

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 owned and managed by a local authority. It provides care for up to five children who may have social and/or emotional difficulties and/ or learning disabilities.

There is an acting manager in post who is not yet registered.

There were four children living in the home at the time of this visit.

Inspection dates: 30 and 31 August 2022

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **inadequate**

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 and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 24 May 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Enforcement action since last inspection:

A judgement of inadequate was given at the full inspection on 24 May 2022. This was due to the widespread failings in the leadership and management arrangements of the home, and due to the poor care planning arrangements for children. In response to these failings, Ofsted issued the provider with two compliance notices

under Regulations 13 and 14. Additionally, Ofsted issued seven requirements to address other shortfalls.

A monitoring visit was carried out on 4 July 2022 to monitor the provider's progress in meeting the compliance notices. At this monitoring visit, Ofsted identified that the provider had taken sufficient action to meet all of the steps in the compliance notices, and had met all of the requirements that were raised at the last inspection.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
24/05/2022	Full	Inadequate
16/11/2021	Full	Good
05/06/2019	Full	Good
25/09/2018	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Inspectors found serious failings in how well children are helped and protected. As a result, children's overall experiences were judged to be inadequate.

The staff do not have meaningful relationships with the children. Therefore, children do not have a positive experience of living in this home. This has a negative impact on various aspects of the children's lives.

While key-work sessions take place between the staff and the children, these sessions lack the necessary focus to ensure that the children can make progress. Furthermore, there are examples where staff have used derogatory language during these sessions and then recorded such language in the children's records. This does not represent supportive and nurturing care to the children. This lack of respect shown towards the children does not support the children's confidence and self-esteem.

Children's competing needs are not met when they move into this home. Leaders and managers have failed to assess and match all of the children's competing needs effectively before any new child moves into the home. In addition, leaders and managers have failed to ensure that the staff are suitably trained to manage the children's risks at the point the child moves into the home. Consequently, children with competing needs and similar risks are placed together in the home. This has led to an unsettled home, with the children going missing from the home together and getting involved in escalating behaviours in the home that put them, and the staff, at risk of harm.

The frequent changes in the staff team have continued since the last full inspection. This has exposed the children to the risk of harm, as unfamiliar staff are unable to provide a consistent level of care that helps the children to make relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

Staff do not provide the children with age-appropriate boundaries and expectations in the home. Children of different ages, for example, do not have any bedtime structure that enables them to feel safe. This leaves them unsettled and prone to periods of disruption. Staff struggle to deal effectively with the children's behaviour during these unsettled periods. This is not a calm environment in which the children are able to feel valued and nurtured.

Children's electronic and paper records do not contain the same information. This is down to a long-drawn-out transitional process. However, this is leaving gaps in information and incident records are not being cross-referenced and recorded appropriately. This affects the quality of information that the staff have and leads to an ineffective system where mistakes are made.

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

Staff do not take immediate action to keep children safe. Children regularly go missing from the home. Records show that when staff are aware that the children are planning to go missing from the home with each other, the staff fail to take proactive steps to prevent this. Furthermore, the staff do not follow the provider's agreed protocols and they do not consistently engage with all other external agencies to ensure that the children return home safely. This leaves the children at risk of harm.

Staff do not communicate effectively with relevant multi-agency safeguarding professionals. One professional said: 'Staff tell us one thing and record another. Communication from staff is poor.' This increases the risk to the children when they go missing from the home.

Children's risk assessments and safety plans are not up to date. For one child, the strategies included in their risk assessment were not relevant to that child. These failures by the leaders and managers expose the children to further risk of harm.

Staff do not fully understand the children's needs, risks and vulnerabilities. Staff shortages have proven to be a challenge, and this has affected the children's ability to build trusting relationships with the staff.

The manager has failed to recognise that the locking of doors prevents the children from leaving their home. Staff spoken to said that this action is used by them as a measure to manage the children's behaviour. This practice has not been agreed by the children's placing social workers, has not been risk-assessed or reviewed and the rationale for this measure is unclear.

Managers have failed to ensure that the use of physical restraint is necessary and proportionate. Staff are unclear as to which model they should use in practice. This places the children at risk of harm. During the visit, inspectors saw staff restraining a child, which raised concerns with inspectors about the child's welfare. The manager acknowledged the concern and took steps to manage the situation and ensure the safety of the child.

