

SC035648

Registered provider: Durham County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this secure children's home

This secure children's home is operated by a local authority and is approved by the Secretary of State to restrict children's liberty. The home cares for up to 34 children aged between 10 and 17 years across five houses. There were 28 children living in the home at the time of this inspection.

The home provides care for up to eight children placed by the Youth Custody Service and up to 26 children under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 who are placed by local authorities.

The admission of any child under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 who is under 13 years of age requires the approval of the Secretary of State.

The commissioning of health services in this home is the statutory responsibility of NHS England under the Health and Social Care Act 2012. Education is provided on site in dedicated facilities.

The manager of the home registered with Ofsted in January 2022.

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 July 2023

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

Children's education and learning **good**

Children's health **outstanding**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

Date of last inspection: 21 September 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
21/09/2022	Full	Good
03/11/2021	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
13/04/2021	Full	Outstanding
04/02/2020	Interim	Sustained effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children have positive relationships with staff, receive good-quality care, and enjoy a range of activities and interests. They experience good-quality education and very high-quality healthcare. This underpins children's development and the good progress that they make.

Children receive sensitive care from staff when they arrive at the home. Staff across all professional disciplines understand children's needs and provide them with individualised care and support.

Staff encourage children to participate in developing their care plans and meetings about their care. This helps them to feel valued, empowered and influential in the care and support they receive.

Children talk about their care and contribute to the running of the home. Independent advocacy services are well used. Children have the choice of speaking to a male or female advocate. Some excellent work was conducted by an advocacy service in promoting a child's rights and ensuring that the child's voice was heard and represented in relation to services provided by a placing local authority.

Children know how to complain. Managers provide a timely and child-centred response to children verbally and in writing. This assures children that their concerns are taken seriously and acted on.

Culture, individuality and diversity are discussed and celebrated, and also included in the education curriculum. Children feel able to raise concerns with staff if they experience bullying or inappropriate behaviour. These concerns are quickly and appropriately addressed. One child was supported to deliver a presentation to her peers to educate and raise awareness about culture and religion. Recently, there was a celebration of Eid at the home, and a child was helped to celebrate with her family in the community.

Children are prepared for moving on, and go out into the community when it is assessed as safe and appropriate to do so. This helps children to reacclimatise to life outside of the home as well as accessing fun activities.

Children's education and learning: good

Teachers carry out initial assessments and use information from education, health and care plans, specialist assessments and joint work with a range of professionals to identify and meet children's learning needs. Staff liaise regularly with other relevant professionals to understand the complex and emotional needs of children. They use this information well to plan and deliver the curriculum and appropriate

learning support. For example, one child receives good support from a speech and language therapist.

Senior leaders know the children well and provide teachers with high-quality training. Children's attendance is consistently high, and teachers plan and teach the curriculum well, providing developmental feedback to children. This helps children to remember more and make good progress in almost all subjects. The education team manage any negative behaviour skilfully and are good role models.

The curriculum is ambitious across all subject areas, tailored to children's needs. Children are offered a broad range of options, including mathematics, English, information and communication technology (ICT) courses, and vocational, creative, personal and social skills. Teachers adapt the scale and content of the curriculum to improve children's levels of engagement. Children complete and achieve qualifications in English, mathematics, ICT, and a wide range of recognised vocational qualifications.

Managers acknowledge that there is more to do in delivering the English curriculum. In English, teachers sometimes do not explain to children the reasons behind their selection of teaching resources. This does not provide children with sufficient opportunities to repeat and practice new knowledge. They do not always thoroughly check what children understand before moving on to the next activity. As a result, on some occasions, children lack motivation.

Teachers assess children's reading ability. However, they do not place sufficient priority on developing reading skills or providing regular and frequent opportunities for children to read aloud. Leaders' initiatives to encourage reading for pleasure are yet to have significant impact on children's fluency and interest in reading.

Leaders provide a rich personal development curriculum, which includes the development of healthy relationships. Staff teach in detail topics such as the nature of friendships, sexual relationships and gender equality. They have also recently introduced a complementary 'character curriculum', where children learn about the importance of motivation, resilience, respect and self-awareness.

Leaders work with other agencies, including the virtual school, to ensure that children have good transition plans. Children meet with an independent careers adviser and the senior manager with responsibility for careers. They produce a detailed personal careers action plan for each child.

Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They have a thorough understanding of the quality of curriculum planning, teaching and the progress that children make in each subject. They work well with the school improvement partner and governors. As a result, the school improvement plan is detailed and effective.

Children's health: outstanding

Children are extremely well supported by a well-resourced and integrated health team. Each house across the centre has a named health professional, which helps excellent relationship building with children.

Comprehensive health assessments are undertaken and reviewed regularly to ensure that children's existing and emerging health needs are identified. Healthcare staff make timely referrals to relevant services, including specialist clinicians, to meet children's needs. Each child is actively involved in planning so that their plans reflect their wishes.

Children have direct access to services such as the visiting GP's and the optician, and in-house services, such as nurse-led clinics, speech and language, occupational therapy and substance misuse. There have been some delays with routine dental clinics due to the new provider having technology issues; however, any urgent dental needs are always met. Additional clinics have been scheduled to help to improve waiting times.

Collaborative working is a significant strength. The effective and timely sharing of health information in centre-wide meetings supports the ongoing review of each child's needs and any risks, and results in the delivery of very high-quality individualised care. This is further supported by additional staff training, such as in trauma-informed approaches.

