

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC035648
Inspector	Paul Scott
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Secure Unit

Registered person	Durham County Council
Registered person address	County Hall DURHAM DH1 5UL

Responsible individual	Carole Payne
Registered manager	Gillian Palin
Date of last inspection	28/01/2014

Inspection date	17/09/2014
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Previous inspection	good progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	There has been no enforcement action since the last inspection.

This inspection	
Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for children and young people	good
Quality of care	good
Keeping children and young people safe	good
Leadership and management	good
Outcomes in education and related learning activities	good

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	good
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This is a good service that contributes positively to young people making good progress and achieving improved outcomes in many aspects of their lives. Staff are fully committed to helping young people address their offending and risk taking behaviour. Focused interventions are used to good effect in helping young people understand and modify their behaviour. This is done in a secure and safe environment where young people learn to trust and rely on the adults caring for them.

Care planning and care practice is underpinned by rigorous assessment and monitoring. Relationships between young people and staff are a key element in getting young people to show an interest and engage in work that helps improve their future prospects. Participation and involvement is fully promoted. Young people are clear about how they can contribute to the day-to-day running of the centre, be involved in decisions about their lives and raise a complaint or concern if necessary. As a result, a large majority are very positive about their experiences.

Good child protection and safeguarding processes are consistently put into practice by staff. Young people's behaviour, risks and vulnerabilities are comprehensively assessed, monitored and managed from the point of admission to when young people move on. Staff demonstrate a good level of skill in managing such a diverse and complex group of young people. This means there is a supportive and proportionate approach taken to managing behaviour and risk.

The centre has faced a number of significant challenges since the last inspection. Managers and staff have demonstrated good resilience in facing up to these challenges, ensuring the quality of care and safety of young people has not been compromised. Staff have responded positively to the recent change in manager who has introduced a number of changes including restructuring of the senior management team and introducing increased rigour to a number of quality assurance monitoring processes. These are beginning to have a positive effect on the running of the home but require time to fully embed into practice.

A number of shortfalls are noted at this inspection. These relate to the centre's Statement of Purpose, Regulation 34 monitoring and auditing and consistency of records.

Full report

Information about this children's home

The children's home is operated by a local authority and is approved by the Secretary of State to provide secure care and accommodation. Education is provided on site within a purpose-built facility.

The children's home can accommodate up to 42 young people, who are aged between 10 and 17 years. Up to 24 young people who have received a custodial sentence are placed at this home by the Youth Justice Board. Other young people are the subject of Section 25 of The Children Act 1989 and placed by local authorities. Admission of any young person under Section 25 of The Children Act 1989 who is over the age of 10 but under 13 years of age requires the approval of the Secretary of State.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
28/01/2014	Interim	good progress
07/08/2013	Full	good
06/03/2013	Interim	satisfactory progress
18/10/2012	Full	good

What does the children's home need to do to improve further?

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
5 (2001)	keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the Statement of Purpose (Regulation 5(a))	15/10/2014
34 (2001)	supply to HMCI a report in respect of any review of quality of care. (Regulation 34(2))	15/10/2014

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure the system for monitoring the quality and adequacy of all record keeping is robust and when needed, action is taken to address shortfalls (NMS 22.1)
- ensure children are provided with appropriate education while in the home; specifically, support less experienced staff in improving their teaching and classroom management (NMS 23.11)
- ensure children are provided with appropriate education while in the home; specifically, better integrate English and mathematics across the curriculum (NMS 23.11)
- ensure children are provided with appropriate education while in the home; specifically, review the dependency on agency staff in order to secure improvements in teaching and learning. (NMS 23.11)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **good**

Young people benefit from and make good progress during the time they are living at this centre. Staff show high levels of skill and sensitivity in working to meet the complex needs of each young person. As a result, trusting relationships develop quickly in which young people can share their experiences and feelings and develop an understanding of their backgrounds.

