

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	28 June 2016
Unique reference number	SC035181
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Durham County Council
Registered person address	County Hall, Durham, County Durham DH1 5UL
Responsible individual	Gillian Palin
Registered manager	Stephen Robinson
Inspector	Colin Imrie

Inspection date	28 June 2016
Previous inspection judgement	Sustained effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Requires improvement
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.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

SC035181

Summary of findings

The children's home provision requires improvement because:

- The home's statement of purpose says that it offers planned short break placements, and that it can offer occasional emergency care placements. In recent months there have been many more emergency placements and this has meant that a substantial number of planned short breaks have been cancelled for a number of children. This means that children in need have lost a valuable service part-way through planned interventions.
- Some children have been admitted to the home in an emergency despite the interim manager clearly saying that the admission was not appropriate. The local authority has imposed decisions on the interim manager. On more than one occasion, impact risk assessments around admissions made by the interim manager have been ignored by more senior managers in the local authority. These differences of opinion have made managing the home difficult and may have increased risks for some young people.
- Children and young people have been admitted to the home with very little information being given to staff. Some children have not had a care plan in place. At the time of the inspection, none of the three young people in placement had a care plan in place. Planning for children and young people admitted in an emergency has been poor. Staff have been unable to get sufficient support from placing social workers to obtain vital information or to get care plans.
- Because staff have often had insufficient information, and because plans are unclear, staff have found it to be very difficult to carry out key-work sessions, and individual care has suffered because of this. More key-work and personalised care needs to be carried out in order to provide a good service.
- The number of missing from home episodes has risen in recent months and some children and young people have not been offered independent return interviews, which means that insufficient effort has been made to reduce the risks around going missing.

The children's home strengths

- There is interim management at the home, which has been appropriate to date. However this situation is now at a point where it can be resolved and a permanent arrangement can now be made.
- The registered manager and the interim manager are both skilled and experienced managers. They are able to manage the home but have not been supported well enough by other managers in the local authority and by placing social workers.
- The staff team is skilled and experienced and has worked hard to provide the best service they can. At present they are not clear about what their task is and so cannot work as well as they are capable of doing.
- The managers and staff are skilled at providing preventative work around short breaks and outreach. However they are unable to engage in this work at present because of the high number of emergency placements that have been made.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person(s) meets 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
6. In order to meet the quality and purpose of care standard, with particular reference to ensuring appropriate key-work is carried out and planned respite is not disrupted by other work, the registered person must ensure that staff: (2)(b)(iv) provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background.	31 August 2016
12. In order to meet the protection of children standard, with particular reference to completing accurate risk assessments, minimising risk and ensuring return from missing interviews are offered to young people, the registered person must ensure that staff: (2)(a)(i) 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.	31 August 2016
13. In order to meet the leadership and management standard, with particular reference to ensuring that emergency placements are managed appropriately and that sufficient information is available to do this safely and that this information is acted upon, the registered person must lead a culture in relation to the children's home that: (1)(b) promotes their welfare.	31 August 2016
14. In order to meet the care planning standard, with particular reference to ensuring that care plans are in place for all children, the registered manager must ensure that children: (1)(a) receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home.	31 August 2016

Subject to paragraph (6), 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)). In particular, this relates to ensuring the description of the admission criteria is accurate and that the needs of all children are fully taken into account and acted upon.	31 August 2016
---	---------------------------

