

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 provides care for up to five children who may have social and emotional difficulties and learning disabilities.

The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2019.

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 May 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **inadequate**

How well children and young people are helped and protected requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers inadequate

There are serious and widespread failures that mean children are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and the care and experiences of children are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 16 November 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
16/11/2021	Full	Good
05/06/2019	Full	Good
25/09/2018	Full	Good
31/10/2017	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Children do not make progress as their experience of living in this home is poor. Not all children attend school or an alternative education provision. The manager and staff work with the headteacher of the virtual school to support the children to return to education. However, the staff do not complete any educational activities to provide structure and routines for the children. This leaves children unoccupied, and creates a gap in the children's learning. Therefore, they are disadvantaged socially and academically compared with their peers.

The assessments and matching of the children who live in this home are poor. Despite the registered manager identifying that they could not keep the children safe, senior leaders made the decision to move one child into the home. The manager and staff's inability to care for all four children safely has resulted in two children's safety and well-being being compromised.

Children have mixed views about living in the home. Children have been unhappy when new children have moved in, and when they have experienced periods of disruption. The frequent changes in the staff team have exposed the children to the risk of harm, as unfamiliar staff are unable to provide a stable and safe living environment.

The home is presentable and provides the children with lots of space to interact and relax. However, on occasion, the staff have locked the kitchen door to manage the children's behaviour. This prevents the children from accessing all areas of their home. The manager has reviewed this practice and accepts that it is no longer necessary.

Children are registered with the necessary health professionals. Children are supported by the staff to attend any specialist health services so that their emotional and mental health needs are met. However, the staff are not always successful in supporting the children to attend their routine general health appointments. The staff do try to encourage the children to attend their rearranged appointments in order to meet the children's health needs.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Staff do not manage the children's competing behaviours effectively to prevent them from harming one another, as the impact risk assessments are poor. Children said that they did not get on with each other. They said that their risk-taking behaviour has increased due to other children moving into the home. This has led to poor experiences for all of the children, and left them at risk of harm.

Children go missing from the home regularly. Staff follow the agreed protocols. The staff engage with all of the agencies to ensure that the children return home safely. However, when the children return home, they are not consistently provided with an opportunity to speak to an independent visitor in a timely manner. In addition, the staff do not record the incident consistently. These failures expose the children to further risk of harm as important information is not captured to inform the children's risk assessments.

Children rarely need to be held by the staff to keep them safe. However, due to the home's reliance on agency staff, not all of these staff are trained. When children are held, the record of this is not always signed correctly by the person authorised to do so. This was recognised by the manager and quickly corrected.

Children's risk assessments and safety plans are thorough. They are kept up to date, and they record any significant events. The staff follow the children's plans, which supports the reduction of harm to children.

Staff respond to crisis situations and follow the agreed safeguarding processes. The manager and staff communicate effectively with the relevant multi-agency safeguarding professionals. This ensures that the children receive a coordinated response when they are in crisis and at risk of harm.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The registered manager left on 31 May 2022. There is an acting manager in post.

The registered manager has failed to monitor the staff's practice, and she has failed to provide effective oversight of the home. The registered manager has also failed to provide the staff with regular supervision, and she has not completed the provider's induction programme for one member of staff. In addition, she has failed to provide the staff with an opportunity to reflect on their practice and identify further training and development needs, as she has not completed the staff's annual appraisals. While some team meetings have been held, these do not take place consistently. This oversight prevents the staff from considering the children's needs and identifying ways that they can better support the children.

The registered manager has missed opportunities to support the staff; therefore, staff morale is low. One staff member said: 'I am leaving, as I do not feel supported by the management.'

The registered manager has failed to support the staff who have managed significant incidents involving the children. She has not provided the staff with a debrief, or a chance to have a post-crisis response meeting. This lack of oversight prevents the manager from identifying if anything needs to change, so that the children can be cared for safely.

