

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 run by a local authority and is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to three children and young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and/or learning disabilities.

Inspection dates: 24 to 25 October 2017

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 28 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: improved effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is outstanding because:

- The leadership and management of the home are exceptional. The registered manager is skilled and highly effective. She is confident and is ambitious for the children.

- The registered manager is very clear about which children can be admitted to the home and in what circumstances. The admissions procedure and pre-admission assessments are rigorous, as are the plans for transition from the home to the next placement.
- The staff team works to a therapeutic model that is simple to deliver and is effective. All of the staff have received training in how to operate this model and this is ongoing. The staff team is fully supported by the local authority therapeutic services and in particular by the lead clinical psychologist.
- The children make good or exceptional progress across all areas of their lives. This is due to the consistent and intensive personalised work carried out by the staff and by external specialist workers.
- The children are making good progress at school and this is aided by excellent communication between the staff of the home and school.
- The home is made homely and cosy by the staff. The care offered is nurturing as well as therapeutic. Staff go above and beyond what is required and are enthusiastic and motivated as well as being experienced and skilled.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
28/03/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness
21/12/2016	Full	Outstanding
15/12/2015	Full	Outstanding
04/08/2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The statement of purpose clearly sets out the role and function of the home. The staff offer placements to younger children with a view to returning them to a foster care or family environment. The staff team delivers care following a recognised therapeutic model. The staff at the home were all selected to work in this way and are specifically trained to offer care according to this model. The registered manager ensures that a meticulous assessment is made before any child is admitted to the home and oversees the therapeutic process in action. This clarity of purpose and procedures and the strong leadership provide an excellent base for all the work carried out at the home.

The staff are skilled and experienced, and enthusiastic and committed to their work. They provide a warm and homely environment where the children thrive. The experience of living in the home is exceptional. The children have excellent relationships with the staff and this was clear for the inspector to see. Children approach staff easily. They can ask for advice or guidance or ask questions, and they laugh and joke with staff. The staff are happy to provide hugs and cuddles in an appropriate way and the children relish

this. The staff give the children positive attention at all times.

The staff team works well together. Communication is thorough and detailed. The staff team has remained stable and staff know each other well. This not only makes for strong care practices but also creates a more family-like environment which is caring and supportive.

All the children are progressing, and for most the progress is exceptional. One child has transformed from being quiet, closed-down and lacking in confidence with poor self-esteem to a happy, confident, resilient child who clearly enjoys life in all its aspects. Another child has been supported to change their behaviour from being angry, destructive and abusive to being relaxed, thoughtful and calm. When staff showed this child a written summary of the changes they had made the child said, 'My heart used to be broken but now it feels healed and fixed'.

The therapeutic approach is successful. The model is based on concepts of playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy. It allows the staff to provide positive nurturing care at all times. The work is backed up by in-depth personalised work provided by both the staff and by a range of specialist external workers. Much of this work is interwoven with stories and narratives either taken from specialist resources or written by the staff. One particular narrative was written by some of the staff about a safeguarding incident. The story explained what had happened in easy to understand language. It helped staff explain what is ok and what is not ok and also the responsibilities and the issues involved. It did this without casting blame and with clarity. The quality of this and other pieces of work is excellent and is partly responsible for the development and progress of the children.

All of the staff are engaged in the personalised work with children. They are skilled in a range of topics – life stories, regression, identity and self-esteem – and have the oversight of an external consultant psychologist. The staff are quick to praise and are incredibly positive with the children.

All the children have very good attendance at school and they are all achieving impressively. One child's school report says, 'It's been lovely to see how well [name of the child] has progressed this year. She is more focused and has gained in confidence enormously. I watched her take part in the Shakespeare performance with great pleasure.'

The excellent care offered by the staff also extends to working with families. One child is rebuilding a relationship with their parent. Prior to one of the first supervised contacts, the staff spent time helping the child prepare themselves and make presents to give their family. The result was an excellent, positive meeting that both the family and child found supportive and fulfilling. The parent later wrote to the registered manager saying how positive the meeting had been and how well their child was developing and making progress.

The inspector spoke to the consultant clinical psychologist who supports the staff team and the children. She was full of praise for the registered manager and the staff and was clearly impressed by the standard of work at the home.

The staff put a big emphasis on the children's health, encouraging exercise and healthy eating. One child was admitted to the home with a prescription for a variety of

medication to control behaviour and mood. Over time, the staff have worked with medical staff to reduce this intervention to a very low level and this has resulted in a change of diagnosis. The child is now calm and flourishing, which is a testament to the ability and motivation of the staff. A number of the children who arrived with poor sleep routines have now improved these considerably.

All the children take part in activities out in the community, enabling them to grow in confidence, gain social skills and make friends. One child now plays football for a local team without supervision, which would have been impossible until recently due to their behaviour. Other children enjoy horse riding, swimming and riding their scooter. One child was enrolled in a local acting school. A child who arrived with no interest in their appearance now loves clothes shopping with staff.