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home is run by a local authority and is registered for the care and accommodation of up to six children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
16 February 2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
14 October 2015	Full	Good
10 March 2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness
2 December 2014	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home	Requires improvement
The home's statement of purpose says that it offers short breaks and also that it can offer 'occasional' emergency placements. Since the last full inspection the number of emergency placements admitted to the home has increased substantially. This has meant that a number of children and young people have had their planned short breaks cancelled. There are seven children and young people currently receiving short breaks and all of these have had short breaks cancelled on a number of occasions. These are children and young people who are children in need, so their experience of receiving planned care has been poor in parts and progress has been limited. Since the last full inspection, a number of children and young people who have received a planned short break intervention have benefited to some extent and have made some progress. Some have been able to improve their relationships with their parents and have been able to return home without further intervention. Others have made progress, in that they have identified that living away from home is the best option and they have moved on to live away from their families. Some children and young people have improved their school attendance as a result of planned work during short breaks. However, other children and young people, who have been on a programme of short breaks and intervention work more recently, have had less successful outcomes. One young person who was having a series of planned breaks in order to sustain and support them living at home had these cancelled and they were later admitted to the home in an emergency placement. Other current short breaks work has been cancelled, so progress is difficult to measure and any further progress seems unlikely at the moment. There is little evidence that the spate of recent emergency placements has produced a good experience for the children and young people involved, and little evidence of progress being made in these placements. Some children and young people have returned home after short stays, which is positive. Others have moved on to other accommodation as they have been unable to return home. Progress is therefore mixed. Currently there are three young people living at the home. They have all been admitted in emergencies. Two of these are as a result of police bail conditions preventing a return home. Both youth offending workers and staff have been unable to engage one young person in work that has been ordered by the courts. The staff work hard to try to build good relationships with the children and young people, and generally they succeed well. The inspector observed young people	

being relaxed and comfortable around staff, and they were talking about their situations. However, two out of three young people living at the home currently had only been there a short time, so relationships were at an early stage.

Two out three young people living at the home currently were attending school or college, and one young person had officially left school but was not engaged in any training or further education at present.

One young person required a medical assessment but this had not yet taken place. Again, the short time-span of the placement made this difficult. One other young person was not engaging with their youth offending worker.

Meetings between staff and, children and young people had been effective and had taken place regularly. However, over the past four months these have not happened in any significant way. The children and young people placed for short emergency placements clearly have less investment in the home and less time to engage with the day-to-day running of the home. Staff were trying to ensure that young people had some say. One young person was helped to move bedrooms during the inspection after he had requested this.

The home is well kept and is homely and comfortable. There are some facilities for the children and young people, but unfortunately the home's Xbox was stolen very recently. Staff suspect that this was carried out by the young people resident currently. One young person spoken to by the inspector said, 'It's alright here,' but another declined to speak.

The staff spoken to by the inspector all felt disheartened at the current state of affairs. They felt that the staff team was strong and capable of some really good work, but that they were not being allowed to do this because of not knowing what was happening. One member of staff said, 'We are just babysitting,' and, 'We haven't been able to do any respite work.' Another staff member said, 'We just want to know where we are going.' The inspector was left with the impression that here was a group of staff who were strong, skilled and motivated but who were becoming increasingly frustrated at the disorganisation within the local authority children's services and the lack of support.

The progress and experience of the young people living in the home was varied, but currently it was poor and in need of improvement. The overwhelming impression of the inspector was that the role and purpose of the home needed an urgent review by the local authority in order to do the good work the staff team is clearly capable of doing.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young	Requires improvement

people are helped and protected	
The registered manager, the interim manager and staff have a good understanding of risk. They make good efforts to seek out the necessary information when placing social workers fail to provide sufficient pre-placement information. The interim manager has told the inspector that the risk assessments provided by social workers are often poor and sometimes non-existent. Staff do make appropriate risk assessments once the young person is admitted and do work to minimise risk. However, it is concerning that risk assessments made by the staff have been ignored on more than one occasion. A risk assessment on one young person made prior to their admission suggested that they should not be in placement with other young people. Arrangements were made for this young person to be on their own at the home for a short placement of several weeks. However, two other young people were later placed at the home in emergencies while the first young person was still resident. Predictably, the behaviour of the first young person deteriorated and they had to be moved out quickly in an unplanned move. This is poor planning and poor childcare. Although no harm is apparent at this point, ignoring risk assessments clearly puts children and young people at the risk of harm. Many of the recent emergency placements have been made as a result of young people involved in criminal activity being given police bail conditions not to reside at their family address. While it may well be appropriate for these young people to be accommodated in a children's home, their needs often conflict with those of other children and young people who are engaged in short breaks and who are working on other issues in their lives. Staff commented that meeting the very different needs of the two groups of children and young people was often very difficult. Children and young people at the home for short breaks were usually expected to stay with staff and to be working on specific issues or activities, while staff found young people who were bailed often wanted to be out of the home and to be unsupervised. These conflicts were such that the registered manager and the interim manager have had very little option but to suspend or cancel the short break work. The number of missing from home incidents has increased as the number of emergency admissions has increased. Staff have found it harder to prevent these children and young people from going missing and have been unable to get social workers to do the return home interviews, despite escalating these concerns. One young person, who was admitted as an emergency, was reported missing 12 times during their 22 day stay, and this included eight overnight missing episodes. Despite frequent requests from the interim manager, no return interviews were carried out until the day the young person left the home. This young person was not kept safe and efforts to try to improve the situation by providing the return interviews were inadequate. The staff try hard to give children and young people clear boundaries and clear expectations. They do not use sanctions very much, preferring to rely on	

