

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

The manager registered with Ofsted in November 2023.

Two children were living in the home at the time of the inspection.

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 May 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded, and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 6 February 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
06/02/2024	Full	Requires improvement to be good
27/09/2022	Full	Good
22/11/2021	Full	Good
26/11/2019	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Children do not always have a positive experience of living in the home. This is due to the inconsistent responses by the staff team. Not all staff follow the home's agreed therapeutic model of care. The unpredictable approach from staff means that children's emotional needs are not being consistently met, particularly when they struggle to manage their emotions.

Staff do not always intervene to help children who are in crisis. Children are sometimes left unsupported, with staff remaining in the office, and this results in an escalation in the children's levels of distress. One child expressed their frustration and said, 'If I want staff, or need to talk, then if [name of other child] is misbehaving then staff are not available'.

Children know some staff well and have good relationships with them. However, the use of agency and casual staff due to permanent staff shortages, creates inconsistency and does not provide children with stability. This prevents children from building trusting relationships with staff.

Children do not live in a safe, hazard-free and comfortable environment in which they can flourish. Since the last inspection, the condition of the home has further deteriorated, particularly with damage caused when the children are in crisis. For example, the children's bedroom door handles have been broken off by the children and not repaired in a timely way. This makes it difficult for staff to easily gain access, or for children to leave in an emergency. One fire door had been removed and therefore would not have been effective in the event of a fire. Children have removed tiles off the walls in the kitchen, kitchen cupboard doors have been removed, and there are numerous holes in walls around the home. Repair work is not always of a good standard or carried out in a timely way. Leaders and managers addressed some of the immediate fire safety issues while the inspector was at the home.

Children engage in full-time education and have good attendance. The manager has good communication with education professionals. This ensures that she is familiar with the plans to support children's access to education. This support enables the children to reach their academic potential.

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

Staff are not always successful at de-escalating situations when children are in crisis. The children have up-to-date risk assessments and placement plans. These documents capture their needs, triggers, and strategies that staff should follow to support them. However, staff do not always consistently follow these plans, and incidents escalate quickly, with children often negatively influencing each other.

During their times of crisis staff are unable to put safeguards around the children, resulting in them being in dangerous situations, such as climbing on walls and a roof to remove tiles, or smashing glass. Staff call the police to intervene and on occasions, the children have been arrested. The children are pre-teens and after arrest they spend time in a police cell. Children are at risk of criminalisation due to some staff's poor behaviour management. When talking about police intervention, one staff member said, 'They have been called sooner than they need to be. I think this is a misunderstanding on staff's part, some don't get what is managing behaviour and what warrants a police call out.'

Since the last inspection there has been a high number of times when staff have physically held children. The recording does not always demonstrate how staff have tried to calm the children before it reaches the point of staff needing to hold them. Staff correctly use the home's agreed physical intervention; however, at times the same staff member involved in the incident speaks to the child involved. Therefore, children do not always have the opportunity to speak to someone independent about their experience.

The manager has failed to ensure that she shares all serious incidents with Ofsted in a timely way. This includes when an anonymous threat was made. The manager responds to these incidents and is aware that Ofsted should be notified, however her failure to share the information prevents the regulator from having oversight of these significant events.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Leaders and managers have not addressed all the concerns raised at the previous inspection. This includes the home environment, which has suffered further damage and deteriorated. Sustained improvement is not achieved.

Staff describe the manager as 'supportive'. The manager is committed to improve outcomes for children. However, she struggles to manage the home effectively because of the ongoing shortfalls in staff practice. The manager receives support from senior leaders; however, there continues to be poor responses to children from some staff members.

A number of permanent staff are absent from work due to issues such as staff sickness. Agency and casual staff are used instead. Permanent staff said that they are exhausted because of the staffing shortfalls. Some staff said that they are unhappy working at the home and said that there is a deterioration in staff morale. Furthermore, agency and casual staff do not all have access to computer systems, or they do not have knowledge of processes. Additionally, children are reported as being reluctant to work with unfamiliar adults. This means permanent staff said that they have additional work to do. One staff member said, 'No one can do paperwork, kids don't want to be with them. So I am having to do it all.'

Staff receive training to support them to have the skills and knowledge to meet the children's needs. The manager shares resources with staff and has sought additional training to improve practice. This includes managers from other children's homes sharing their knowledge of working with younger children. However, staff do not always implement the knowledge and skills they have acquired. This lack of a consistent approach from staff means that children do not always receive good-quality care.

The manager holds regular and reflective supervision sessions with staff. Some senior staff are also responsible for completing the supervision of staff; however, these are not always completed regularly. This prevents consistency across the team, poor practice is not promptly challenged, and this restricts the management team from driving forward good standards to improve the quality of care that children receive. The manager has plans to improve the quality and frequency of supervision sessions; however, this is still to be embedded.

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 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— manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed, furnished and maintained so as to protect each child from avoidable hazards to the child's health. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(iv)(v)(vi)(d))	7 July 2024
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— 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;	2 September 2024

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; strive to gain each child's respect and trust; understand how children's previous experiences and present emotions can be communicated through behaviour and have the competence and skills to interpret these and develop positive relationships with children; 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; de-escalate confrontations with or between children, or potentially violent behaviour by children; and that each child is encouraged to build and maintain positive relationships with others. (Regulation 11 (1)(b)(c) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(viii)(ix)(x)(xi)(b))	
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— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose;	2 September 2024

ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate; ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child; and understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(e)(f))	
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there; a child protection enquiry involving a child — is instigated; or concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); and there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(c)(d)(i)(ii)(e))	2 September 2024

*This requirement is subject to a compliance notice.

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: SC035235

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: County Hall, Durham City, Durham DH1 5UJ

Responsible individual: Paul Rudd

Registered manager: Amy Philbin-Robinson

Inspector

Jess Elliott, Social Care Inspector

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