

SC035247

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 by a local authority and is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to seven children or young people who have learning disabilities, in a short-break children's home.

Inspection dates: 25 to 26 July 2017

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: 20 December 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: Sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- The registered manager is organised and has maintained high standards of care practice at the home. She has motivated the staff team and has continued to develop the service and to make improvements.
- The staff have created a really positive atmosphere in the home. There is a relaxed and calm feel to the home. The staff are caring and attentive as well as being enthusiastic and fun to be with. There is an ordered feel to the home with clear expectations and clear routines that the children and young people find reassuring and comfortable.
- The children and young people have many choices of activities and are encouraged to choose what they would like to do. The staff encourage the children and young people to try different activities and to be adventurous, which is really positive. The experience of coming to this home for short breaks is very good.
- The children and young people at the home are kept very safe. There have been no serious incidents at the home at all in the year since the previous full inspection. Levels of staff supervision are high and so the environment is safe and secure.
- The staff team is very settled with almost no changes in personnel. All the staff are very experienced and all are appropriately qualified. The staff team has appropriate skills and continues to be enthusiastic and committed to the work.

The children's home's areas for development:

- There was a safeguarding incident, during which checks that are normally made did not take place and the protocol was not followed.
- Some staff have not received sufficient refresher training in safeguarding. The home's policy is that staff have refresher training in safeguarding at least once every three years and some staff have not maintained this.
- Children's case records have not been kept up to date. A number of children in need review minutes are not on file and a number are out of date. Also, one consent form for emergency medical treatment was not signed by a person with parental responsibility.
- One child has had more than 75 days of short breaks within a 12-month period. While this is permissible, the child did not receive the appropriate services and protections of a looked after child and the home did not have the appropriate records required for a looked after child.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
20/12/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
17/05/2016	Full	Good
02/02/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
20/10/2015	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 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 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(2)(b)) In particular, ensure that appropriate checks are made when any injury is observed on a child.	26/09/2017
The registered person must ensure that all employees undertake appropriate continuing professional development. (Regulation 33(4)(a))	26/09/2017
The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which are kept up to date. (Regulation 36(1)(b))	26/09/2017
Care Standards Act 2000 Registration Regulations 2010 Application of the The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. The circumstances are that the short breaks do not exceed 75 days in total in any 12 months. (Regulation 48(2)(c)(iii))	26/09/2017

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The short-breaks children's home has experienced a number of changes in the year following the previous full inspection. The previous registered manager has left and a new manager has been appointed and has now been registered. The new registered manager was appointed from within the staff team. There have been no other changes in the staff team, which has been good for consistency.

There have been a lot of changes in the children and young people receiving a short-

breaks service. Quite high numbers of young people have turned 18 years old and similarly high numbers of new children and young people have started to receive a service, and it now feels like a new group of children and young people being cared for. The average age of children and young people receiving a service has dropped, and the staff have had to make appropriate changes to their working practices.

It is clear that previous high standards of care have been maintained, and this is due to the commitment, enthusiasm and skill of both the new registered manager and the staff team.

The most striking thing about the home is the atmosphere created by the staff. Although the home is busy, there is an air of calmness and relaxation. One placing social worker observed that the staff have created a culture of calmness and orderliness, and the new children and young people arriving are content to fit in and continue this culture. The staff manage this well, and allow the children and young people a wide choice of activities and how they spend their time. The staff also maintain a positive environment by gently encouraging positive choices and discouraging negative behaviours. This creates excellent relationships with the children and young people, despite only seeing them infrequently, and this is the basis for the good work carried out.

The children and young people can participate in a wide range of activities in the home and are also able to go on many different trips and activities outside of the home. The home is well resourced, with a sensory room, a soft play room, a games room, a large and very well-equipped garden and a very well-equipped lounge full of toys, games, books and other stimulating activities. It is good to see the children and young people choosing to go out on trips to the seaside, local park and cafes, and on bigger trips, such as a local air show. The children and young people share these activities with staff and this helps with communication and socialisation skills as well as building relationships.

The inspector observed the children and young people playing happily in the garden and in the house with staff. Two young people were having fun playing dominoes with staff, but were also being encouraged to learn to count better and being encouraged to speak and verbalise more. This type of activity, where the children and young people are learning, gaining in confidence and learning new skills at the same time as having fun, is typical of the environment that the staff create.

The experience of attending for short breaks is really good and does mean that the children and young people make progress in many ways. They make progress with personal-care skills, eating, household chores, and with socialising and communication. They make progress with building confidence and with trying new activities. There are plenty of examples of the children and young people trying new foods and liking them. There are examples of children and young people being introduced to new environments outside of the home and enjoying these. These new-found interests and skills transfer back into family life and allow parents and carers to be able to have a wider range of activities.

The children and young people are regularly consulted on how they feel, what they like doing and what they don't like. There is a system of key working in place and the

children and young people are spoken to regularly by staff to ascertain their preferences. They have a choice of food at each meal and choices of activity. Recently, a number of young people asked for a computer games device and this was purchased and has become such a hit that a further purchase is being considered. The children and young people wanted a garden trampoline, helped to choose and buy one and now enjoy playing on it when the weather is fine.

The staff have identified that they sometimes find it difficult to negotiate placements and services in adult care when young people are ready to transition to adult care. They do make good efforts but are sometimes let down by slow responses. They have identified that this needs more work, but they are making acceptable efforts to address this issue. The young people are helped and supported to acquire more skills that will ensure that they are more able to have more independence as they grow older and move towards adult life.

The children and young people have their health needs met well. The staff are all well trained in health and medical matters and understand the treatment and medication that is required. Any interventions are well administered and recorded and this ensures their well-being.