There are many examples of health professionals working creatively with staff across the centre to improve outcomes for the children. For example, they have supported one child to develop the skills to self-manage a health condition, and another child going through a complex medical procedure.

Secure Stairs, which is a framework that involves a developmentally attuned, psychologically informed model of care, is extremely well led and fully embedded throughout the home. This has created a safe and stable environment where children's emotional well-being improves. One child has coproduced a newsletter for all children about Secure Stairs. Reflective practice is in place for all staff and the integrated healthcare team. This supports staff in their work with children, who often have complex needs.

Governance processes are robust and effective. Regular audits underpin and drive service improvements. Healthcare staff are exceptionally well supported. Clinical supervision and appraisals are up to date, as is mandatory training. Staff have excellent access to additional training to further develop their skills and knowledge, supporting them in their role of delivering high-quality care to children.

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

Children feel safe and staff help children to stay safe. Children are helped to understand risk and develop the knowledge and skills they need to live safer lives.

Any concerns about a child's safety are acted on immediately, with good partnership working with other professionals and agencies.

There is continuous review of any risks to children. There are detailed risk assessments for each child that are fully and formally reviewed every two weeks in well-attended multi-agency team around the child meetings. Children also attend these meetings to give their views. Additional meetings take place where there are risks that require urgent review. Staff know and understand children's risk assessments and implement these to help to keep children safe.

Staff help and support children to develop positive social skills and behaviour. An incentive scheme, which can be individualised, helps children to work towards achievable targets and rewards. Consequences, where used, are appropriate. However, there is insufficient focus on restorative practice to help children to understand the impact of their behaviour on others. Records of consequences are often poor. For example, records do not evaluate effectiveness so that managers know if consequences have the desired impact.

Single separation, where children are locked into an area alone due to being a serious risk to themselves or others, and managing away, where children are kept apart from their peers due to risk, are used appropriately and for the minimum time necessary. There is good management oversight and regular review to ensure appropriate practice.

The use of physical restraint is appropriate. Children are seen by a nurse at the earliest opportunity following any incident to ensure that they are well supported. There is robust management oversight and quality assurance of all incidents. Where learning for staff is identified, this results in reflective supervision and further training if needed.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers know the children and their needs well. They set high standards and have high aspirations for the children. They ensure that children receive safe, good-quality care.

The overall occupancy of the home in the last 12 months is 74%. The manager states that the reason for this occupancy level is because the home has been looking after children who have needed higher ratios of staff due to their complex needs.

The registered manager leads an open learning culture. Staff stated that managers are highly supportive and go the extra mile to help and guide them. The requirement and recommendations made at the last inspection have been met, leading to improvement in security and children's education.

Staff feel well supported in their day-to-day work, and the majority receive regular and recorded formal supervision and training, which supports their practice. A limited few have had less-frequent supervision, including the registered manager.

Although staff spoke highly of the supervision they receive, the quality of records are poor for the most part. The registered manager has identified this as an area of improvement, although progress is slow.

The home has had some staff attrition and absenteeism. Staff recruitment remains a challenge, with 18 care staff vacancies at the time of inspection, though six of these are supernumerary posts. Managers continue in their efforts to bring in the right people to work at the home. There are always sufficient staff on duty to provide safe care to children. On some occasions, there are three staff on duty in some houses, which is the minimum ratio and includes newer staff. This, at times, leaves staff stretched meaning that there is a slower or delayed response to children's requests.

The quality of recordings is very variable across a range of documents. Some are of a good standard and child-centred, where others have gaps and do not provide the complete story of the child's journey.

There is good partnership working with other professionals. Managers effectively challenge placing authorities when they do not uphold their statutory duties to children, such as in planning for children who are moving on from the home.

There are good internal and external monitoring systems and a good evaluation of information. These identify emerging trends and patterns and highlight positive practice. This analysis enables the targeting of specific work to reduce and manage any risks to children and improve the quality of care. Some systems require further review to ensure that matters such as sanctions, restorative practice, staff supervision and staff allocations provide consistently good standards and quality care for children.

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 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— a description of the measure and its duration; 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 (3)(a)(iv)(vii)(b)(i)(ii)(c))	29 September 2023
The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— 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 has sufficient staff to provide care for each child;	29 September 2023

ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child; and

use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(d)(e)(h))

In particular, the registered person must monitor the use of consequences, the quality of staff supervision sessions, the planning and delivery of the staff rota, and the general quality of records.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that any consequences used to address poor behaviour are restorative in nature, to help children to recognise the impact of their behaviour on themselves, other children, the staff caring for them and the wider community. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.38)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff receive supervision of their practice from an appropriately qualified and experienced professional. In particular, ensure that the frequency of supervision sessions, including that of the registered manager, and the quality of the records reflect the care of children and the support and guidance given to staff to be effective in their role. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the ethos of the home supports each child to learn. In particular, ensure that the head of education improves the quality of education in English by ensuring that teachers explain why and what the children are learning, spend sufficient time on the learning activity, and check that children have a secure understanding before moving on to the next topic. They should also ensure that subject teachers provide children with frequent well-supported opportunities to improve their reading level and fluency. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 29, paragraph 5.18)
- The registered should ensure that the home's records on each child represent a significant contribution to their life history. In particular, ensure that all records relating to a child are fully completed and are in plain language that children can easily understand. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.5)

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'.

Secure children's home details

Unique reference number: SC035648

Provision sub-type: Secure Unit

Registered provider: Durham County Council

Registered provider address: County Hall, Durham DH1 5UL

Responsible individual: Martyn Stenton

Registered manager: Valerie Haigh

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