Staff are pro-active in presenting young people with opportunities to increase their self-esteem and confidence through a range of activities in which young people can succeed and achieve. For example, some of the activity groups such as the fitness incentive programme, increase young people's fitness, enables them to earn incentives and appreciate practical benefits from achievement and success. Young people describe the progress they have made since coming to the centre and recognise and are proud of their achievements. Some young people made comments such as, 'I have changed a lot and I am more mature now.'

Young people are encouraged to take personal responsibility for promoting their physical and emotional health. Access to a wide range of routine and specialist health services is good. This ensures young people's day-to-day health needs are routinely met and their health outcomes improve during their stay at the centre.

Young people are supported and encouraged to make healthy lifestyle choices and many actively engage in a series of programmes aimed at reducing risk taking or offending behaviours. This enables young people to consider the consequences of risk taking behaviour and make more positive choices in the future. One young person said, 'Staff have really helped me and I don't want to do that kind of thing anymore.'

There are many opportunities for young people to become involved in the day-to-day running of the home through groups such as the school council, weekly house meetings and contributing suggestions about how the quality of the service could be improved. Suggestions include, improvements to the admission area making it a more welcoming and attractive environment and new furniture for activity areas. Recent suggestions have included the use of a voice coach and a guitar coach. A number of these suggestions have been put into practice.

Some young people choose to undertake additional tasks in the home. This positive contribution provides them with a sense of involvement and pride in their community. With increased mobility plans some young people are able to become involved in the wider community which contributes to helping them prepare for their release.

Planning for young people leaving the secure centre and returning to the community starts at the time of admission. A social skills assessment is undertaken and this may

be repeated depending on the length of stay. There is an effective life skills programme in place and young people say that they are well prepared with the necessary skills to make a successful transition back into the community and toward adulthood. Additional support can be offered to some young people for up to three months after leaving the centre if they feel they are at risk of returning to high risk behaviours. This provides young people with another level of support that reduces the likelihood of them returning to a secure setting.

Staff appreciate the importance of appropriate family contact. Young people's contact with families and significant others is positively promoted and they are able to share valuable time with their families when they visit. Staff are flexible in supporting contact arrangements and visitors are made welcome. Young people have regular direct and indirect family contact as agreed within their placement plans. They are able to make or receive two telephone calls a day on a cordless telephone. For privacy these calls can be taken in their rooms.

Quality of care

good

Young people's needs are thoroughly assessed and identified on admission to the centre. Background information is rigorously sought in order that staff can start to respond to known needs and risks. As a result, effective strategies are put in place at an early stage. Young people's diverse and complex needs are reflected in their individual placement and care plans. Staff are skilled in promoting individual work with each young person in order to meet those diverse needs. Within the fortnightly reviewing system progress is monitored and targets are adjusted to ensure that young people's needs continue to be met and effective interventions remain in place. Young people and those who are significant to them are fully engaged in the planning and review process. Staff are proactive in ensuring that all external reviews and planning meetings take place in a timely manner. This means young people receive up-to-date care and support which is individually tailored to their unique and specific needs.

Young people benefit from extremely positive relationships with staff who are highly skilled. Although staff adopt a caring and empathetic approach to each young person, they set clear boundaries in relation to expected behaviour. This provides young people with a sense of emotional security and clear boundaries and expectations that are fully understood. This, combined with a nurturing and sensitive approach to working with the young people, promotes stability and provides a strong foundation on which to build.

Staff have high aspirations for each young person and work jointly with them to achieve their goals. Young people say things like, 'The staff are brilliant' or 'they are really good, they care about you'. Young people make significant progress in addressing many complex issues as a result of the trusting relationships that develop. Staff celebrate success with young people and as a result their self-esteem is

increased. Inappropriate behaviours are challenged and young people are encouraged to reflect on the impact their behaviours have on others.

