

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 is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to five children who may have emotional and social difficulties. Five children live in the home.

The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2019.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020. The home was last inspected in May 2019. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 28 to 29 September 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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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: 21 May 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
21/05/2019	Full	Good
09/05/2018	Full	Good
20/02/2018	Interim	Improved effectiveness
03/10/2017	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

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

Children's daily lived experiences are varied. A change in the group living, with new children moving into the home, has had a significant impact on the relationships that children have with each other. A professional commented: 'The dynamics have shifted, and it is not always positive for [Name]. The staff are addressing this and manage all the children's behaviours as best as they can.'

Children who have moved on and left the home have positive experiences during their transition period. This has supported the stability of children's future living arrangements, which aids their continued progress.

Children are supported to achieve good health and well-being. Children are encouraged to be active, and they have access to clubs, such as street dance and sporting activities. For some children, their physical health has improved.

Education is supported in line with children's education plans. When the children are not attending education, the staff work with a range of professionals to reintegrate children back into education, which supports the children's learning. However, when the children do not attend training or employment, there is no clear plan in place to support the children's engagement and attendance. This does not promote the children's continued development and achievements.

Children's relationships with their family members have improved significantly. Children are supported to spend time with their family and friends. Key relationships with the children and their family are maintained via the staff following the children's plans.

The manager has a maintenance plan to improve the living standards in the home. There is some damage that has occurred when the children have been in crisis. Repairs are required, including those arising from wear and tear, and new flooring is needed. Conditions in the children's bedrooms are varied, and are poor in some respects. For example, there is poor-quality bedding, minor damage to the walls, damage to the furniture and some of the rooms require a clean and tidy. This gives children negative messages about acceptable standards of care. The manager's monitoring system has not identified this as a shortfall.

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

Some children say that they do not always feel safe living in the home. This is because they have witnessed seeing an increase in significant incidents. Some incidents have resulted in the police being called to the home. A child said: 'It has changed my experiences of living here. I don't like having to live in a home where

there is damage and other kids arguing and fighting with each other. The neighbours know about stuff and it's embarrassing. It isn't great at the moment, but it could be if [Name of manager] addresses the issue.'

Despite pre-admission risk assessments being completed prior to children moving into the home, the current mix of children living in the home is not good. Children's behaviours and known risks are not suitably considered before they move into the home. This does not demonstrate effective care planning for children.

An incident has occurred involving the staff using a measure of control to manage children's behaviour. The incident is not adequately recorded. There is no record of the measure, reasons for it or any outcome. The manager does not identify this as being necessary. Therefore, he has not identified this as a shortfall in the staff's practice as part of his monitoring. This does not provide the staff with clear guidance around how to record the measures of control to manage the children's behaviour. Furthermore, the manager cannot assure himself that staff practice remains safe, necessary and appropriate.

When there are significant incidents involving the children, the staff follow the appropriate processes and report these incidents to the relevant agencies. Children's safety plans are updated regularly to highlight recent or new areas of risk. Staff follow the children's safety plans, which helps to mitigate some risk of harm. However, some children's behaviours are impulsive, and this limits how quickly the staff can intervene. Children say that this has been unsettling.

The manager has a system for recording the consequences that are used to manage the children's behaviour. However, there is an inconsistent approach in staff using these consequences to manage the children's behaviour. For example, not all of the consequences used are restorative in nature. This does not provide the children with opportunities to learn consistently from their behaviour.

The manager reviews the home's locality risk assessment annually. Since the locality risk assessment was last updated several months ago, an incident relating to the children and the wider community occurred. This information is not included in the locality risk assessment. Therefore, the locality risk assessment is not sufficiently detailed to help inform the children's plans and risk assessments.

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

The manager is suitably qualified and experienced. He is supported in his role by a nurturing staff team whose members have varied skills and knowledge. Furthermore, there is a good gender balance within the staff team, which enhances the children's experiences of being cared for.

The manager has systems in place to monitor the day-to-day practice of the staff. This covers areas such as staff checking children's bedrooms, completing key-working sessions with the children, attending meetings and much more. However,

the system is not effective as there is an inconsistent approach to how the staff use the system. This means that the manager cannot evaluate the quality of care for children effectively.

There has been a period of unsettlement due to the mix of the children currently living in the home. Despite this unsettled period, a core team of staff continue to support each child. Staff have made comments including 'We want to do our best for our children,' and 'It has been difficult, but we support every child in our care.' The resilience of the staff team has reduced the need to rely on external or agency staff. This improves the consistency of care provided for children.

Staff say that they are supported in their roles. Training, team meetings and regular staff supervisions provide the staff with opportunities to develop and learn. Supervision gives the staff opportunities to reflect on their practice and discuss ways of supporting the children. Children receive better support because of this.

How staff record in children's documents is not consistently good. For example, the use of language can be misleading, some details are lacking and, in some instances, not recorded at all. This limits the manager's ability to monitor the children's experiences and progress effectively. Furthermore, poor recordings in the children's documents do not always help them to understand how they will be helped and protected.

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, and the 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— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff— treat each child with dignity and respect; and ensure that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed and furnished so as to meet the needs of each child. (Regulation 6 (1) (2)(a)(b)(i)(iii)(c)(i))	28 October 2021
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 use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(h))	28 October 2021
The care planning standard is that children—	28 October 2021

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 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)) This specifically relates to the provider ensuring that children's care plans are explicit and detail how children will be supported to access training or employment. This specifically relates to the provider ensuring that new admissions are carefully considered and that children are only admitted to the home if their range of needs can be safely met.	
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— the name of the child; details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of the measure; the date, time and location of the use of the measure; a description of the measure and its duration; details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure; the name of the person who used the measure ("the user"), and of any other person present when the measure was used; the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and	28 October 2021

a description of any injury to the child or any other person, and any medical treatment administered, as a result of the measure;

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)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(viii) (b)(i)(ii)(c)(iv))

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that any sanctions used to manage children's behaviour are restorative, and that they help children to learn from their behaviour. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 64, paragraph 9.38)
- The registered person should ensure that the home's locality risk assessment assists in assessing risks to each child and the arrangements in place to protect them. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards' page 42, paragraph 9.5)
- The registered person should ensure that staff are familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Staff should record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards' page 62, paragraph 14.4)

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: Claire Morris

Registered manager: Martin Poole

Inspector

Jacqueline Tate, Social Care Inspector

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