

# SC035181

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 by a local authority and is registered for the care and accommodation of up to five children or young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

**Inspection dates:** 8 to 9 August 2017

**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 and young people are not protected, 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:** 31 January 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** Sustained effectiveness

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** None

## Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is inadequate because:

- There are widespread failures in the leadership and management. The home has not had a consistent manager over the past year. Between the last full inspection in June 2016 and this inspection, there have been four managers. The manager at the time of the last inspection was registered but left the post at the end of September 2016. The next manager took over at the beginning of October 2016 and stayed until the end of January 2017, but did not apply to be registered. The next manager took over at the end of January 2017 and was registered on 2 June 2017, but left the post on 5 June 2017. A new manager started in mid-June 2017 and has not yet applied to be registered.
- The staff have admitted too many children and young people in emergency situations. This is not in line with the home's statement of purpose.
  - Sometimes these admissions are accompanied by too little documentation.
  - On one occasion, an admission was of a child younger than the age range stated in the statement of purpose.
  - On another occasion, an admission was made of a sixth young person when the conditions of registration state that the home may only care for up to five children at any one time.
  - Some of these admissions have been made by senior managers against staff's wishes and advice. Impact risk assessments have not always been followed.
  - While some of these emergency admissions have been successful, many have drifted for too long, and planning has been poor.
  - The consequence of these constant emergency admissions has been that the home has been unsettled for a prolonged period, and some children and young people have been adversely affected.
- The children and young people currently residing in the home have not made good progress. Their experience of living in the home has also been poor.
- The children and young people living at the home have not been sufficiently well safeguarded. There have been high levels of missing from home and bullying and many cases of children and young people putting themselves at risk.
- The staff have struggled to provide consistent care for the children and young people. There has been a good deal of challenging behaviour, and staff morale has fallen. Some staff have left and sickness rates are high, leaving the team short staffed and having to borrow staff from other homes.
- The staff have not provided a good enough service for the children and young people. Care planning has been poor at times. Staff have not kept records on children's files up to date. Sufficient personalised work with the children and

young people has not been carried out.

- Staff have not received sufficient support and supervision from their manager or from senior staff in the local authority.

The children's home's strengths:

- The current manager has only been in post for a few weeks but is highly motivated, highly experienced and has previously successfully managed other children's homes. He has quickly grasped the situation at this home, assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the staff and the care practices, and has produced a comprehensive development and action plan.
- The staff team is resilient and skilled and has a good deal of experience. Staff remain motivated to provide a good service for the children and young people they look after, and they are looking forward to a period of strong, clear management and support.

## Recent inspection history

| Inspection date | Inspection type | Inspection judgement    |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 31/01/2017      | Interim         | Sustained effectiveness |
| 28/06/2016      | Full            | Requires improvement    |
| 16/02/2016      | Interim         | Sustained effectiveness |
| 14/10/2015      | Full            | Good                    |

## 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   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <p>*The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>promote their welfare. (Regulation 13(1)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that emergency placements are managed appropriately and there is sufficient information and documentation available to do this safely.</p>                                                                                                                                                               | 29/09/2017 |
| <p>*The registered person must ensure that the home is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. (Regulation 16(5))</p> <p>In particular, this relates to ensuring that the description of the admission criteria is accurate. The stated age range should be adhered to and the number of emergency admissions should fit the description in the statement of purpose.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 29/09/2017 |
| <p>The care planning standard is that children receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of 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(2)(a))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that impact risk assessments are accurately made and acted upon and that emergency placements are not allowed to drift without further planning.</p> | 29/09/2017 |
| <p>The registered person must ensure that all employees receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 29/09/2017 |

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| experience. (Regulation 33(4)b))                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |            |
| <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 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)b))</p> <p>In particular, this means addressing the increasing number of missing from home incidents. Additionally, work with children on issues of keeping themselves safe, drug taking and criminal behaviour.</p>                                                                                                                                                                         | 29/09/2017 |
| <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 that staff—</p> <p>manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other. (Regulation 12(2)(a)(iv))</p> <p>In particular, address bullying in the home.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 29/09/2017 |
| <p>The quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who—</p> <p>(a) understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children;</p> <p>(b) use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's relevant background. (Regulation 6(2)(b)(iv))</p> <p>In particular, provide appropriate key work to help children understand their situation, their behaviour and their identity, and to plan their futures.</p> | 29/09/2017 |
| <p>The registered person must maintain records ('case records') for each child which are kept up to date. (Regulation 36(1)(b))</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 29/09/2017 |

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| In particular, keep risk assessments up to date, and keep placement plans up to date, to ensure that each child has a personalised education plan and an up-to-date care plan. |  |
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\* These requirements are subject of a compliance notice.

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

The young people currently living at the home have made very little progress, and their experience of living in the home has been poor.

