and responsible individual have recently qualified as physical intervention trainers, ensuring that staff knowledge and skills remain current.

Knowledge and understanding of safeguarding procedures are sound. Leaders and managers ensure that, in the event of an allegation or practice concern, they refer it to the appropriate safeguarding professionals, it is fully investigated, and it is dealt with in a timely way. Outcomes are recorded, and actions are taken to ensure that children and staff are supported throughout these processes. This means that concerns are taken seriously, and steps are taken to help prevent them from harm.

Collaboration between psychology support, therapists working in the home and staff promotes a holistic and consistent approach to addressing children's needs. Following incidents, the team around the child participates in incident reviews to examine the causes of the behaviour, and this contributes to a deeper insight into the children's behaviour. This comprehensive strategy has impacted on children positively, leading to a noticeable decrease in incidents.

Errors have been made with the medication recording and administering procedures. The manager has been quick to investigate each incident. Changes to practice have been implemented to avoid reoccurrence. All staff are trained in medication administration and undertake a competency assessment. As a result, the likelihood of further errors is minimised.

Incidents of concern are well recorded and appropriately shared with external multi-agency partners. Although risk assessments are regularly reviewed, one child's assessment did not reflect all learning from an incident that occurred during a journey in the home's vehicle. As a result, the assessment does not accurately reflect the strategies in place to reduce risks.

Recruitment records do not show attention to detail. This particularly relates to identification checks of a staff member and a lack of professional scrutiny when reviewing references. Consequently, this increases the risk that unsuitable staff may be employed at the home to care for children.

Some records contain imprecise language and lack clarity. This is particularly when recording and describing children's behaviours within plans and assessments.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

A new registered manager leads the home. She is well supported by the responsible individual. Staff hold the manager in high regard. They say that she is open, approachable and supportive, both professionally and personally. The staff reported an open-door approach with leaders, who welcome their feedback and ideas. This has helped boost morale and dedication in the staff team.

The manager works hard to develop and maintain positive relationships with external agencies. She recognises that partnership working is key to effective care planning. Professionals involved in the children's care hold the manager and staff in high regard. They said communication and information-sharing are good and that staff are committed to wanting the best for the children.

Children are held at the centre of decision-making at this home. The manager is ambitious about the quality of care provided to children, and she is aspirational about achieving the best outcomes for children. This positive approach means that these are the goals of the whole team.

There is a core experienced staff team, which means that the children are provided with stability. There has been a change of manager and some changes within the staff team at this home. However, the changes have been well managed and have not had an impact on the continuity of care for children.

The induction process for new staff is thorough. Staff have access to a wide range of training opportunities that help them meet the child's needs. The staff have reported that the training they have received in communication systems, autism and attachment theory has had a positive impact on their practice. They can adapt their practice to meet children's individual needs. This supports the personalised care provided.

The manager carries out regular reviews and audits to maintain a clear oversight of the home. Any relevant findings are shared with the staff to support learning and ensure they are meeting the needs of the children. Management monitoring is also aided by monthly independent visitor reports. The manager describes these visits as being a 'critical friend' and ensures there are consistent, ongoing opportunities for development and improvement.

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

### Statutory requirements

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.

| Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Due date         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| <p>The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that staff—</p> <p>assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child;</p> <p>that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. (Regulation 12 (2)(a)(i)(b))</p> <p>This specifically relates to managers ensuring that risk assessments reflect the needs and identified risks of the children and include guidance on how staff should respond to the assessed risks.</p> | 10 November 2025 |
| <p>The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. (Regulation 32 (1))</p> <p>This specifically relates to managers ensuring that appropriate action has been taken to complete all required checks for staff being appointed to work at the home. This includes the manager obtaining ID documents for the staff member and demonstrating professional scrutiny of references received.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 10 November 2025 |

### Recommendations

- Staff should be familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Staff should record

information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

## **Information about this inspection**

The inspector has 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:** 2719516

**Provision sub-type:** Children's home

**Registered provider:** Soteria Children's Services Group Limited

**Registered provider address:** 43 Coniscliffe Road, Darlington DL3 7EH

**Responsible individual:** Peter Cliff

**Registered manager:** Sophie Higgins

## Inspector

Zoey Lee, Social Care Inspector

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