The staff are trained in a variety of methods of communication. Assessments are made of each child's preferred method of communication and relevant communication aids and systems are then stored in individual bags to be brought out when that child or young person is visiting. This works well and the inspector observed staff using different methods of communication. The inspector also observed staff recognising the children and young people's needs and desires from body language. Staff did spend time encouraging children to be more verbal if they had the ability but were choosing not to use it, which is positive.

Parents and social workers spoken to comment on how good communication is and how friendly the staff are. The staff make good efforts to keep in close touch with parents, carers and other professionals involved in the care of the children and young people.

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

The children and young people at this home are kept very safe. There have been no safeguarding incidents and no child or young person has gone missing at any time. Staff supervise them closely so that incidents between the children and young people are very rare. Only a few minor incidents have been recorded.

The staff understand risks and assess these well. They take appropriate precautions and

manage and minimise risks very well.

The staff creates a very positive culture in the home where expectations about behaviour are very straightforward and clear. The children and young people know quickly if their behaviour is not acceptable. Levels of staff supervision are high and this works well. The staff are able to maintain an air of calmness and orderliness and ensure that the home is relaxed and comfortable. The staff do not use sanctions and physical interventions are very rare. Consequently, the children and young people feel safe and secure and any challenging behaviour is moderated.

The staff make excellent relationships with the children and young people, and spend a great deal of time with them in shared activities. They are quick to encourage and praise and quick to offer new things to do and experience. The children and young people are free to have quiet times or have their own privacy but they are always encouraged to join in and socialise wherever possible.

The home is very safe. Because of the high levels of supervision there are very few accidents. Self-harm is rare, and if it does occur it is dealt with appropriately by trained and skilled staff. The staff use specialist psychological services as well when needed.

Many of the children and young people have complex and serious medical conditions which require a high level of knowledge, skill and confidence to deal with safely. The staff are well trained and both routine and more serious ill-health issues are managed well. The administration of medication is safe. Consequently, the health of the children and young people is promoted and protected.

There have been a couple of lapses around safeguarding practice. On one occasion, insufficient checks were made when a child with a minor injury was admitted for a short break. Some of the staff are behind with their refresher safeguarding training.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is new in post. She was appointed in December 2016 and was registered in April 2017. She is very experienced in childcare and has previously worked in the home for a long time as a senior worker. She is not yet qualified at the required level to meet regulations, but is studying for the necessary qualification. She is progressing with this and is comfortably within the allowed timescale. She has reviewed the home's statement of purpose and ensures that the home does meet the aims and objectives documented in the statement.

The registered manager enjoys a hands-on approach and knows the children and young people who attend the home well. She clearly prioritises their needs and this is at the forefront of her mind. She understands what progress they are making and is clear about what plans are in place to promote further progress. She is fully involved in the pre-admission assessments of all the children and young people and oversees the transitions when they move on at the end of their placement.

The appointment of the registered manager has been welcomed by the staff team. She has worked as a senior within the team for some time and so knows the strengths and

weaknesses of the team well. There is clearly a renewed enthusiasm within the staff team. The staff spoken to by the inspector were complimentary about the new registered manager, saying that she was open to new ideas and was good at listening. They also said that she was well organised and offered good support in terms of supervision and training. The staff team is well trained, but there is some refresher training that is a little overdue. The staff have been able to attend training on a range of subjects around disability, and this is positive.

When dealing with external professionals and agencies, the registered manager is able to make good relationships and negotiate the best possible all-round support for the children and young people. She is able to challenge others when needed. Parents and professionals comment on the good communication with the home. In a recent survey carried out by staff, the responses from professionals were very positive. One said it was a 'fabulous respite service' and another commented that staff were 'extremely friendly'. The staff also produce a regular newsletter to aid communication with all stakeholders.

Arranging short breaks for large numbers of children and young people is a complex task. The staff try to ensure that the children and young people are able to have their short breaks with other children and young people of their choice, so that they are able to form and maintain friendship groups. Staff achieve this well. The registered manager is ably supported by her senior staff with these sometimes complex arrangements.

There were no requirements or recommendations made at the previous inspection.

Four requirements have been made at this inspection.

There is a requirement to ensure that any short break placements that exceed 75 days in a 12-month period are treated differently. If children are looked after for more than 75 days, then the registered manager needs to understand that Regulation 48 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 applies and the usual short-break exemptions do not apply. The registered manager accepts that one young person has had more than 75 days care in the previous 12 months and Regulation 48 has not been met.

There is a requirement that all records are kept up to date. One set of consent forms, including the consent for emergency medical consent, was missing from one young person's file after they were admitted for an emergency placement. In addition, a number of minutes relating to children in need reviews were very out of date or missing, and the registered manager needs to ensure that these are available for staff to be able to be clear about care planning.

A third requirement is made to ensure that all staff have up-to-date refresher training. A number of staff have not completed their safeguarding refresher training within the time limit of three years, as set out in the home's safeguarding policy.

Another requirement is to ensure that if children or young people arrive for their short break with an injury, then this is dealt with appropriately. One child arrived with a small, old bruise, which they said was caused at school. This was not checked out. Staff did not phone the school or the person with parental responsibility to validate this explanation.

The situation did require checks to be made in the first instance prior to an assessment of the situation.

These four requirements are made to cover breaches of regulations that have not had a direct impact on the care of the children and young people, but there is potential for them to have had a direct impact.

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 whom 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: SC035247

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: County Hall, Durham DH1 5UL

Responsible individual: Karen Robb

Registered manager: Kathryn Bulman

Inspector

Colin Imrie, social care inspector

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