The health needs of each of the young people are thoroughly assessed on admission. This is undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team and focuses on the physical and emotional well-being of the young person. Young people have access to a full range of medical services in a timely manner. This includes visits from doctors, dentist and optician. There are excellent dental facilities and a medical consulting room on site. These are routinely used by a range of health care professionals. The centre is in the process of bringing online video equipment which will enable remote diagnosis and treatment. This will ensure speedy access for medical diagnosis and avoids delay because of distance and travel implications.

Specialist services are available within the multi-disciplinary team to work with young people wishing to address complex behavioural or emotional issues. In addition, staff support and advice is provided when undertaking direct work with young people. Each young person has a fortnightly multi-disciplinary case review. Their health plans are reviewed within this forum. As a result young people's physical and emotional health needs are well met.

Young people are actively engaged in the design and planning of a wide range of meaningful activities which give the opportunity to develop life-skills and build confidence. Popular activities include dog walking and pet care, singing, Caribbean cooking, music and beauty sessions. One particular activity, 'Dress to impress' combines an element of fun, while dressing for a special social event. Young people clearly take a pride in self-presentation, which assists in the overall development of social skills and confidence.

There are good opportunities for young people to contribute to the day-to-day running of the home. Staff make good use of young people's meetings, one to one discussion and individual sessions to support young people in expressing their views and staff offer good support to those who find this difficult. In addition, staff are skilful in ensuring young people are helped to understand that their views and wishes may not always be in their best interests.

Young people are clear about the process of raising a complaint or concern about their care. They know who to approach and most say they are confident that any concerns would be taken seriously. There are a number of routes young people can use, from speaking with a staff member such as a key-worker, to posting a formal complaint. Young people proposed an anonymous posting system in which complaints can be posted with other mail. This has been accepted but is not yet in place. There is evidence that complaints are thoroughly looked into and young people are now offered the opportunity to record whether they are satisfied with the outcome. They are able to access external advocacy services upon request if required or for further support if needed. Many complaints are resolved at a low level.

The centre provides purpose built secure accommodation. It has excellent facilities which meet the needs of the young people living there. There is a programme of maintenance and re-decoration, that ensures the centre remains in good decorative order. A number of recent improvements to the décor and appearance of the centre have been put in place. This work is continuing and young people are actively engaged in making suggestions to improve the quality of their living environment.

Keeping children and young people safe good

Young people are supported to stay safe and feel safe within the secure environment. Well understood safeguarding procedures mean that they are kept safe. All staff receive good quality safeguarding training during their induction and throughout their employment at the home. This supports them to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse. Staff also know how to respond appropriately to allegations or disclosures made by young people. Good links with external safeguarding agencies ensure that any concerns are investigated promptly and effectively. Staff are highly empathetic to the needs and vulnerabilities of young people who have experienced abuse prior to admission to the home. For example, staff have worked very sensitively with young people who experience anxiety and distress during the night. Risks to young people are further reduced, because all staff are carefully and robustly vetted before beginning work in the home.

Bullying is managed well in the home. Young people say that, 'There is bullying, but staff deal with it straight away.' A range of approaches are adopted to counter bullying behaviours. These include group work and anti-bullying wall displays. Where appropriate, the home develops individually tailored bullying strategies that support both the perpetrator and the victim. These strategies recognise the complexity and range of bullying behaviours. Young people gain an improved understanding of how to develop positive relationships, interact safely, and cope in social situations, because a punitive approach is not taken towards the perpetrators of bullying.

The home is good at promoting positive behaviour. Young people report that the incentive scheme motivates them to behave well. Consequently it is an effective behaviour modification tool. Managers and staff find creative ways to link rewards with good behaviour. For example, young people value the fact that positive behaviours result in increased opportunities to socialise with other young people. Where the incentive scheme does not impact on the behaviour of particular young people, it is adapted and individualised so that more realistic targets can be set. This helps young people to address entrenched patterns of challenging and anti-social behaviour. The positive ethos of behaviour management means that the use of sanctions is minimal and when they are used they are proportionate and relevant.

