

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	17 May 2016
Unique reference number	SC035247
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Durham County Council
Registered person address	County Hall, Durham DH1 5UL

Responsible individual	Gillian Palin
Registered manager	Helen Andrews
Inspector	Colin Imrie

Inspection date	17 May 2016
Previous inspection judgement	Sustained effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good

SC035247

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- The registered manager continues to lead the staff team well and to run the home to a high standard. The service continues to improve and develop. The children and young people who attend for short breaks get a high-quality service.
- Children and young people at this home are kept very safe. Children and young people are supervised very closely and are therefore kept safe from external factors. Staff provide clear boundaries and expectations and reinforce these in a nurturing and caring way. Staff are able to understand the behaviour of children and young people and are often able to avoid situations escalating or are able to de-escalate situations when they occur. This all helps to keep children and young people safe from themselves and safe from each other.
- The staff offer the children and young people a nurturing and caring environment. Staff help children and young people to set goals and targets to help them to improve their independence skills. Staff are able to encourage children and young people to work hard at these, and this work is developing well.
- Parents and carers speak highly of the service offered by staff. They say that communication is good and that they are kept informed of all issues. They clearly trust staff to keep their children safe and say that children and young people make good progress during their time at the home.
- The health needs of children and young people are well met. The administration of medication is well organised and safe. Other health needs are attended to well. Staff take a full part in working with other health professionals in health assessments and work to improve the health of all children and young people
- Staff are able to support children and young people to take part in and enjoy a wide range of activities and trips. Staff also work with local organisations to raise money for additional play equipment. The children and young people and staff at the home support several charities and actively support and raise money for them.

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home is run by a local authority and is registered for the care and accommodation for short breaks for up to seven children who have learning disabilities.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
2 February 2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
20 October 2015	Full	Good
5 March 2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness
7 October 2014	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The children and young people who attend this home for short breaks are cared for well and clearly enjoy the experience. The registered manager is experienced and is clearly dedicated to ensuring that the home runs as well as possible. She is continuing to develop practice and systems at the home so that the children and young people have the best experience possible. Staff support the children and young people to work on skills to help them to become more independent through a system of goals and targets, and this demonstrates that they make good progress. The staff team is very settled with no one leaving or starting for some considerable time. This is not only positive for the children and young people, in terms of building relationships, but also promotes good consistency of practice and the development of strong teamwork. Recent developments and improvements in setting goals and targets are a result of this stability. Relationships between the children and young people and the staff are very good. There are high levels of supervision in place, and this allows children and young people to spend a good deal of time one to one with staff or to be able to play or spend time with other children and young people in a way that is relaxed and supervised. This not only keeps them safe and secure, but also allows staff attention to be focussed on getting the best out of the short break. A good deal of effort and time goes into planning the short breaks. The staff responsible for this clearly take the views of the children and young people and their parents and carers into account and they also try to ensure that groups of children and young people are put together, according to their ages, abilities, interests and friendships. Every child and young person who attends the home has a daily living plan, which contains all the important information about them and informs their goals and targets planning. These goals and targets are varied and individualised and are about developing further independent living skills. Children and young people made good progress with skills such as dressing, personal care, food preparation, eating and household chores. Children and young people also make progress in making positive changes to their behaviour, improving their communication and other social skills. This progress is clear in parts, but the staff are working on ways of quantifying and evidencing this	

progress so that there is more clarity about and focus on goals and tasks.

There is clearly good communication with parents and carers. Several parents spoken to were full of praise for the staff and the home. One parent said, 'I can't praise them enough... It's a wonderful environment... Staff are more like a family.' This parent went on to say of her daughter, 'She has flourished... I never expected her to be the person she is now.' Another parent described the home as 'brilliant'. They said, 'They really understand my daughter's needs... She would come every day if she could.'

A social worker spoken to was also very complimentary. This social worker has placed many children and young people at the home over an extended period and was clear that they do a good job and make a real difference to the lives of those they work with. They particularly praised the staff team, talking about its extensive experience and skills.

A number of young people have reached their eighteenth birthdays recently and have made transitions to adult care. These have gone well, and recent changes to the organisation of the local authority's social work teams have made this easier. The staff have very good relationships with the teams of placing social workers, and this means that admissions and transitions are well planned and child centred. One child was at the home for their first overnight stay during the inspection. This first night went very well. The break had been well planned, the child had been for tea visits prior to coming for an overnight stay and the placing social worker visited the home to meet the child on this first occasion.

The inspector was only able to speak a little to the children present on the days of the inspection, but was able to spend some time observing them at play after they had returned from school. On this day, the group of children receiving a short break were all primary school age. Some children knew exactly what they wanted to do and were supported quickly to do these activities. Other children were given a little encouragement to try different activities. Children were encouraged to play together when appropriate and diverted when this was needed. Supervision by staff was close but not overbearing. The care and nurture from the staff was evident throughout.

Children and young people are able to take part in a wide range of activities and trips to local places of entertainment and interest. The inspector was able to look through a number of photograph albums, which are available for all to look at, to see evidence of trips to beaches, parks, museums and many other places. Some of the children and young people enjoy looking at these albums from time to time. Trips to the local professional basketball team have become very popular and the children and young people have adopted them as their team. The children and young people also support a couple of charities. They support the Dogs Trust and there is a photograph album of the dogs that they have visited and helped, which is lovely to see.

