

SC035247

Registered provider: Durham County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This short-break children's home is owned and managed by a local authority. It is registered to provide care for up to seven children who have learning disabilities. The home also provides care for children who may require accommodation on a longer-term basis.

33 children are currently having short breaks in the home, and three children were spoken to and observed as part of the inspection.

The manager was registered with Ofsted in March 2023.

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 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: 11 March 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/03/2024	Full	Good
21/02/2023	Full	Good
15/06/2021	Full	Good
30/07/2019	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Staff know the children and their likes and dislikes well. The home is bright and welcoming in communal areas, with a wide variety of resources and play equipment for children to use. Information displayed is set out in various formats to make it more accessible for children. There are also communication aids to help children to express their emotions and share their views.

Staff create photobooks and online diaries for children. They capture the children's visits to the home through photos and a diary entry written by staff about their day. This enables children to share their experiences with family and relevant others. This particularly helps children who do not use words to speak.

The manager advocates for children if she has worries about them and helps the children and their families to access support they may need. She encourages the children to have an advocate so that their views are included about their care and support needs.

Parents value the short-break care and describe how staff adapted their support to help their children settle into the home. Children say that they like coming to stay and that they like the staff team and manager. Most have a positive experience of care in the home and make progress during their stays. Children grow in confidence when staying away from their family home. One child is anxious about coming to the service after recent incidents at the home. The manager is seeking support from other professionals to create a plan for them to return.

Some areas of the home need repair and upgrading. The manager is aware of these and has a plan to address them. She consistently follows up requests for home improvements. Contractors were in the home during the visit addressing some of these issues.

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

Children's plans and risk assessments do not give clear instructions to staff about how to support children who may become distressed. This leads to inconsistencies in responses given and can impact on children's sense of safety. Several of these plans are out of date and do not contain the most current information about children. There was not a clear support plan for one child who has been involved in several incidents. This does not support staff to help children cope with difficult emotions.

Physical intervention is not frequently used in the home. However, a recent incident was prolonged and upsetting for a child, and the use of holds was not always

proportionate. Recording of the incident was delayed, preventing other professionals from reviewing the record and understanding the incident fully in a timely manner.

A child raised concerns about staff's practice following a physical intervention. Managers did not follow their own procedures when they became aware of this. There was no immediate safety plan to safeguard children and staff while fact-finding took place relating to the allegation. Additionally, the local authority designated officer was not informed by managers. These gaps in safeguarding procedures do not protect children from harm.

Children do not go missing from the home. Safe staffing levels support children to explore their community safely. The manager keeps risk in the area under review with other professionals, so the children's safety is maintained when out and about with staff.

The manager occasionally uses temporary staff to maintain the required staffing levels. Appropriate checks are made before they start working with the children. These staff complete an in-house induction and receive additional training to give them essential knowledge and understanding of their role and responsibilities.

Changes to the medication policy have ensured that staff have more time to check in medication and clarify any issues before children arrive. There have been two medication errors since the last inspection. Reflective learning and clear actions have been agreed to prevent the risk of further errors.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager recognises the strengths and weaknesses of the home. She has focused on developing recording to capture the progress of children in their records. Records are becoming more accessible to the children by using photos. The quality of recording is improving to reflect the care children experience.

The manager works with other professionals to support and broaden the experience of children. She is building links locally to raise the profile of the short-breaks service, including with health and well-being services and education professionals. She has improved working relationships with social care professionals through regular meetings before children start their overnight stays, to support a smooth process for children and families.

Staff are suitably qualified for their role. They describe the manager as supportive and approachable, and they value the help afforded to them. They complete a wide variety of training to equip them for their role and meet the specific needs of children. This includes training that has helped staff more clearly understand how children communicate.

Staff have practice-related supervision. However, one requirement made at the previous inspection in relation to this has been restated. Some supervisions are

reflective and support staff to reflect on their practice and how this can impact on the care for children, but this practice is inconsistent. Staff who provide supervision to others have not all had training to do so.

The manager has supported staff to reflect on recent incidents in the home. However, agreed actions from these conversations have not yet been pulled together into a clear plan to support staff to understand a child's needs and how similar incidents can be avoided in the future.

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— 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; 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 home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(v)(vi)(b)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that: safeguarding procedures are followed when concerns are raised about staff's practice; children's risk assessments are kept under review to reflect the children's current needs; incident records are completed in a timely manner and are shared with relevant professionals.	19 March 2025
The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that—	19 March 2025

helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that the home’s workforce provides continuity of care to each child; demonstrate that practice in the home is informed and improved by taking into account and acting on— feedback on the experiences of children, including complaints received; and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (a)(b) (2)(e)(g)(ii)(h)) In particular, the registered person must keep the children’s plans under review and use feedback from incidents to continually develop plans for staff to follow.	
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). Restraint in relation to a child must be necessary and proportionate. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b) (2))	19 March 2025
The registered person must ensure that all employees— receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33 (4)(b)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that staff completing supervision have the skills to enable staff to reflect and act on how their own feelings and behaviour may affect the behaviour of children they care for. The registered person must	19 March 2025

have systems in place so that all staff receive supervision of their practice which allows them to reflect on their practice and the needs of the children assigned to their care.

This requirement is restated.

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: SC035247

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: Margaret Laidler

Inspector

Carol Jagger, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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