

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

The manager was registered with Ofsted in September 2019.

At the time of the inspection, there were five children living in the home.

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 August 2022

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: 11 January 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/01/2022	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
28/09/2021	Full	Requires improvement to be good
21/05/2019	Full	Good
09/05/2018	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children make positive progress from their starting points.

Children move in to the home following the comprehensive sharing of information within the child's care team meetings. From this, the manager completes a detailed analysis and evaluation of the children's individual risks and known specific vulnerabilities. He shares this with the staff, so they can access any additional support that is required. This helps the children to settle into the home quickly.

Children benefit from a dedicated staff team that ensure excellent communication is maintained with healthcare professionals. This involves training and expert advice provided to manage the children's health needs. In one example, joint working and an effective response to a child's healthcare has resulted in safe care being provided consistently. A social worker commented on the resilience of the staff and said, '[child], has made so much progress, she is a different child completely'.

Children have positive relationships with staff, and they are supported to develop good relationships with each other. This is a busy home where the children spend a lot of time with the staff, who provide a nurturing and supportive environment. One child said, 'Staff communicate really well with the children and understand us. They take all the children's individual needs into consideration.'

Children spend time with their families. Staff support and encourage family time in accordance with the children's individual plans. The staff are aware of the children's relationships and how, at times, these may affect the feelings and behaviours of the children. Staff ensure that the children are safe, and their well-being is supported. Additionally, the staff speak to the children's family members on a daily basis, which promotes open communication and the sharing of information. This enables good care planning to be in place to meet the children's needs.

Staff do not effectively ensure that all the children attend education, college or training. This means that the children are not prepared for future employment and limits their potential.

The home is well maintained. The manager has continued to improve the living environment. The staff talk to the children regularly to gain their views and wishes on the overall appearance of the home. The children were proud to show their bedrooms, which are personalised to their tastes. This helps the children to feel settled and have a sense of belonging.

Staff support the children's attendance at their health appointments, so that their general health needs are maintained. Staff also ensure that healthy eating is promoted and, when necessary, keep food diaries to monitor the children's

nutritional needs. However, the staff do not date and sign the weekly chart, which limits its effectiveness in monitoring any progress being made.

Children are provided with guidance and advice on smoking cessation. However, the expectations and boundaries in place do not effectively deter some children from smoking. As a result, the manager and staff provide mixed messages to the children about where the children should smoke. This does not encourage children to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Children benefit from a planned approach to key-work sessions that include their set targets. However, staff do not cover the safe use of social media and socially inappropriate behaviour. This means that some children are vulnerable to potential harm, and at risk of exploitation through negative relationships.

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

Children say that they feel safe living in the home, and that they have trusting relationships with the staff. There has been a significant reduction in police being called to the home to manage the children's behaviour. Children are provided with a consistent staff team that enables them to feel safe with familiar carers.

Some children have been involved in critical incidents. However, staff are well informed and skilled in responding to the children's missing-from-home behaviour and associated behaviours that may place the children at risk. Staff report these incidents to the relevant services and carry out a coordinated response to concerns, which supports the reduction in harm. This involves high staffing levels and effective communication with professionals and family members. As a result, the amount of times that the children go missing from the home have reduced.

Children's risk management plans are thorough and provide a wealth of vital information. They highlight the children's individual triggers to risk, and their individual challenges and associated behaviours. However, the strategies identified are not always specific to help the reader to follow a step-by-step approach. The lack of clear direction for staff means that children may not always receive a consistent approach and, therefore, potentially leave the children at risk.

The staff complete regular fire drills. However, on one occasion, not all the children who were present took part. In addition, the staff do not consistently record the times of the fire drills. This does not enable effective monitoring of the drill, nor does it prepare the children and the staff for potential eventualities. This oversight may expose the children and the staff to the risk of harm.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is supported by a newly appointed deputy manager and a senior leadership team. This structure is also supported by a dedicated staff team that has a variety of skills and knowledge. Additionally, to ensure that the children's varied and competing needs are met, a core group of agency staff who are known to the

children add additional support. This helps the children to feel safe and to enjoy positive experiences while living at the home.

The manager speaks positively about the united front that the team share with the management in the care of the children. The staff spoke collectively of being supported by management and their colleagues. There are also adverts out for additional staff. This has led to an improvement in staff morale, with this positivity reflected in the care of the children.

The manager provides his staff with regular supervision. Additionally, he has ensured that there is a system in place to enable supervision and support to be provided to all agency staff and the home's casual staff. This provides the children with staff who are knowledgeable and skilled to meet their needs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, all appraisals were put on hold. Staff have still not received an appraisal and they have not been informed of when or how this will take place. This does not support the development of staff through the identification of performance targets.

The manager has improved the regular monitoring and audit systems to support the development of the home and staff practice. He also monitors and evaluates intelligence gained by reviewing the children's missing-from-home episodes and return-home interviews. This enables an effective coordinated response to support the children. As a result, the children are increasingly safe.

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— understand the barriers to learning that each child may face and take appropriate action to help the child to overcome any such barriers; help each child to understand the importance and value of education, learning, training and employment; help each child who is above compulsory school age to participate in further education, training or employment and to prepare for future care, education or employment. (Regulation 8 (1) (2)(a)(iii)(iv)(viii)) This specifically refers to the staff ensuring that any further education, training and/or employment opportunities are confirmed and carefully planned to meet the individual needs of the children, inclusive of specific healthcare.	30 September 2022
The positive relationship standard is that children are helped to develop, and benefit from, relationships based on— an understanding about acceptable behaviour. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— help each child to develop socially aware behaviour;	30 September 2022

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 damaging, exploitative or harmful relationship. (Regulation 11 (1)(b) (2)(a)(ii)(vi)(vii)) This specifically relates to the staff providing the children with relevant advice, education and support around the use of social media in a safe way.	
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; 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)(a) (2)(a)(i)(b)) This relates to the staff recording the specific risk management strategies that the staff must follow in the children's records to support safe care.	30 September 2022
After consultation with the fire and rescue authority, the registered person must— ensure, by means of fire drills and practices at suitable intervals, that persons working at the home and, so far as reasonably practicable, children are aware of the procedure to be followed in case of fire. (Regulation 25 (1)(d)) This relates to the staff ensuring that all of the children take part in fire drills and realise the significance of the danger involved.	30 September 2022

This also relates to ensuring that the staff complete and record the times that the fire drills are conducted during various times of the night and day.	
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Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the children are supported to change negative behaviours in the key area of their health and well-being, such as smoking. This relates to understanding boundaries and expectations in the home and on the premises. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 35, paragraph 7.18)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff have their performance and fitness to carry out their role formally appraised at least once annually. This appraisal should ensure that the staff are fully aware of the process and timescales for completion. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, 13.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the children's records are dated and signed by the author of each entry. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, 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: SC035181

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: Martin Poole

Inspector

Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector

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