

SC035220

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. The home provides care for up to three children with social and emotional difficulties.

The manager was registered with Ofsted in January 2022.

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

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 April 2022

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

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

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 are poor, and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 11 May 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/05/2021	Full	Good
05/11/2019	Full	Good
16/10/2018	Full	Good
24/10/2017	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Children do not make progress in key areas of their lives and their experiences are poor. While the manager completes an impact risk assessment prior to a child moving into the home, these assessments do not consider the children's ages and their competing needs, risks and vulnerabilities. This does not enable the children to have a positive experience of living in a settled environment.

Children's educational outcomes are inadequate. While the manager and staff work with the virtual head and alternative educational providers, children do not attend school or an alternative education provision of their choice. This leaves children at a disadvantage, socially and educationally, to the peers of their own age, and hinders their life-long employment chances.

The manager and staff have not been effective in helping one child to consider the dangers that are associated with their misuse of drugs and alcohol. This has a negative effect on their health outcomes.

Children have experienced periods of instability due to the number of different care givers, and some have had their home life disrupted. This is because the manager and staff have been unable to care for children safely.

While some children continue to enjoy positive time with their family members, other children's relationships have broken down. This prevents children from developing and maintaining their sense of identity.

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

Staff do not consistently request the identification of visitors before they enter the home. This was particularly relevant to the use of agency staff. This potentially leaves children at risk of harm.

Staff regularly review children's risk assessments and maintain effective communication with multi-agency safeguarding professionals. This ensures that when incidents occur, agreed protocols are followed and timely action can be taken. However, action taken in one situation reviewed was not shared with Ofsted. This does not enable Ofsted to monitor the provider's safeguarding practice. On this occasion, this has not left children at risk.

Staff are proactive in following children's individual missing-from-care protocols. They have well-established links with local police and make every effort to maintain communication with the children while they are out in the community. Staff record and share information thoroughly with relevant parties. However, the evaluation of

missing-from-home incidents is inconsistent. This does not enable the manager and her staff to identify what worked well, and what could be improved to keep children safe.

Children receive support from staff when they are in crisis and struggling. Staff are trained to use physical interventions and approved de-escalation techniques. However, the manager does not have a system in place to ensure that the agency staff are provided with the same level of training and expertise. This potentially leaves children at risk of harm.

The physical environment of the home is well-maintained and free of hazards. Children's personal space and privacy is respected. Staff follow agreed health and safety checks daily. This includes, ensuring that the children are supported to maintain a clean and tidy bedroom. This helps the children with their physical and emotional well-being as well as increasing their independence skills.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The registered manager is qualified. While she is now supported in her role by a newly established senior staff team, this has not ensured that the children are helped to enjoy positive experiences and make progress.

The staffing arrangements are insufficient. There is an over reliance on the use of agency staff to ensure that there are sufficient staffing levels in the home to care for children. The constant changes to the staff team prevents children from developing positive and meaning relationships with their caring adults, and this does not provide continuity of care for children.

The manager does not have a system in place to have direct oversight of employment checks for new staff as these are done by the local authorities human resource department. This seriously limits the manager's ability to ensure herself that she is compliant with the regulations, and that safer recruitment has been adhered to fully.

The manager reviews the children's experiences of living in the home. When the manager identifies that she cannot keep the children safe, she raises this with the senior management team. However, on one occasion, the manager has not contacted the child's independent reviewing officer to request a formal review of the child's care plan. This oversight prevents independent scrutiny to ensure that the child's care plan and placement continue to meet their needs safely.

The manager ensures that the staff receive regular supervision. This has consistently improved since her appointment. However, senior managers have failed to provide the manager with regular formal supervision. This has left her lacking the leadership support to be able to reflect on the care of the children.

The manager completes a quality-of-care review in a timely manner. However, the process for further evaluation and leadership oversight has not then led to the final

report being sent to Ofsted. This limits the effectiveness of the external monitoring of care provided to children by the regulator.

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 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— understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person. (Regulation 12 (1)(a) (2)(a)(v)) This relates specifically to ensuring that the management and staff clarify the identity of any visitors to the home.	26 May 2022
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's 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 on the home's statement of purpose. (Regulation 14 (1)(a) (2)(a)) The registered provider must ensure that when they complete an impact risk assessment for a child that move into the home, that the risk assessment suitably evaluates and considers all of the child's known risks and emerging needs and evaluates how these may impact on the children already living in the home.	26 May 2022
The care planning standard is that children—	26 May 2022

receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that the child's placing authority is contacted, and a review of that child's relevant plans is requested, if— the registered person considers that the child is at risk of harm or has concerns that the care provided for the child is inadequate to meet the child's needs; the child is, or has been persistently absent from the home without permission; or the child requests a review of the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 14 (1)(a) (2)(e)(i)(ii)(iii))	
The registered person must ensure that the employment of any person on a temporary basis at the children's home does not prevent children from receiving such continuity of care as is reasonable to meet their needs. (Regulation 31 (1)) This relates to the over reliance on the use of agency staff to fill shortfalls in staffing levels.	26 May 2022
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The registered person may only— if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). The requirements are that— the individual is of integrity and good character; the individual has the appropriate experience, qualifications and skills for the work that the individual is to perform; the individual is mentally and physically fit for the purpose of the work that the individual is to perform; and	26 May 2022

full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1) (2)(b) (3)(a)(b)(c)(d)) This relates specifically to the manager having a system in place that enables her to have direct oversight and full evaluation of employment checks undertaken.	
The registered person must ensure that all employees receive a practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33 (4)(b)) This refers specifically to the registered manager of the home receiving regular formal supervision and a record maintained.	26 May 2022
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation; an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious; there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(a)(b)(e)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that an accumulation of significant events, such as missing from care and associated risks, which lead to a strategy meeting or multi-agency meeting are notified to HMCI, without delay.	26 May 2022
The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children ("quality of care review") at least once every 6 months. The registered person must— supply to HMCI a copy of the quality of care review report within 28 days of the date on which the quality of care review is completed. (Regulation 45 (1) (4)(a))	26 May 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children's home staff act as effective advocates for and on behalf of children to enable children to return to education in accordance with their care plans as soon as possible. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 28, paragraph 5.12)
- The registered person should ensure that, in line with their individual health plans and ethos of the home, children are offered advice, support and guidance on health and well-being. Specifically, support to change negative behaviours in key areas of health and well-being such as, drugs and alcohol and tobacco. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 35, paragraph 7.18)
- The registered person should ensure that records are kept that detail all the individual incidents when children go missing from the home (regulation 36 (schedule 3(14))). This specifically refers to the evaluating the missing from home incidents to identify any gaps in training, skills, or knowledge of the staff, or to retain evidence of what worked well. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.31)
- The registered person should ensure that the use of external agency staff should meet the requirements in regulation 32(4) regarding mandatory qualifications, and the registered manager should have a system in place whereupon they are able to consider the skills, qualifications and any induction necessary before they commence work in the home. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.16)

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: SC035220

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: Emma Atkinson

Inspector

Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector

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