Since the previous full inspection in June 2016, the leadership and management of the home have been inconsistent. In this period, there have been four managers. The registered manager at the start of this period left the post at the end of September 2016, and since then only one manager has been registered and then only for a period of four days. A new manager was appointed in June 2017 and is tasked with improving the home.

During this period, the local authority also changed the role and purpose of the home. A decision was taken at the beginning of the year to end the home's role of emergency and respite care and to provide medium- and longer-term care. This transition has been very poorly managed. The staff have not received clear guidance and training about their new roles. The scale and content of the changes necessary have been underestimated and not well planned for.

The staff have continued to be asked, and told, to accept more emergency admissions. Only one planned admission has taken place since the role changed. Some of these admissions have been poor in other ways. Some children and young people have been admitted without sufficient documentation or information. Some children and young people have been admitted when staff impact risk assessments have suggested that they are not suitable. One child who was admitted was outside the stated age range. One young person was admitted when the home was technically full and so the condition of registration, to care for up to five children, was breached. This occurred very soon after the local authority had applied to vary the conditions, so that the number of children that could be accommodated was reduced to five.

The consequence of admitting so many children and young people in emergency situations, many of whom have been in crisis, has been to substantially unsettle the home. The period from January 2017 to the present has been characterised by unsettled and challenging behaviour, significant safeguarding concerns and lack of clarity around planning and task.

Staff have been put under more pressure and morale has fallen. Some staff have left and staff sickness rates have increased. This has led to staff shortages and the need to draft in staff from other homes. This has led to further inconsistencies, further poor

planning and poor care practices.

Staff spoken to by the inspector during the inspection were clearly downhearted. Staff said the work had been 'soul destroying' and 'chaotic', and they described what they were doing as 'firefighting'. One staff member said of the change in role at the home, 'We changed back in March but we didn't know how we have changed. We had no time to think about what to change and how to do it.'

The consequence of the failings at leadership and management level has been significant. Children and young people have not made appreciable progress, and the experience of living in the home has not been good. A number of emergency placements have drifted without clear planning. Essential individualised work has not been carried out with the children and young people, and case recording has become poor and unclear.

Some of the children and young people admitted have displayed disturbed, aggressive and challenging behaviour. This has caused an already unsettled environment to become more so. Levels of bullying have risen. Safeguarding concerns have been heightened and, generally, the boundaries and expectations that should be clear in the home have been allowed to erode and, at times, disappear.

All of the young people currently living at the home were spoken to by the inspector, and their views are mixed. Some said that they do not like the home and some said that they do. One young person made some complaints, which the inspector will consider. However, no young person said that they do not feel safe at the home.

The staff have tried to maintain good relationships with the children and young people and have succeeded at times, but at other times these have broken down or been ineffectual. The staff have been unable to influence the behaviour of the children and young people sufficiently. Several of the young people have increasing concerns, and the negative influence of some other young people continues to have a detrimental effect on them. The home environment is unsettled and feels tense at times, and it requires a concerted effort for it to become calmer and more nurturing.

A number of the children and young people have significant emotional issues to deal with, and staff have been unable to support them with these, in order to make progress. Generally, the children and young people have not made progress educationally, and most of them have poor attendance and achieve little. A number of the children and young people have had multiple school placements, which have further unsettled them.

Some children and young people would benefit from external specialist help, but this has not been accessed well. Sometimes this is because they refuse to cooperate, and sometimes it is because referrals have not been made sufficiently quickly.

Routine systems have broken down. There have been no children's meetings for some time, consultation is less apparent and everyday life in the home has become strained and at times fraught.

There are some examples of staff engaging in positive work. Some positive relationships

have been built. A few examples of good key work are evident, and some good work with families is apparent. However, on balance, insufficient positive work has been carried out. Some of the very short emergency placements have been successful on occasions.

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

The safeguarding concerns at the home have been increasing.

The staff have a good understanding of risk and are able to make good assessments of risk. However, risk assessments now need reviewing as some are out of date. Because of the lack of clear leadership and management and the lack of a clearly defined or effectively implemented role for the home, staff have been overwhelmed. While they have tried to take appropriate action to help and protect the children and young people in their care, they have not always been effective. Concerns about safeguarding are increasing and more action is now required.

Levels of missing from home have been increasing, and concerns about what the young people are doing when they are away from the home are higher. It is clear that some of the young people are taking drugs and alcohol. One young person in particular has engaged in increasing drug taking. There are clear child sexual exploitation concerns for all the current young people. Some of them are engaging in increasingly serious criminal activities, and this sometimes involves groups of the current residents. Three young people from the home were involved in a recent incident, allegedly taking drugs and alcohol and being involved in a burglary and the taking and driving of a stolen car. This is currently being investigated by the local police.

There have been clear concerns, voiced by police officers who oversee the police county-wide child sexual exploitation and missing from home services, about the risks to these young people and about their increasing criminal activity.