discussion and negotiation. Staff have carried out a small number of physical restraints when some children and young people have become aggressive or when they have caused serious damage to property. These restraints have been appropriate and have been recorded well.

There have been no recorded concerns about actual child sexual exploitation, but clearly there are concerns when children and young people go missing. Staff have had training in this area and are aware of the issues.

No bullying at the home has been identified by staff and none has been reported by any child or young person.

Some young people have issues and concerns recognised in their risk assessments but often there is no key-work carried out to address these issues. This is often difficult because of the short-term nature of the emergency work.

There are clearly improvements required in terms of helping children and young people to stay safer. A requirement has been made to ensure that risk assessments are accurate and, more importantly, are followed and to ensure that return from missing interviews are always held.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement
The home has had some difficulties since the last full inspection. There have been high levels of staff sickness and the registered manager and staff team have worked hard to cover for these absences without bringing in workers from outside. This has benefited the children and young people by ensuring consistency, but has put more pressure on staff. Further pressures have come from an increased number of emergency placements and from the subsequent disruption to the core work of providing planned short break placements. In the later part of this period, the registered manager has had some absences from work, and an interim manager was put in place on 1 April 2016. These interim arrangements have been appropriate and have continued up until this inspection. The registered manager is now able to return to work and the registered provider is in the process of ensuring that appropriate and permanent arrangements are being put in place. Both the registered manager and the interim manager are very experienced in this work and both hold appropriate qualifications for the post. Both the registered manager and the interim manager are very child-centred and	

clearly prioritise the needs of the children and young people they look after. They remain motivated and enthusiastic. This has been difficult at times because of the increase in emergency placements and the necessary cancelling of short break placements.

Both the interim manager and the responsible individual are clear that the interim manager's decisions not to admit a young person to the home have been overruled by other more senior managers in the local authority.

It is clear, therefore, that the home is not fully meeting the aims and objectives of the home's statement of purpose. Too many emergency admissions are causing short break care to be restricted, and to stop for long periods, and clearly the children and young people being admitted are significantly impacting on those already at the home. There is also too little care planning taking place at times. A requirement has been made to ensure that the statement of purpose accurately describes the role of the home.

At the previous interim inspection, a requirement was made to provide more personalised care by ensuring more key-work was carried out, and to ensure that planned respite care was not repeatedly cancelled. This has not happened, and so the requirement is raised again.

Further requirements have now been made to ensure that care planning is much tighter, to ensure that the balance of emergency placements and short break placements is restored so that all the children's and young people's welfare is promoted.

Both the registered manager and the interim manager are held in high regard by staff. All the staff are appropriately qualified and all are up to date with their core training. Other training was taking place and all the staff had recently completed their 'Prevent' duty training. Supervisions were happening and staff felt supported. There have been no changes in staff, so therefore no recruitment has taken place. The staff team are used to working with each other and have formed a strong team.

Both the registered manager and the interim manager were very clear about the current difficulties and both were frustrated about the lack of progress outside of the home to resolve these issues. The responsible individual was also very clear about these issues. They were new in post and were clearly tackling the issues at a higher level. The interim manager commented that the responsible individual had been very supportive in the short time since taking up the post and that they were pleased with this.

The registered manager has excellent knowledge of external services and has good relationships with them. Both he and the interim manager are well able to negotiate appropriate services and to escalate matters or to challenge others when there are problems. They are very motivated to provide the children and young people in their care with the best possible support and external services.

A requirement has not been made under regulation 5 about the need to escalate

issues to higher management. The inspector has concluded that issues have been appropriately escalated by both the interim manager and the registered manager, but that these issues have not been addressed sufficiently well at a higher level within the local authority.

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of children looked after is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place. However, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, 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 who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service 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'.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It inspects services for children looked after and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2016