Care planning is also completed exceedingly well. Great care is taken at admission and considerable care is taken in planning the transitions on from the home. Again, the use of stories and narratives is used to good effect. Recording in the children's file is child-friendly and children are supported to take part in decision-making when appropriate. The processes of planning are child-centred and nurturing.

The inspector was impressed with the resources at the home. Toys, games and particularly books were plentiful. Posters in the dining room ranged from cartoon figures to maps of the world and a times table poster.

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

The children at this home are kept very safe. The staff understand risks and make excellent assessments of risk. They assess risk around each child and around activities and put good control measures in place to minimise harm. At the last inspection a recommendation was made to review risk assessments and the staff have responded by reviewing all risk assessments monthly or more frequently if required.

The staff ensure the children have clear routines, and this is important considering their young age. The staff are clear about boundaries and about expectations and the children respond well to this.

There have been no episodes of missing from the home.

There has been one safeguarding incident in the home, between two children of the same age. The staff reported this as a potential child protection incident and it was investigated but no further formal action was taken. The staff have reacted to this incident with thoroughness and sensitivity. They have added bedroom door alarms to the house and have undertaken in-depth work with both children. One child has undergone a specialist assessment and additional work with an external specialist worker and a member of staff from the home. Both children were worked with in an age-appropriate way to understand what had happened. This was an excellent piece of work and as a result both children have been educated and reassured about what happened.

The staff engage in a great deal of in-depth personal work to help all the children understand their past difficulties and traumas and to understand what has happened to them. This undoubtedly helps them come to terms with the past and build resilience for the future. This comprehensive work contributes significantly to the reduction of risk

because it successfully tackles underlying issues.

The staff also reported an incident to child protection when one of the children came home from school and said they had been hurt by a teacher. Again this was fully investigated and the issues was resolved quickly and effectively.

The staff avoid the use of sanctions as they prefer to reward positive behaviour. They are, however, prepared to hold children on the few occasions when children lose control and start to cause damage or harm. This does not happen very often and any physical interventions are short and use minimal force. When interventions have been used the action is appropriate.

There is no doubt that the children living in this home feel safe and secure, and dedicated and vigilant staff ensure that their safety is paramount.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager has worked at the home almost since it was opened in 2014. She is appropriately qualified and is extremely skilled and experienced. She is very ambitious for the children, wanting the absolute best for all of them. She goes to considerable lengths to ensure that all children being admitted are well assessed and understood. She goes to even greater lengths to ensure that children move on to the right setting at the right time and have the right support. This involves working closely with the local authority fostering services.

The registered manager has a close relationship with the professionals in the local authority therapeutic services and has regular clinical supervision and discussion with them about the therapy offered to each child. This ensures each child receives exactly what they need in a personalised package of support and care, which in turn means that each child makes maximum progress. She has an excellent understanding of the children's needs and of their behaviour. She is able to plan the therapeutic intervention effectively in order to provide the most appropriate care.

Both she and the entire staff team prioritise the needs of children and young people. When staff are sick or have holidays, the registered manager steps in to avoid the use of any external care staff. Like all the staff, the registered manager goes above and beyond what is required of her. The children are all making excellent progress and it is the registered manager's attention to detail in all aspects of their lives that allows this.

The staff speak highly of the registered manager. One senior member of the staff team described her as 'spot on'. They went on to say the staff all want to work for her and all want to work at the home so that there are never any difficulties. Supervision and appraisals happen regularly and are of good quality. All the staff are qualified and all are up to date with their core training and refresher training. They also benefit from a good deal of additional, more advanced training arranged by the registered manager from time to time.

The registered manager knows her team well. She works hard to ensure her staff work according to the therapeutic model. However, recently when she felt practice was slipping she organised a programme of refresher training so that staff could look at themselves and review their work. They were then able to adjust what they were doing

to stay true to the model. This demonstrates excellent leadership and management and also considerable care for the staff team and the children, wanting the best for them all.

The registered manager has excellent relationships with a number of key professionals and agencies. The relationship between the registered manager and the specialist psychologists within the local authority therapeutic services is paramount to the success of the home. The registered manager also works closely with the local authority fostering services, and again this is a really important relationship. Both the registered manager and the staff have successfully challenged education providers when needed. Again, the whole staff team wants the best for the children and will insist on the best response from all involved. The registered manager leads the effort to source and access a wide variety of resources for the children. They belong to various activity groups, and access other services such as book clubs and libraries.

One recommendation was made at the previous inspection and that has been met. No requirements or recommendations were made at this inspection.

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 differences 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: SC035220

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: County Hall, Durham DH1 5UL

Responsible individual: Karen Robb

Registered manager: Joan Inns

Inspector:

Colin Imrie, social care inspector

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