One extremely vulnerable young person was recently placed in secure accommodation for their own safety after they alleged that a number of extremely serious incidents took place during the times they were missing from the home. This young person was assessed to be at high risk of child sexual exploitation at the time. Placing this young person in secure accommodation was appropriate action.

Another young person at the home is also at significant risk of child sexual exploitation. They have been missing with other young people living in the local community, known to be at risk as well. There have been several situations that appear to involve grooming, which staff have identified and for which they have offered support. The concern is that this young person is now increasingly missing from home and so putting themselves at greater risk.

The levels of bullying in the home have been unacceptably high for some time. Although staff try to challenge this, there is little evidence of any coordinated effort to address the issues, to impose any consequences or to support those being bullied. There appears to



be a culture at the home in which a level of inappropriate behaviour among the children is tolerated. This is consistent with staff who described working at the home as firefighting. The more serious issues are tackled, but those seen as less serious receive less attention. Clear boundaries and expectations need to be re-introduced to the home so that the environment can become calmer and more pleasant for those living and working there.

There have been a number of other safeguarding incidents. One young person brought some medication back to the home and, as well as taking some themselves, gave some to another more vulnerable young person who had to be taken to hospital for treatment.

One young person managed to smuggle a male friend into the home to stay overnight without staff being aware, due to which there are clear concerns and risks.

There are, at times, some good examples of staff taking action to help to safeguard young people. When children go missing, good efforts to locate and return them have sometimes been made. Return home interviews are arranged and generally take place. Staff were quick to act when a very vulnerable young person required being placed in secure accommodation.

However, there are many more examples of times when staff efforts have been ineffective at safeguarding. The issues here are clear to the inspector and include too many inappropriate placements, too little consideration for the mix of young people in the home and too little support for moving children and young people on when required. This lack of leadership and management has created dangerous situations, which staff have battled to contain.

There now appears to be a culture of going missing at the home and a culture of aggressive and unpleasant behaviour. Unless firmer boundaries are put in place, some children or young people are likely to come to further harm.

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

The failings of leadership and management are pivotal to the lack of progress of the children and young people and of the poor experience that many of them have at the home and of the increased safeguarding concerns.

The local authority has struggled to find an appropriate manager for the past year. There have been four managers in post at different times during the period from the previous full inspection, and this has caused difficulties.

The current manager has only been in post for a few weeks. However, he is a highly motivated and experienced manager who brings with him considerable skills and a successful track record of managing other homes. He is also qualified appropriately. He is now due to apply for registration.

The leadership and management comprise senior managers in the local authority as well as the responsible individual and the home's manager. They have collectively failed to be

clear about the home's role over the past year. They have allowed high numbers of emergency placements to be made at the home to the detriment of planned respite care in the period June 2016 to January 2017, and to the detriment of medium- or longer-term placements in the period since. They have changed the role of the home but failed to give staff clear direction and also failed to keep admissions in line with the statement of purpose. They have admitted children and young people inappropriately and, on one occasion, have allowed one extra child to be placed, breaking the conditions of registration. Too often, impact risk assessments have not been made or have been made and then ignored. The home is therefore not meeting the aims and objectives set out in the statement of purpose.

The effect of this poor management has been to introduce many highly needy children into the home, and this has caused the home to become unsettled. The staff have been left to cope with a great deal of challenging behaviour and, as a result, some staff have left and sickness levels have risen. Staff shortages have meant inconsistent care, an erosion of appropriate boundaries and expectations, and increased levels of vulnerability and risk. Safeguarding concerns have been high and are increasing. The needs of children and young people have not had the priority they require. Planning has been poor and care practices have suffered. The staff have been left without sufficient support. Little training has taken place, supervision has stopped and direction from managers has been lacking.

Successive managers have been unable to effect improvements. Although they have understood the strengths and weaknesses of the staff team, they have not had the resources or the support to develop the service. The home was judged as requiring improvement at the previous full inspection and, instead of improvements, there has been further deterioration.

Successive managers have not worked well enough in partnership with other agencies, which include others within their own children's services department, and they have been ineffective in challenging these people. More clarity, understanding and agreement about role and purpose are required.

Two requirements were made at the previous interim inspection: firstly, to ensure that emergency admissions were appropriate in terms of both quality of information and of quantity, and secondly to ensure that the home met the aims and objectives of the statement of purpose. The inspector has judged that neither of these requirements has been met and so they have been raised again along with seven other requirements.

Five requirements have been made about leadership and management: three of them in relation to ensuring that admissions are appropriate, one to improve care planning and one to improve staff support. Two requirements have been made regarding safeguarding: one to improve day-to-day safeguarding issues, in particular to tackle increased levels of missing from home and other allied risky behaviours, and one to tackle bullying in the home. Two further requirements are to carry out more personalised work with the children and young people and to maintain better records on children's case files.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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:** SC035181

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

**Registered provider address:** County Hall, Durham DH1 5UL

**Responsible individual:** Karen Robb

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

## Inspector

Colin Imrie, social care inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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