The use of external agency staff and low staffing levels mean that children do not receive consistent care and support. The high turnover of staff, high sickness levels

in the staff team and the poor support provided by the registered manager, means that the staff lack any insight into the children's experiences and emotions. The poor staffing arrangements hinder the children's ability to develop positive and meaningful relationships with the staff.

The registered manager has not reviewed the quality of care that the children receive, and she has failed once to produce the required independent visitor report to Ofsted. This hinders Ofsted's ability to review and monitor practice in the home.

The registered manager has not notified Ofsted of one allegation. This prevents Ofsted from reviewing and monitoring safeguarding arrangements to ensure that the correct action is taken to safeguard the children.

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, 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 education standard is that children make measurable progress towards achieving their educational potential and are helped to do so. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— help a child who is excluded from school, or who is of compulsory school age but not attending school, to access educational and training support throughout the period of exclusion or non-attendance and to return to school as soon as possible. (Regulation 8 (1)(2)(viii)) The registered provider must ensure that the staff support the children to follow an education timetable in the home during the day to provide a structured day of learning.	3 July 2022
The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— manage relationships between the children to prevent them from harming each other. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(iv))	3 July 2022
*The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, and inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare.	23 June 2022

In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home’s statement of purpose; ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child; ensure that the home’s workforce provides continuity of care to each child; understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home; use the monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(d)(e)(f)(h))	
*The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children’s home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of the children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home’s statement of purpose. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)) The registered provider must ensure that when they complete an impact risk assessment for a child that move into the home, that the risk assessment effectively evaluates and considers all of the child’s known risks and emerging needs, and evaluates how these may affect the children already living in the home.	3 July 2022

The registered person must— keep the statement of purpose under review and where appropriate, revise it; and notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (3)(a)(b))	3 July 2022
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— 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)) This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.	3 July 2022
The registered person must— ensure that each employee completes an appropriate induction. The registered person must ensure that all employees— receive practice-related supervisions by a person with appropriate experience; and have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. (Regulation 33 (1)(a) (4)(b)(c))	3 July 2022

The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there. (Regulation 40 (4)(c))	3 July 2022
The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children (“a quality of care review”) at least once every 6 months. In order to complete a quality of care review the registered person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating— the quality of care provided for children; the feedback and opinions of children about the children’s home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it; and any actions that the registered person considers necessary in order to improve or maintain the quality of care provided for children. After completing a quality of care review, the registered person must produce a written report about the quality of care review and the actions which the registered person intends to take as a result of the quality of care review (“the quality of care review report”). The registered person must— supply to HMCI a copy of the quality of care review report within 28 days of the date on which the quality of care review is completed; and make a copy of the quality of care review report available on request to a placing authority, if the placing authority is not the parent of a child accommodated in the home. The system referred to in paragraph (2) must provide for ascertaining and considering the opinions of children, their parents, placing authorities and staff. (Regulation 45 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c) (3) (4)(a)(b) (5))	3 July 2022

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that when a child returns home after being missing from care or away from the home without permission, the responsible local authority provides an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. This should be undertaken in a timely manner and for each occurrence. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30)
- The registered person should ensure that records are kept detailing all individual incidents when children go missing from the home (regulation 36 (schedule 3(14))) and should be completed in full. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.31)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff, including agency staff, have been trained in the principles of restraint and any restraint techniques appropriate to the needs of the children the home is set up to care for as defined in the home's statement of purpose. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 49, paragraph 9.57)
- The registered person should ensure that staffing levels meet the needs of the children and can respond flexibly to unexpected events or opportunities. Staffing structures should promote continuity of care from the child's perspective. If children complain or give a view on how the staffing structure could be improved to promote the best care for them, appropriate action should be taken. (('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.15)
- The registered person should ensure that children's care records are kept up to date and signed and dated by the author of each entry. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)

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 Council

Registered provider address: County Hall, Durham DH1 5UJ

Responsible individual: Laura Caunce

Registered manager: Michelle Nicholson

Inspectors

Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector

Aasia Hussain, Social Care Inspector

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