

SC035235

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 with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Inspection dates: 6 to 7 June 2017

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	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: 14 February 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: Improved effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because

- The leadership and management are good. The registered manager is skilled and highly experienced. She leads her team well and ensures that the standard of care remains high. She is constantly looking for ways to develop the service and this is clearly working well, because the service continues to develop and

care practice continues to improve.

- The staff team is also skilled and experienced and all of the staff are clearly committed to and are enthusiastic about their work. They develop very good nurturing relationships with the children and young people and have created a lovely homely environment where the children and young people clearly feel safe and secure.
- The children and young people make good progress. Staff contribute to this by carrying out good individualised work with them but also refer them to external specialist workers for counselling, advice and guidance when they require this. All of the children and young people currently receive specialist support for various issues and this is really positive.
- The staff understand the risks around the children and young people and make good assessments of these. These assessments are up to date and are constantly reviewed and adjusted so that measures can be put in place to minimise risk. The staff also complete relevant work with the children and young people to ensure that they are best able to protect themselves. All of this means that the children and young people are kept safe at this home.
- Care planning is also carried out well. The children and young people contribute to this process. It is clear that placement plans are regularly reviewed and that all of the children's and young people's needs are understood and met as best as possible. Because the staff work with the children and young people on areas of need which are identified, then these needs are met and progress is made.

The children's home's areas for development

- Some of the records made by the staff were not as good or as accurate as they should be. A personal education plan was not on file, one of the reports that was initially missing was not accurate and a risk assessment was not recorded consistently. Some records that evidence progress could have included more detail.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/02/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness
11/10/2016	Full	Good
11/03/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
15/12/2015	Full	Good

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 registered provider must maintain records ("case records") for each child which are kept up to date. (Regulation 36 (1)(b))	07/08/2017

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The home has experienced some changes recently. One young person has left the home after living there for an extended period. This young person was almost 18 years old and required some specialist mental health support following an illness. Another young person was admitted for a short-term placement and left shortly afterwards in a successfully planned move. More recently, two other children and young people have moved into the home for planned long-term placements. One young person has remained at the home throughout. The home has now become more settled. There have been no staffing changes at all, and this has helped with the various transitions. The staff team has adapted well to the challenges of looking after a range of children and young people with very different needs.

The staff team is nurturing and caring and make the home a comfortable and relaxed place to live. The staff team develops excellent relationships with the children and young people. Consequently, the children and young people are able to build trusting relationships with the staff and are able to feel safe and secure. Because of this, they are thriving.

The children and young people currently living at the home have a range of learning difficulties and disabilities, and all require considerable support. The staff team does this well, and provides good quality individualised work that is effective and that deals with all the relevant issues. The staff also refer the children and young people to external workers for more specialised support and interventions. The combination of both forms of support works well and there is good communication and understanding between all the workers involved. Some of the children and young people receive support from mental and emotional health workers, and this has been effective. Others receive counselling and another receives guidance from a youth offending worker.

Because the children and young people feel safe, and because staff meet their needs well, they are able to grow and mature and make good progress in most areas of their lives.

The inspector observed that one young person has made excellent progress with their communication skills, with their social skills and with their confidence. This is excellent progress for this young person and means that they are able to become more independent and to be able to keep themselves safer. Two other young people have settled well. Their behaviour has improved and they are starting to achieve more. One young person is doing much better at school and in building relationships, another is becoming more independent. One young person proudly told the inspector about his new paper round, which they had just started and which was going well.

The staff team is good at encouraging the children and young people to complete household tasks and to practise independence skills. Some of the children and young people were keen to cook, and the inspector was able to enjoy home-baked cake and a meal that were cooked by the children and young people. The children and young people are able to contribute to many aspects of daily living and enjoy local shopping and leisure opportunities. They all attend local clubs and leisure centres, including scouts and cadets, which enhances their independence and self-esteem. The staff monitor these situations really well by getting to know the group leaders and leisure centre workers and maintain regular contact if issues arise.

All of the children and young people attend school regularly and they are all achieving success at the level they are working at. They experience some difficulties at their schools because of their sometimes challenging behaviour, but good communication and good support from the care staff enables the school staff to work positively with them and maintain their placements.

Most of the children and young people have some health needs and staff work hard to ensure that these are met. Health appointments and checks are made and kept routinely. One lively child has had a number of accidents, and staff have worked hard with them to ensure that they recover fully before starting more physical activities. One young person has just had a specialist health assessment for autistic spectrum disorder, and there is now an increase in external support for this young person. The staff have also undertaken more specialist training in order to increase their knowledge of the issues diagnosed. This will ensure that the young person's needs are met with increased skill and consistency.

Care planning at the home is good. The children and young people are able to contribute to this. Staff tailor their individual work to meet needs identified in care plans and these plans are reviewed regularly.

The inspector felt that some of the record-keeping needed to be a little more accurate and also that one personal education plan was missing from the records. A requirement has been made to keep all records up to date.