The health needs of the children and young people are given a high priority. Health needs are monitored closely and staff contribute greatly to ongoing health assessment and diagnosis. Administration of medication is rightly given the highest priority and is safe and accurate.

There are regular meetings involving the children and young people in which there is good participation and they are clearly able to give their views and wishes, which are acted upon by staff. Recently, a local charitable organisation has chosen to raise some money and donate it to the home. Children and young people were asked what they would like it to be spent on. They were clear, and additional play and electronic games equipment has now been ordered.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
The children and young people at this home are kept very safe. They are escorted to and from the home by their parents or carers or by approved transport arrangements, and are supervised fully by staff during their time at the home. Staffing levels are high, and this means that each child or young person will have very close levels of supervision at all times. When children and young people are taken out of the home for activities or trips, supervision levels remain high and supervision remains tight. Staff understand risks well and are able to be proactive in their care and attention. Risk assessments are clear, and actions taken to minimise risks are equally clear. Children and young people do not go missing from this home. There have been no child protection incidents. There have been very occasional incidents of lower level concern when children or young people have been aggressive or have hit out, and these are dealt with quickly and appropriately. No injuries have occurred to other children and young people. One incident was reported in which two older young people were able to be on their own for a few minutes and were able partially to undress. Staff intervened quickly and reported the matter. However, on investigation the incident was found to have been completely harmless. Some children and young people do have some minor self-harming behaviours, but staff work hard to ensure that these are minimised by good supervision and appropriate interventions. Staff rarely have to intervene physically. Since the last inspection, only one child has been briefly held after they became frustrated and hit out at staff. This was handled well by staff. The need for physical intervention is low because staff know	

the children and young people well. They understand their behaviours and are able to intervene quickly and positively when there are signs that the children and young people are becoming angry or frustrated, and they are able to intervene when other external triggers happen.

The children and young people are given clear boundaries by staff. Staff are consistent in their expectations and boundaries, and these result in the children and young people feeling safe and secure. Parents spoken to commented on how much they trust the staff to look after their children. A social worker also commented on how safe the home was. The inspector observed children who were feeling relaxed and secure playing. No complaints have been made by any child or young person, or by anyone else.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good
The registered manager has been in post for over seven years and is appropriately qualified. She has an excellent knowledge of disability and a strong background in healthcare work as well as social care. All the staff are appropriately qualified, with at least a level 3 vocational qualification in the care of children and young people. The home meets its aims and objectives as set out in the statement of purpose. The home is well maintained, and, generally, the registered manager keeps on top of this. One or two rooms are ready for redecoration, and some equipment now requires repair or replacement, but, in a busy home, this will always be the case. The home is well equipped with an excellent sensory room and separate soft play area. The registered manager is very child centred and clearly prioritises the needs of the children and young people. An example of this is when one young person was starting to struggle with noise and too much activity. The registered manager arranged for this young person to attend short breaks when the group size is reduced and when noise is less of an issue. This will mean that this young person's needs are met, and they are able to continue to attend. It is clear that children and young people make progress. Some children make improvements in their behaviour, some in communication and others in more practical living skills. The staff team is well trained and training is ongoing. Staff asked for more training about various disabilities, and this has been sourced and has taken place. There are also plans for further specific training in Makaton communication and on a	

number of specific disabilities.

Supervision happens regularly and clearly includes discussion about the children and young people and discussion about staff development. Annual appraisals are taking place, as they should. Staff talk positively about the registered manager and about her ongoing support and leadership. The registered manager is well supported by a team of very experienced senior workers who each take responsibility for certain areas of the work. This is really positive and works well. Two of the senior staff take responsibility for the complex planning of the short breaks, and this results in children and young people being part of a group from which they will benefit the most during their short stays.

The registered manager is very aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the home and has worked hard to develop and improve areas where there was room for improvement. This effort is continuing and the registered manager has clear plans in place to add to the quality of the service. She clearly has excellent relationships with families and with other professionals, and this is positive. During the inspection, the registered manager was spending time talking to various professionals about the needs of one of the children attending for short breaks. This child's behaviour was becoming more challenging and unpredictable. The registered manager was maintaining a good balance between ensuring the safety of others and trying to meet the needs of the child in question by keeping their short break placement open. The registered manager is clearly experienced and confident enough to challenge any professional if required.

The registered manager works closely with the local authority's specialist learning disability child and adolescent mental health service, and this partnership working is really helpful. Children and young people who have complex disabilities and complex challenging behaviour are able to be assessed thoroughly and advice about interventions and further work is formulated and put in to action. This benefits the children and young people in many ways and clearly enhances the ability of staff to care appropriately for them.

The registered manager has good links with external workers and with families. A regular newsletter is produced, which keeps interested parties informed of any news or new information. The registered manager also maintains links with a number of outside agencies that support the home in many ways. A local charity has been fund raising for new equipment for the home, and this will directly benefit the children and young people.

At the previous inspection, two recommendations were made and both have been carried out satisfactorily. Specific training on disability has happened and more is planned. The recording of any sores or injuries that children and young people arrive with has improved and is satisfactory.

There are no requirements or recommendations made at this inspection.

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of children looked after is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place. However, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm, or result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference that adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, 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 whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service 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'.

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