

SC035387

Registered provider: Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is operated and managed by a local authority. It provides care for up to five children who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

There is currently no registered manager in place. A manager has been appointed but has yet to be registered with Ofsted.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this setting on 3 March 2021 to carry out a monitoring inspection. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 October 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be 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	requires improvement to be good
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The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 4 February 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection:

A monitoring visit on 26 January 2021 identified serious shortfalls under regulations 12 and 13. Compliance notices were issued to address these shortfalls. On 3 March 2021, a further monitoring visit was undertaken. The inspector found significant progress had been made and it was agreed that the compliance notices had been met.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
04/02/2020	Full	Good
26/11/2018	Full	Good
30/05/2017	Full	Good
31/08/2016	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Children's experiences of living in the home are mixed. Some children are happy, feel safe and engage well with staff and the other children. However, this is not consistent across all children. A professional said that one child is 'not getting on well and is not engaging with staff'.

Children have regular one-to-one sessions with staff, where they share their worries and talk openly about their feelings. Children will ask for help and support, and the staff respond to this. However, boundaries and expectations are not always consistent, and this can make the children feel unfairly treated.

Children take part in monthly meetings where they help to plan menus and activities. This makes children feel valued. Children are given the opportunity to attend many and varied activities, particularly during school holidays. This provides them with memorable experiences.

Children's progress is mixed. Some children are attending education and achieving. Other children have not been in education since moving into the home. This limits their future prospects. Some children's risks have reduced, such as missing from home and drug use. One professional said that their child has made 'massive progress'. However, another child continues to be at risk of significant harm in the community.

A number of doors in the home are locked. This practice has been in place for a long time and adds to the institutional feel. It is sometimes used as a way of managing behaviour, which is not a positive learning experience for the children. Children told the inspectors that they do not like asking the staff to unlock doors. One child said that before coming here, they had 'freedom'.

Some records, such as risk assessments, contain some stigmatising phrases. This supports negative attitudes to children in care. Furthermore, a record written in this way is not helpful for the children.

Children spend time with those who are important to them, in line with their plans. Staff will facilitate and support this time if necessary. Families and friends are invited to spend time in the home. One family member said that she is 'always made to feel welcome'. This is significant in promoting the children's identities and important relationships.

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

Risk assessments are regularly reviewed and contain all known risks for the children. The staff know how to reduce risks. They also know what actions to take when a child is at risk of harm. Police say that the staff request police intervention appropriately. However, risk assessments are sometimes confusing, as they provide contradictory information. For example, some risk ratings do not match the evidence. This could result in inconsistent care being given to the children.

The locality risk assessment was last updated in 2019. This means it does not fully reflect the risks in the surrounding areas of the home. Therefore, the children could unknowingly put themselves at risk.

One-to-one sessions are undertaken when a risk is identified or increased. Staff help children to understand why and how to make themselves safer. This means children are better able to protect themselves.

The number of sanctions given to the children have reduced. The manager has also introduced sanctions which are more restorative in nature. However, when a sanction is given, it is not properly recorded. This means there is no way of monitoring whether sanctions are appropriate or have had a positive impact. It also means children's views about the sanction are not recorded; therefore, their voice is not heard.

The manager responds quickly to allegations and concerns about staff. They work with professionals to ensure that children are safeguarded. The manager address issues directly with the staff. They undertake restorative work where appropriate, and this is at the pace of the child.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The home has a new manager and deputy manager in place. There have also been a number of changes within the staff team over recent months. The manager often uses bank staff due to staff shortages and is aware of how this could further unsettle the children. The manager is committed to using the same bank staff to provide familiarity for the children and a more consistent approach to their care.

The manager has introduced an improved risk assessment prior to children moving in. It ensures that children's needs and risks are known and understood, and it identifies whether they can be met.

The manager has identified that the home can no longer meet the needs of one child and has escalated this. Additional safeguarding measures have been put in place to help protect this child and the other children. However, there are no clear timescales for this to happen. As a result, all of the children are now being exposed to further risk and uncertainty.

Professionals value the communication and contributions received from the manager and staff. They work in partnership with other agencies. This includes mental health

and therapeutic services, the youth offending service and the police. This enables services to work together to best meet the needs of the children.

Staff like working here and feel supported by the manager. They receive regular supervision, which is reflective. Staff are challenged about any practice issues, and they are also offered advice and guidance so that they can improve their practice. Staff are praised for good work undertaken. Staff feel able to talk about personal issues and help is offered.

The children and any safeguarding issues are central to supervision, team meetings, handovers and the daily logs. This means that staff have up-to-date information and can respond appropriately.

While the manager ensures that staff receive mandatory training, training records are not up to date. It is also not clear when training needs to be reviewed. Fire warden training has not taken place for any staff member. This means that in the event of a fire, staff may not respond properly. This could increase the risk of harm to the children.

Room searches are not consistently undertaken in line with children's risk assessments. This means children could be at risk of harm. They are also not recorded as a room search; therefore, management oversight is poor. It also means children's views are not recorded; therefore, their voice is not heard.

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 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))	1 December 2021

In particular, ensure children's risk ratings are accurate.	
The registered person must ensure that— 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 (b)(c)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv))	1 December 2021
After consultation with the fire and rescue authority, the registered person must— make arrangements for persons working at the home to receive suitable training in fire prevention. (Regulation 25 (1)(c))	1 December 2021
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy ("the behaviour management policy") which sets out— how appropriate behaviour is to be promoted in the children's home; and the measures of control, discipline and restraint which may be used in relation to children in the home. The registered person must keep the behaviour management policy under review and, where appropriate, revise it. The registered person must ensure that— within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a child in the home, a record is made which includes— the name of the child; details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of the measure;	1 December 2021

the date, time and location of the use of the measure; a description of the measure and its duration; details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure; the name of the person who used the measure ("the user"), and of any other person present when the measure was used; the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and within 48 hours of the use of the measure, the registered person, or a person who is authorised by the registered person to do so ("the authorised person")— has spoken to the user about the measure; and has signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(b)(i)(ii)(c))	
The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which— include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child; are kept up to date; and are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b)(c)) In particular, ensure that room searches are recorded.	1 December 2021
The registered person must review the appropriateness and suitability of the location of the premises used for the purposes of the children's home at least once in each calendar year taking into account the requirement in regulation 12(2)(c) (the protection of children standard).	1 December 2021

When conducting the review, the registered person must consult, and take into account the views of, each relevant person. (Regulation 46 (1)(2))	
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Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that information on children should be recorded in a non-stigmatising way. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's home regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

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: SC035387

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered Provider: Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Registered provider address: Municipal Buildings, Church Road, Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland TS18 1LD

Responsible individual: Rhona Bollands

Registered manager: Brian Thwaites

Inspectors

Emma Ridley, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

Paula Kelly, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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