The staff are also good at supporting the children and young people to maintain and develop contact with their families. Progress was evident with some of the children and

young people. The staff were also good at encouraging and supporting appropriate friendships outside of the home.

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

The children and young people at this home are kept safe. The staff clearly understand risks and work hard to keep these under review to manage and minimise risk. Risks around the young people were generally reducing. For one child, the risks appeared to have risen a little. The risks around this child were assessed when the child was admitted. However, as the staff got to know the child, it became apparent that some of the risks were a little higher than first thought. This is good work and demonstrates not only that staff are vigilant, but also that they are accurate and professional. One risk assessment did require a small correction, but generally the standard of the assessments was good.

The staff take a proportionate approach to the children and young people going out on their own for free time. They continue to encourage this while putting in appropriate monitoring and checks. Staff have made it their business to get to know local shopkeepers and leisure centre staff so that they be contacted if any issues arise with one young person in particular. This young person also has a two-way radio given to them so that they can contact staff while they are out if they need to, and staff can contact them if needed. This arrangement works well, and works better than giving out a mobile phone, which is inappropriate in these circumstances.

There was a safeguarding incident at the home which was properly reported, notified and dealt with by the staff. The staff took appropriate action and the incident was not repeated.

The staff do ensure that the children and young people are aware of boundaries and expectations and generally this works well. However, from time to time there are arguments and squabbles between the children and young people which require staff intervention. These interventions by the staff are to calm the situation down and prevent further difficulties. Without these interventions, the situations could easily become bullying, so the staff work well to prevent this happening, and largely succeed. The staff have not used any sanctions, apart from one occasion when a misused bus fare had to be paid back. The use of physical interventions is also very infrequent. Most challenging behaviour of the children and young people is dealt with by staff using firm, clear and consistent dialogue and negotiation. The staff team has also introduced an incentive scheme whereby points and stars can be earned by the children and young people for completing agreed tasks or for positive behaviour. This has been well received by the children and young people and is being effective in encouraging appropriate behaviour and action.

There have been some low level concerns about the possibility of inappropriate relationships developing between the children and young people and the possibility of inappropriate touching. Staff have addressed these concerns well, with individualised work around relationships and safe touching. This work has been thorough and has

prevented these concerns from becoming anything more serious. This is excellent work. Individual work around relationships is now ongoing. The staff were able to acquire resources devised by a national child protection charity for this purpose, and have used these well.

Levels of missing from home have been low and recently have stopped altogether. One child, who ran out of the house one afternoon after becoming angry, was reported missing immediately and located very quickly by vigilant staff.

The staff have reviewed the children's and young people's internet access at the home and have purchased a new filter system, which they feel is better than the previous one. Although there have not been any issues about internet access, this does show good proactive working.

Some of the children and young people at the home have histories of self-harming behaviour prior to living at this home. However, this has decreased considerably because the children and young people concerned clearly feel safe and secure.

It is therefore clear to the inspector, that the children and young people at this home are becoming increasingly safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is very well qualified and has extensive experience of running this children's home. She is a very good manager who is liked, respected and supported by her staff team. In turn, she leads the team well and provides good support for her staff. All members of the staff team are qualified and all are well trained. The manager has bought in specialised training when required and also ensures that staff complete appropriate refresher training as needed. Annual appraisals are completed and supervision is regular and constructive. The registered manager has built a team of skilled and committed workers who work well together and who are effective in their care practices.

The registered manager also priorities the needs of the children and young people well. She has constructed a development plan for the home with other staff members. This plan details a variety of ways that the staff can improve the service so that children and young people receive better care. This is excellent work and shows the enthusiasm and dedication of the staff team to keep on improving. It builds on the strengths of the staff team and identifies areas where things could be better. The inspector felt it was an accurate assessment of the home and the staff team.

All of the children and young people are making good progress. For some, this progress is excellent. Much of this is down to effective care planning. Care plans, along with risk assessments and day-to-day placement planning, are constantly reviewed and updated ensuring they are effective. Most of the documentation was up to date. However, some documentation was missing and some not entirely accurate. In general, the monitoring by the registered manager is good but there have been a few recent lapses. One personal education plan had been requested but had not arrived. The registered

manager is generally good at challenging others to ensure that services are provided appropriately, but this document is now required.

It was clear to the inspector that external specialist workers have been brought in appropriately. All the children and young people were benefiting from these additional supports. Communication between the staff and the specialist workers was good and again this helps consistency of practice. There are also good relationships between the registered manager and other professionals, particularly with school staff. All of the young people have difficulties at school and require sensitive management. The good relationships and communication between home and school mean that these education placements are being successfully managed and that the children and young people are benefiting.

The statement of purpose is up to date and the staff clearly meet the aims and objectives as stated in this document. The children's guide is also up to date. However, staff are looking at some revisions which might benefit the younger group of children and young people currently living at the home.

No requirements or recommendations were made at the previous inspection. One requirement has been 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 difference 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 who 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: SC035235

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: County Hall, Durham DH1 5UL

Responsible individual: Karen Robb

Registered manager: Bernadette Olney

Inspector

Colin Imrie, social care inspector

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