

SC034686

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 is registered to provide care for up to five children who may have emotional and/or social difficulties and learning disabilities.

The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2019.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

We last visited this setting on 3 March 2021 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 November 2021

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: 5 June 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
05/06/2019	Full	Good
25/09/2018	Full	Good
31/10/2017	Full	Outstanding
25/01/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

At the time of the inspection, four children were living in the home. Children develop good relationships with the staff. They identify the staff as trusted adults who they can share their worries and concerns with. Staff get to know the children very well. This helps the children to flourish because of the bespoke care that they receive.

Children's attendance and attainment in education, training and employment are mixed. When children experience difficulties with their education attendance, the staff work well with a range of professionals to help to support the children's learning and development. Children's care plans are kept under regular review. However, the staff do not always record the children's education information clearly, particularly around alternative education activities. This has not negatively impacted on the care that children receive, but it could lead to inconsistent care practice.

Children achieve good health and overall well-being. They are registered with the necessary health professionals. Staff support the children to attend health appointments. For children who find it difficult to attend health appointments, the manager is creative in how she helps them to overcome these barriers. Additionally, children enjoy a range of activities which help them to keep active, fit and have fun.

Children take great pride in their bedrooms, which are decorated and personalised to their liking. The manager recognises that the building will require some structural changes in the coming years due to the age of the property. She is working with her manager and the commissioning services to address this. The home has been redecorated and updated with new furnishings throughout. This makes the home a comfortable space for the children to relax in.

Children benefit from living in a clean and comfortable home. The home employs a domestic member of staff. She ensures that the home is cleaned to a consistently good standard. As part of the evening tasks which are delegated to the staff team, the kitchen is routinely cleaned and locked once the children have gone to bed. Staff accompany the children if they require any food or a drink after this time. This restrictive practice prevents the children from accessing all areas of their home freely. The manager has reviewed this practice and accepts that it is no longer necessary.

Children are supported to spend time with their family and friends in line with their wishes and feelings. Children benefit from maintaining key relationships with those people who are important to them. A professional commented:

'This is an amazing home. There is such a great family feel when you walk in. I have no concerns about the care that the children receive. The work that the staff do with the children and their families, to support quality family time, is second to none. Children make fantastic progress here, they really do.'

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

Children feel valued because they are listened to, particularly if they feel unsafe or unhappy. Children know that their complaints and concerns will be listened to and acted on. The manager follows the necessary protocols to ensure that the children are better protected. Where necessary, the manager notifies the designated officer in the local authority of any complaints that are made about the staff's practice. The manager informs the children of the actions that she is taking in response to complaints received, and of the outcome from her investigations.

Children are helped and protected well because of the support that they receive from a nurturing staff team. The staff speak to the children during key-work sessions about a range of topics that aim to educate the children on how to keep themselves safe. Staff are creative in how they engage the children in this work. For example, videos are used to help educate the children about a range of topics. Risks to the children reduce because of the interventions that the staff use.

Children very rarely go missing from the home. When they do, the staff follow the necessary steps to locate them. The children are provided with an opportunity to speak to an independent person on their return. Additionally, the staff complete key-work sessions to help educate the children about the risks of this behaviour.

Behaviour management in the home is consistent. Restorative measures are used to help the children to learn from their behaviour. This is effective because incidents have reduced, including bullying behaviour. The children have worked with the staff and other services to highlight bullying issues. The children's participation in the campaign against bullying behaviour is recognised within the service.

Physical restraint is rarely used in this home. When this is required, the children are held by staff who are suitably trained. The manager scrutinises this practice to ensure that it is safe. However, there is one incident where a physical restraint was recorded, and the child did not have the opportunity to speak with someone independent after the incident. This means that the children do not consistently have the opportunity to speak to an independent adult following the use of physical restraint.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Effective leadership in the home supports the progress that the children make. The manager is suitably qualified and experienced. She is supported in her role by a dedicated staff team with a diverse range of skills and experience. Together, they share similar values and aspirations for the children. Children who leave the home maintain contact with the manager and her team. This highlights that children value their relationships with the manager and the staff.

The manager uses regular team meetings and reflective supervision to identify and address areas of practice that require improvements. Due to the COVID-19

pandemic, and the impact of staffing arrangements, the whole organisation suspended formal appraisals for staff. The manager highlighted that, on this basis, the appraisals for the staff are well out of date. There are no plans to complete these formal appraisals until 2022. This limits the manager's ability to satisfy herself that her staff's practice is sufficiently appraised as part of her performance management process.

Children access the necessary support that they require. The manager and her team work closely with a range of services. They use the advice and support from other services to help them to understand the children's presenting needs, and to guide the staff in how they should respond. Staff say that they feel equipped and have the right guidance and support to help them to meet the needs of the children.

The manager regularly monitors and reviews the quality of care that the children receive. She has identified that there is a gap in the level of support that the children receive when they leave the service and move on to independent living. She is working with a range of professionals at a consultation level to explore these gaps. The manager's passion and ambition to develop the service and improve the children's experiences highlight that the leadership in the home is good.

The children's guide provides the children with information about the home's complaints procedure and advocacy support. However, some important information is missing. For example, the details of how to contact the Office of the Children's Commissioner are not included. This hinders the children's ability to contact the independent organisation which is there to support their rights.

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, and 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
The registered person must ensure that— the privacy of children is appropriately protected; children can access all appropriate areas of the children's home's premises; and any limitation placed on a child's privacy or access to any area of the home's premises— is intended to safeguard each child accommodated in the home; is necessary and proportionate; is kept under review and, if necessary, revised; and allows children as much freedom as is possible when balanced against the need to protect them and keep them safe. (Regulation 21 (a)(b)(c)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv))	17 December 2021

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the children's guide includes details of how to contact the Office of the Children's Commissioner. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 24, paragraph 4.22)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff receive a formal appraisal to evaluate their practice. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.5)
- The registered person should include in the children's care plans the alternative education activities that will help to prepare the children for their next stages of education. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 26, paragraph 5.2)
- The registered person should ensure that any person involved in a physical intervention with a child is not directly involved with any debrief following the incident. This provides the children with an opportunity to speak to an independent adult following the use of the physical intervention. ('Guide to the

children's homes regulations including the quality standards,' page 49, paragraph 9.59)

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: SC034686

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Durham County

Registered provider address: County Hall, Durham DH1 5UJ

Responsible individual: Claire Morris

Registered manager: Michelle Nicholson

Inspectors

Jacqueline Tate, Social Care Inspector

Julia Hagan, Social Care Inspector

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