

Aycliffe Secure Services

Durham County Council

Copelaw, Aycliffe, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham DL5 6JB

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this secure children's home

The home is operated by a local authority and is approved by the Department for Education to restrict children's liberty. The home provides care for up to 34 children aged between 10 and 17 years across 5 houses.

At the time of this inspection, 13 children were living at the home. The home provides care for up to 8 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 has applied to register with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 17 to 19 March 2026

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
Children's education and learning	not judged
Children's health	not judged
How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good

The secure 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: 9 December 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Enforcement action since last inspection:

Following a full inspection in December 2025, Ofsted served compliance notices in relation to the protection of children, the leadership and management of the home and poor restraint practice. On 29 January 2026, Ofsted carried out a monitoring visit to review the provider's progress in meeting the steps set out in the compliance notices. At that visit, the steps in 2 compliance notices had been met and one step under regulation 13, the leadership and management standard was reissued.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
09/12/2025	Full	Inadequate
28/01/2025	Full	Good
11/07/2023	Full	Good
21/09/2022	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

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

The overall judgement is impacted by shortfalls in leadership and management and the help and protection of children.

Children's experiences have improved since the last inspection in December 2025. There is a calm and settled atmosphere throughout the home. Children now speak positively about their relationships with staff and the support that they receive. Staff now better understand each child's individual needs. This helps them to build positive and meaningful relationships with children.

Children who are preparing to leave the home enjoy trips out in the community. Children speak positively about these experiences and enjoy meals out and other fun activities. These activities help children to spend time in the community safely. Children also enjoy activities at the home, including swimming, pickle ball and table tennis. These help them to build their social skills and self-confidence and develop new interests.

Managers and staff are working with the equality and diversity improvement lead from the local authority. Children said that they now feel more comfortable talking to staff about their identities. This is helping staff to improve their knowledge and understanding of children's different heritages and cultural backgrounds. In turn, staff are now better able to plan and deliver care and support to children, taking account of these individual needs. This development is still in the early stages and not yet fully embedded in practice.

Staff now better support children to raise concerns and make complaints. This helps children to voice their views and opinions. Managers respond appropriately and promptly to children in writing to confirm the outcome of any complaints. This reinforces that their concerns are taken seriously. Children are provided with information about the complaints process in a way that matches their levels of understanding, making this process accessible to all children.

Children's education and learning: not judged

Children's health: not judged

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

There have been continued improvements in the recording of single separation incidents since the last full inspection in December 2025 and the monitoring visit in January 2026.

Developments in management monitoring systems are beginning to identify shortfalls in the use of measures of control, enabling managers to act quickly to improve practice and children's experiences. For one child, on one occasion, staff failed to complete the correct level of observation checks as per policy, but this was identified in the manager's oversight. However, one single separation incident did not meet the legal criteria and this was not identified through the management review processes. Further work is needed to ensure that effective oversight and review is consistent across all leaders and managers.

When it is necessary for children to spend time on their own to keep themselves and others safe, staff take steps to reduce potential risks. However, while staff were making a child's bedroom safe, their personal items were thrown out into the corridor. Although managers identified this as a concern, staff did not. This practice should not occur as it does not demonstrate dignity and respect for the child. Training on this aspect of practice is not currently provided in induction training for new staff.

Managers are not yet using their monitoring systems to monitor and review the effectiveness of sanctions. This means that some children have repeated sanctions for the same behaviours, and these are not restorative in nature. For one child, repeated financial penalties have been given, leaving them indifferent to the consequences of their actions and behaviour.

Most referrals to the local authority designated officer are made appropriately. However, on one occasion, there was delay in a referral being made. The reasons for the delay are not clearly documented. Furthermore, information regarding allegations against staff is sometimes contained in multiple documents that are not held centrally. As a result, it is difficult to determine the actions taken to immediately protect children for harm.

Improvements have been made with reviewing physical restraint practices. A multi-agency restraint review panel now meets weekly to review all incidents. This is successful in identifying shortfalls in restraint practice, and action is taken quickly to improve children's experiences.

Regular multi-agency meetings take place to help staff gain an understanding of what is happening for children and how to support them. For one child, care staff, education staff and the healthcare team have worked together to gain a better understanding of their needs, anxieties and vulnerabilities. Due to this, the child now feels safer and there has been a significant reduction in incidents, enabling them to make progress.

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

Staff supervision sessions focus on staff practice and their learning and development through discussions around training needs. Leaders and managers acknowledge staff members' good work and commitment, helping them to feel valued and supported in their role. Supervision sessions offer a safe space for staff to discuss personal circumstances. Nevertheless, not all supervisions consistently reflect on staff practice with the children. This is a missed opportunity to help further develop staff skills when working directly with the children.

Feedback from parents is positive about the quality of care that their children receive. Despite this, some parents shared concerns about inconsistent communication and said that they receive information from their child rather than from staff. Some professionals and social workers also shared these views and said that communication could be improved.

The manager is aware of the areas of development and that there is further work to do across the home. They are working closely with the local authority to improve the quality of care for children. Senior managers across the home now have defined areas of responsibility, which help them to focus on improving practice.

Staff said that they feel supported and that there have been a number of changes to their role, including better defined tasks and individual staff responsibilities, which have led to improvements to the quality of care that children receive. Staff commented that these changes help children to feel safe and secure and that the children living in the home are now more settled.

The recommendation about education was not looked at on this inspection so has been restated. Two requirements have been restated and a new requirement made. The compliance notice has been met.

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, The 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 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— use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(h)) In particular, records of allegations should include all actions taken and staff supervision sessions should include discussions about the children. This requirement has been restated.	8 May 2026
In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff— seek to involve each child's placing authority effectively in the child's care, in accordance with the child's relevant plans; seek to develop and maintain effective professional relationships with such persons, bodies or organisations as the registered person considers appropriate having regard to the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the children's home is to provide care and accommodation. (Regulation 5(a)(d)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that external professionals and children's families are kept up to date with all relevant information.	10 April 2026

This requirement has been restated.	
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 effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure. (Regulation 35 (3)(a)(vii)) In particular, the effectiveness of consequences should be reviewed.	24 April 2026

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that each child has their own personal space, which will usually be their bedroom. In particular, staff should treat children's bedrooms and their personal property with respect at all times, including when personal items are removed to create a safe environment for the child. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 16, paragraph 3.18)
- The registered person should ensure that the necessary support is given to children to enable them to access their education or training. In particular, there should be a clear post-16 offer that children can access. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 28, paragraph 5.13)
- The registered person should ensure that incidents of single separation are fully recorded about what checks are undertaken and that these are carried out in line with the home's policy. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 50, paragraph 9.65)

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 address: Fostering & Adoption Team, Spectrum 8, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham SR7 7TT

Responsible individual: Clare Nicholls

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Leanne Lyon, Social Care Inspector

Jo Birtwhistle, Social Care Inspector

Gemma McDonnell, Social Care Inspector

Jo Stephenson, Regulatory Inspection Manager, Quality Assurance Manager

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