

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 operated and managed by a local authority. It provides care for up to three children who may experience social and emotional difficulties and who may have learning disabilities.

The manager registered with Ofsted in November 2022. The manager was not in work at the time of this inspection. The inspection was supported by the responsible individual.

Three children were living in the home at the time of this inspection.

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 February 2025

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	requires improvement to be 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: 13 February 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
13/02/2024	Full	Good
25/07/2022	Full	Good
12/04/2022	Full	Inadequate
11/05/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children live in the home a long time, providing them with stability and a sense of belonging. Staff build trusting relationships with children. Staff know what is important for each child and understand their needs. As a result, children say the best things about living at the home are the staff and the activities.

Staff support children to access a range of activities. Staff support children to engage in hobbies of interest such as football and horse riding. This enables children to develop their identity and self-esteem. Furthermore, these experiences are captured in personalised memory books for the children to cherish.

Staff help children to spend time with their loved ones. Staff develop positive working relationships with the children's parents. This enables children to see carers and family working together in their best interests. For one child, this has supported family time moving to no longer being supervised.

Children regularly attend education. Most children are making progress academically. For one child who is experiencing difficulties at school, staff and managers have provided challenge to educational plans and strongly advocated on behalf of the child. When children do not attend education on a full-time basis, staff engage them in educational work at home.

Staff enable children to make progress from their starting points. This mainly relates to children being more 'settled' and calmer. This is due to staff understanding children's needs and providing good-quality care. One professional said, 'Since [name of child] has been there, I can't believe the progress he has made.'

Staff engage children in discussions to seek their views. Children make requests such as purchasing new toys or activities they would like to do. These requests are acted on and actively considered by adults. However, the manager's quality of care review reports do not capture the children's views about the quality of their care, demonstrating some gaps in seeking the children's views.

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

Staff ensure that children have risk assessments. However, the information contained in these documents is not accurate. The specific risks and safety measures are not clear to the reader, for example stating the child becomes 'dysregulated', but there is no description of what this looks like for the child, to inform staff of how they should respond. Aspects that have never been a risk for children are included, such as children making allegations. This causes confusion and leads to children receiving inconsistent responses.

Staff write care plans for children. Some important aspects of the child's needs are contained, but not all. The plans do not always link with recommendations made in statutory assessments such as health assessments. This limits the reader having the most up-to-date plan to follow. However, in practice, actions are being carried out, for example ensuring that children have access to a healthy balanced diet.

The use of language within documents and some conversations is not always language that cares. For example, one document states that '[name of child] may place themselves at risk'. This does not keep in focus the child's needs. Senior leaders continue to work to address this across the organisation.

The use of physical intervention is not always proportionate. Staff hold children for excessive periods of time, which is particularly concerning given the young age of the children. For example, one child was held for being verbally abusive to staff. This will likely have an impact on the children's emotional well-being. There is limited reflection and management oversight of these incidents that aim to change practice and develop different ways of managing behaviour.

Staff always support children on a one-to-one basis. However, they do not always help children to engage in activities together. This disproportionate practice prevents children from having important social experiences with their peers. Staff do not always engage children in discussions to develop their skills in living with others, or learning from incidents that occur in the home. This does not support children's long-term plans of moving to foster care.

Staff activate nighttime alarms on children's bedroom doors. The use of the alarm is not proportionate to the children's needs. For example, some children do not often wake during the night. This demonstrates an institutional and generic approach to care.

The children's health needs are being met. Staff advocate to ensure that children receive the correct services they are entitled to. One child is now prescribed glasses and hearing aids. This has seen a reduction in the number of behavioural incidents because of the child's health needs being met.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The deputy manager is overseeing the home in the absence of the registered manager, with the support from senior leaders. At present, this has not had a direct impact on children. In the absence of the manager, staff can articulate their thorough understanding of the children's needs and how they are supporting them.

Staff and managers advocate on behalf of children to ensure that their needs are being met by the wider care team. Staff support children to attend specialist appointments and contribute to referrals for additional support. The managers provide challenge to partner agencies when plans are not considered effective for children.

There is strong multi-agency working for each of the children. The manager utilises support from partner agencies. One professional said, 'They [staff and managers] will ask for advice and guidance. They also update me, for example if one of the children has attended a doctor's appointment. They keep me informed.'

The manager has monitoring systems that cover a range of aspects, including the children's care, staffing and the management of the building. The manager delegates tasks to more experienced staff, such as case file audits, to promote a shared accountability. When actions are identified they are acted on.

Staff benefit from regular practice-related supervision sessions and team meetings, some of which are reflective. The children are discussed in detail, providing staff with current information. Guest speakers attend meetings to enhance the staff's knowledge and skills.

Staff benefit from accessing training, and the provider's mandatory training is up to date. The manager supporting in the registered manager's absence has identified further training for staff to access to support them in their roles. This enables children to be cared for by skilled and knowledgeable adults.

Senior leaders have a good understanding and acceptance of the shortfalls raised in how well children are helped and protected. They are undertaking initial steps to address the concerns raised.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards'. The registered person must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The positive relationships standard The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust; an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and positive responses to other children and adults. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— meet each child's behavioural and emotional needs, as set out in the child's relevant plans; help each child to develop socially aware behaviour; encourage each child to take responsibility for the child's behaviour, in accordance with the child's age and understanding; help each child to develop and practise skills to resolve conflicts positively and without harm to anyone; communicate to each child expectations about the child's behaviour and ensure that the child understands those expectations in accordance with the child's age and understanding; are provided with supervision and support to enable them to understand and manage their own feelings and responses to the behaviour and emotions of children, and to help children to do the same;	13 April 2025

de-escalate confrontations with or between children, or potentially violent behaviour by children; that each child is encouraged to build and maintain positive relationships with others. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(x)(xi)(b))	
Restraint and deprivation of liberty Restraint in relation to a child is only permitted for the purpose of preventing— injury to any person (including the child); serious damage to the property of any person (including the child); or a child who is accommodated in a secure children's home from absconding from the home. Restraint in relation to a child must be necessary and proportionate. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2))	13 April 2025
Privacy and access The registered person must ensure that— any limitation placed on a child's privacy or access to any area of the home's premises— is necessary and proportionate; is kept under review and, if necessary, revised. (Regulation 21 (c)(ii)(iii))	13 April 2025

Recommendations

- Staff should be 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)

- The registered person should have a system in place that allows them to monitor the matters set out in the regulation at least once every six months. The registered person should undertake a review that focuses on the quality of the care provided by the home, the experiences of children living there and the impact the care is having on outcomes and improvements for the children. In particular, the registered person should ensure that the views of children are captured within the review. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 64, paragraph 15.2)

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: Fostering & Adoption Team, Spectrum 8, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham SR7 7TT

Responsible individual: Paul Rudd

Registered manager: Paula Murtha

Inspector

Jess Elliott, Social Care Inspector

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