There has been an increase in allegations made by the children. Leaders have responded appropriately to the allegations that the children have made about how the staff physically hold them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The acting manager had made improvements at the last monitoring visit by Ofsted. However, at this visit inconsistencies in staff practice and leadership have led to the home once more being very unsettled. The decision-making in respect of the children being placed in a short space of time at the home is one example. As a result, a number of compliance notices previously issued are being reissued.

The acting manager and the leadership team have failed to respond effectively to poor performance or the lack of progress for the children. The acting manager and staff have put in long hours to support the safe care of the children. However, this has not led to the children being able or willing to engage in homely activities due to the constant instability in the home.

Closed-circuit television (CCTV) devices have been fitted to the home externally, in an attempt to help to safeguard the children. However, this is not reflected in the children's safety plans and there is no risk assessment, or the necessary consent in place by the placing authority acknowledging their agreement to this practice. Additionally, children have not been informed that this measure is in place. This shows a disregard for the children's views regarding their privacy. This lacks management direction and planning.

The acting manager has improved formal supervision practice and staff have access to training. However, there is not always a member of staff trained in first aid on duty. This management shortfall leaves children at risk of harm.

The home's statement of purpose does not reflect or specify which physical intervention and de-escalation practice is being used in the home. Staff spoken to referred to the current practice they have been trained in, whereas the statement of purpose records the previous practice.

The failures identified during this inspection were immediately brought to the attention of the acting manager, the quality assurance manager, the responsible individual, and the director of children's services. The provider put in place an immediate action plan to address some of the shortfalls identified. As a result of the serious and repeated shortfalls identified during the inspection, six compliance notices have been issued under regulations 11, 12, 13, 14, 20 and 21.

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 positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and 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; 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 develop the understanding and skills to recognise or withdraw from damaging, exploitative or harmful relationships; 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) (2)(a)(i)(v)(vi)(vii)(ix))	23 October 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— 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; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; 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; 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. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(b)) This relates to staff understanding and implementation of each child’s safety plan, and their role in keeping children safe. In addition, ensuring that they respond to children’s known behaviours and competing needs.	23 October 2022
*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— ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate; ensure that the home’s workforce provides continuity of care to each child;	23 October 2022

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. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(e)(f))	
*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 moves into the home, the risk assessment evaluates and considers effectively all the child’s known risks and emerging needs and evaluates how these may affect the children already living in the home.	23 October 2022
*Restraint in relation to a child is only permitted for the purpose of preventing— injury to any person (including the child); serious damage to the property of any person (including the child). restraint in relation to a child must be necessary and proportionate. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b) (2))	23 October 2022
*The registered person must ensure that— children can access all appropriate areas of the children’s home’s premises; and	23 October 2022

any limitation placed on a child's privacy or access to any area of the home's premises— is necessary and proportionate; allows children as much freedom as is possible when balanced against the need to protect them and keep them safe. (Regulation 21 (b)(c)(ii)(iv)) This relates to the stopping of the routine practice of locking external doors, which prevents children from exiting the home.	
The registered person may only use devices for the monitoring or surveillance of children if— the monitoring or surveillance is for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child concerned, or other children; the child's placing authority consents in writing to the monitoring or surveillance; so far as reasonably practicable in the light of the child's age and understanding, the child is informed in advance of the intention to do the monitoring or surveillance; and the monitoring or surveillance is no more intrusive than necessary, having regard to the child's need for privacy. (Regulation 24 (1)(a)(b)(c)(d)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that there is a risk assessment in place, and this is reviewed regularly in accordance with the needs of each child in the home.	23 October 2022
The registered person must ensure that— at all times, at least one person on duty at the home has a suitable first aid qualification. (Regulation 31 (1) (2)(a))	23 October 2022
The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which— include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child; are kept up to date; and	23 October 2022

are signed and dated by the author of each entry.
(Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b)(c))

This relates to the need for staff to accurately record in children's safety plans details pertaining to the individual child. Also, records in relation to any physical intervention should be cross-referenced in both the restrictions record and the incident logbook, as per the provider's processes.

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that the information set out in the statement of purpose is an essential part of the process of agreement between the registered person and the placing authority that a placement in the home is the right one for that child, and that the home will be able to respond effectively to the child's assessed needs. In particular, the provider should ensure that the most current physical and de-escalation practice is recorded. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.6)

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: post vacant

Inspectors

Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector

Claire Webster, Social Care Inspector

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