

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 operated and managed by a local authority. It is registered to provide care for up to three children who may have emotional and/or social difficulties and learning disabilities. Three children live in the home.

The manager's post is vacant.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

We last visited this setting in January 2021 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 November 2021

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 26 November 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
26/11/2019	Full	Good
24/07/2018	Full	Good
06/06/2017	Full	Good
14/02/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children say that this is a good home to live in. Children develop good relationships with the staff team. This helps the children to share their worries and concerns with the trusted adults who help to care for them. Children receive better care and support because of this.

Careful consideration is given to group living before a child moves into the home. The manager completes an impact risk assessment to consider the child's needs, and the dynamics of the group. This ensures that the best possible mix of children can live together effectively. Children are welcomed sensitively into the home, which helps them to settle quickly.

Children make very good progress with their education. Children's attendance and attainment in education have improved because of the support that they receive from the staff and education services. Children say that they are proud of their achievements and the progress that they have made.

Children maintain good health and overall well-being. Children are registered with the necessary health professionals. Staff support the children to attend a range of health appointments. Good cleaning routines in the home and regular health checks have reduced the risk of COVID-19 being an issue of concern in the home. Children are supported to understand the risks of COVID-19 and how to stay safe and healthy.

Children take great pride in their home. They are consulted and have a say about how they wish their home to look. Children's bedrooms are decorated to a good standard and are individualised. Regular cleaning in children's bedrooms provides them with positive messages about acceptable standards of care. Subsequently, the children take pride in keeping their home nice and there is minimal damage caused in the home.

Children enjoy spending time with their family and friends. Staff support the children to maintain relationships with people who are important to them. A professional commented:

The staff are very supportive and extremely tenacious. They really understand the children and what is important to them. [Name] benefits from building relationships with their extended family. The staff genuinely care about the children.

The living room door is routinely locked once the children have gone to bed. Children can access other areas of the downstairs living space. However, this restrictive practice unnecessarily prevents the children from accessing all areas of

their home freely. The interim manager acknowledges that this practice is not necessary, and she is addressing this with the staff team. A requirement made at the assurance visit to address this has been re-issued.

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

Children are better protected because of the support that they receive from a nurturing staff team. Risks to children are identified and managed well. Staff follow the necessary protocols to help keep the children increasingly safe. However, there is an inconsistent approach to how well the children's safety plans are written. For example, they do not always provide clear strategies and guidance for the staff to follow. This has not had an impact on the children, but it could lead to inconsistent practice.

Children feel valued because they are listened to. Children know how to complain, and they have complained about issues that they are not happy with. The manager follows the necessary protocols to ensure that the children are listened to and that their complaints are acted on. Children are informed of any actions to be taken in response to their complaints and of the outcome following the managers investigations.

The risks that the children may be exposed to are reduced because of the staff's interventions. Targeted key-worker sessions help to better protect the children. Staff support the children during these sessions to understand the risks associated with their behaviour, and to develop strategies to help keep the children safe. As a result, children become safer.

Children rarely go missing from the home. On the rare occasions that the children do go missing from home, the staff follow the necessary steps to ensure that the children are returned quickly and safely. The staff ensure that the children are provided with an opportunity to speak to an independent person on their return home. Furthermore, the staff work effectively with a range of professionals to increase the children's safety and well-being.

Staff encourage children's individuality and support the children to get along in the home well. For example, the staff provide the children with a high-level of emotional support when the children are in crisis. This limits the need for the staff to physically intervene when the children are in turmoil. Additionally, the staff help the children to embrace each other and their differences. Restorative measures are used to help the children to learn from their behaviour and live together in a safer way. The children's participation in the campaign against bullying behaviour is recognised and celebrated.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager left at the end of October 2021. An interim manager was appointed at the same time. The provider is in the process of recruiting a permanent manager. The interim manager has completed her own audit of the service and is

clear of the home's strengths and areas to develop. She has a plan in place to help improve the service.

The manager uses regular team meetings, reflective supervision and annual appraisals to help her to develop her staff and their practice. The staff say that they feel supported in their role, and that this helps them to improve the children's experiences.

The provider regularly monitors and reviews the quality of care that the children receive. Understanding the children's daily lived experiences helps the provider to improve the quality of care that the children receive. This is effective at improving the children's overall outcomes.

The provider has experienced some staffing difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic due to staff sickness and other issues. The staff report that this was a difficult time, but the situation has since improved. Children do not report that this has had any impact on them. This is because they have received consistent care and support from a core group of staff.

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, and the 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— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)) The registered provider must ensure that the children's safety plans clearly record the steps to be taken by the staff to safeguard the children and any outcomes.	23 December 2021
The registered person must ensure that— the privacy of children is appropriately protected; children can access all appropriate areas of the children's home's premises; and any limitation placed on a child's privacy or access to any area of the home's premises— is intended to safeguard each child accommodated in the home; is necessary and proportionate; is kept under review and, if necessary, revised; and allows children as much freedom as is possible when balanced against the need to protect them and keep them safe. (Regulation 21 (a)(b)(c)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv))	23 December 2021

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: Durham County Council

Registered provider address: County Hall, Durham DH1 5UJ

Responsible individual: Claire Morris

Registered manager: Vacant post

Inspector

Jacqueline Tate, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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