

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. The home can provide care for up to five children with social and emotional difficulties, and with learning disabilities.

There has been no registered manager since September 2022. A manager has been appointed but has yet to be registered with Ofsted. At the time of the inspection, the manager was not in work. During the manager's absence, a service manager and the responsible individual are providing management oversight at the home.

Inspection dates: 25 and 26 July 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **requires improvement to be good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **requires improvement to be good**

The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 29 November 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
29/11/2022	Full	Good
30/08/2022	Full	Inadequate
24/05/2022	Full	Inadequate
16/11/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

The manager has moved children into the home when it has not been in their best interests. As a result, some children are not happy and want to move. One child is anxious in their living environment. Others spend minimal time in the home, with little if any investment in it. This has an impact on children developing positive relationships with staff.

Much of the work that is undertaken with the children is to remind them of the rules within the home. The language and approach used by the staff is often punitive, with little explanation provided to the children as to why the rules are in place. Similarly, when discussions take place about unsafe behaviours, children are sometimes left without an understanding of the risks associated with these behaviours. On one occasion, a child was told to look for the risks online.

The children are not helped to learn about healthy relationships or how to keep themselves and others safe. When one child acted in an inappropriate way towards female staff on two occasions, both went unchallenged. This does not help the children to learn about and change their unsocial behaviours.

Children's placement plans are poor, with sections left blank or incomplete, including important information missing about how the staff should respond to emotionally support the children. This means that there is insufficient information to help the staff to understand how they should meet the children's needs.

Although the home is clean, tidy and pleasantly furnished, it does not feel like a family home. There are too few photos of the children and an absence of their personalised belongings. This does not help the children to feel like they belong in the home or that they are important.

Some food and drinks are locked away. This practice has been in place for a long time and provides an institutional feel to the home. Fire extinguishers are kept behind locked doors, despite there being a risk of fire setting within the home.

The staff are creative in gaining the views and wishes of the children when they choose not to attend the children's meetings. Staff then act on those views and wishes, for example arrangements were put in place for one child to go on holiday with his parent.

Children are praised and rewarded for their achievements. For example, one child who sat his GCSE exams will be taking part in a fast car experience.

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

All children have experienced missing-from-care episodes. Despite this, there are no individualised missing-from-care procedures for the staff to follow. This means that staff take inconsistent approaches when children go missing from the home. The children's missing-from-care protocol for the police is often incomplete. Until recently, staff have not always been proactive in looking for children. This could delay children being found and increases the risk of harm to the children.

The quality of the children's risk assessments varies. Current information is not always provided in relation to known risks. As a result, some staff do not fully understand the extent of the children's risks or how to reduce them. Some staff are also not confident about what to do in the event that they have concerns about a colleague's practice. This means unsafe or harmful behaviour towards children could go unchallenged and continue.

On one occasion, staff did not respond in a timely way to dangerous behaviours involving two children within the home. This resulted in a repeat of the behaviour, which created further and unnecessary risk of harm to both the children and staff.

Children are rarely restrained, and restraints only take place as a last resort by staff who are appropriately trained. However, it is not always clear what efforts have been taken by staff to avoid this measure being carried out. This prevents leaders and managers from assuring themselves that this practice is necessary. In addition, there is no discussion with the children involved following the intervention. This does not help children to have a voice, receive support and learn.

Consequences are given to children to help them learn about unacceptable behaviours. However, they are not always recorded, and when they are, their effectiveness is often not reviewed. This means there is no way of monitoring whether they are appropriate or have had a positive impact.

There is weekly management attendance at a multi-agency meeting regarding child exploitation concerns. This enables information-sharing and working together between agencies to better help and protect the children.

Measures are in place and followed to ensure that new staff are recruited safely. This prevents unsuitable people from being recruited to work with the children in this home.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

Staff said that the past few months have been unsettling and uncertain due to the management changes and a lack of guidance and support from the current manager. One staff member describes herself as feeling 'de-skilled'. The poor

management of the home has had an impact on the quality of care that the children receive.

Staff training records are not up to date and it is unclear when refresher training is needed. This limits the manager's ability to track and monitor the staff's training requirements. Training relevant to the risks and needs of the children is not routinely provided and places are limited. This prevents the staff from having a deeper understanding of the children's needs, which they require in order to respond more effectively to those needs.

In team meetings, there is no discussion around what actions staff should be taking to try and reduce the children's ongoing risks or when new risks emerge. Staff are not encouraged to share their own ideas. This is a missed opportunity to involve the whole team in raising the standard of care that the children receive.

The manager has failed to notify Ofsted of two lengthy missing-from-care episodes. This prevents the regulator from having a full understanding of these episodes and being assured that all of the necessary actions have been taken to safeguard the children.

The recent involvement and oversight from the service manager and responsible individual has revitalised the staff team. They said that they are feeling 'positive', 'hopeful' and 'valued'. New staff are happy in their work and feel supported by their colleagues. One said he has never felt on his own. The staff are given time to read important documentation about the children and learn the systems that they need to use. The newer staff are able to shadow their more experienced colleagues, which helps them to better understand the children and learn how to interact with them.

Prior to this inspection, the service manager and responsible individual were aware of the shortfalls described throughout this report. They had already commenced extensive auditing throughout the home and identified and scrutinised unsafe and ineffective practice. As a result, a significant number of actions to improve the service and care of the children have been identified, many of which have been implemented.

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 quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children; use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that staff— provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(iv))	6 September 2023
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust; an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and positive responses to other children and adults. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— meet each child's behavioural and emotional needs, as set out in the child's relevant plans; help each child to develop socially aware behaviour;	6 September 2023

encourage each child to take responsibility for the child's behaviour, in accordance with the child's age and understanding; help each child to develop and practise skills to resolve conflicts positively and without harm to anyone; communicate to each child expectations about the child's behaviour and ensure that the child understands those expectations in accordance with the child's age and understanding; help each child to understand, in a way that is appropriate according to the child's age and understanding, personal, sexual and social relationships, and how those relationships can be supportive or harmful; help each child to develop the understanding and skills to recognise or withdraw from a damaging, exploitative or harmful relationship; strive to gain each child's respect and trust; and understand how children's previous experiences and present emotions can be communicated through behaviour and have the competence and skills to interpret these and develop positive relationships with children. (Regulation 11(1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(viii)(ix))	
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— 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; help each child to understand how to keep safe; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm;	6 September 2023

understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies; and 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; and that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed, furnished and maintained so as to protect each child from avoidable hazards to the child's health. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(v)(vi)(vii)(b)(d))	
The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. 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 staff work as a team where appropriate; ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; and ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(c)(d))	6 September 2023
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. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b))	6 September 2023

The registered person must ensure that— 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(b)(c)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv))	6 September 2023
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; details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure; 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)(v)(vii)(viii)(b)(i)(ii)(c))	6 September 2023

The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if—

6 September 2023

there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40(4)(e))

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the children's home is a nurturing and supportive environment that meet the needs of the children and provides a homely, domestic environment. This relates to a lack of personalised items in the home, such as photographs of the children. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)

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 5UL

Responsible individual: Paul Rudd

Registered manager: Vacant post

Inspectors

Emma Ridley, Social Care Inspector

Lisa Finch, Social Care Inspector

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