Single separation is used only when necessary to ensure the safety of young people and staff. Determined efforts are made to re-integrate young people to the group as quickly as possible so that they are not stigmatised or isolated. Clear recording

enables managers to evaluate the necessity and effectiveness of all uses of single separation. Staff are skilled at managing complex group dynamics. For example, good use is made of structured resolution meetings following conflict between young people. These meetings reduce the need for young people to be separated from the group. They also enable young people to take responsibility for their behaviours in a supportive environment.

Staff are provided with specialist training in the use of restraint. Staff make every effort to carry out restraint as sensitively as possible. They adapt restraint practice to the personal, cultural and physical needs of individual young people. Qualified medical staff assess each young person following a restraint. Closed circuit television (CCTV) footage is used very well by managers to evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of every restraint that takes place in the home. The home has a restraint minimisation strategy that aims to identify and remove any environmental or procedural factors which may contribute to the current high levels of restraint. This demonstrates a clear commitment to continually improve the safety and well-being of young people.

Health and safety systems are good. The risk of accidental injury is minimised through careful risk assessment of individual young people, their activities and the environment. Fire safety systems are robust and well understood by staff and young people. Routine testing of all gas and electrical installations further promotes the safety of young people.

The risk of self-harm or suicide is minimised by very careful monitoring of vulnerable young people. Managers have recently reviewed and amended the home's search procedures. Implementation of the procedures ensures that there is minimal potential for harmful items to enter the home and that this is balanced with promoting the dignity and privacy of young people.

A multi-agency approach ensures that mobility is well-planned and decision making is well-informed. A thorough risk assessment is undertaken, in consultation with external agencies, before young people leave the home on approved mobility or to attend appointments. There have been three incidents when young people have gone missing since the last inspection. Staff responses have been robust and are underpinned by robust protocols that have been agreed with the police. For example, staff take decisive action in reporting when young people go missing and work closely with the police, placing authorities and young people's families. This ensures a robust response that secures a quick and safe return for young people.

Leadership and management

good

Leadership and management in the home is good. The Registered Manager has recently been seconded from her day-to-day management role to undertake a comprehensive review of the service. A temporary manager has been appointed and is currently in the process of registering with Ofsted. She is suitably qualified and has extensive experience and understanding of working in a secure setting.

The manager demonstrates a strong commitment to improvement and development and has made a number of changes that have impacted positively on the centre in a very short period of time. For example, she has worked closely with the senior management team to redefine their management roles and responsibilities, which in turn has increased clarity and accountability across the centre. This is viewed as a very positive step towards a more cohesive and streamlined approach to providing care for young people.

The manager has taken a very analytical approach to her new position. She has meticulously assessed the centres current performance. As a result, she has a comprehensive understanding of the centres strengths and has developed a number of developmental strategies, which are clearly detailed in the progression and improvement plan to address any noted shortfalls. This process has included seeking the views of staff and young people who have been fully consulted and involved in determining the centres future travel. This has created a sense of ownership amongst staff who demonstrate an even stronger commitment to improving the services and support available to young people in their care.

Monthly regulation 33 monitoring visits are undertaken to each of the centres five units and education setting by an independent visitor. The visitor compiles a report for each setting which can vary in quality. However, there are noticeable improvements in this process including the quality of information recorded and improved consultation with young people and stakeholders. This is an area for continued development.

A range of matters are routinely monitored by the manager in line with regulations. This information is rigorously analysed and presented in reports. However, No reports have been sent to Ofsted since May 2014. While this is a breach of regulations, the impact on the quality of care is minimal. This is because there is a wide range of internal quality assurance systems used to ensure high standards of care are consistently maintained. For example, a raft of audits are scheduled to be undertaken as part of the centres drive to improve quality of practice and performance. This includes a rigorous audit of young people's files, behaviour in education, resettlement, keyworking and interventions. This is a clear example of the managers commitment to improvement and development.

Young people are provided with a copy of the children's guide on admission. This guide is child-friendly and provides young people with good information about the service including who they can speak to if they have a concern or need advice. The home's Statement of Purpose is accessible on the centres website and provides

professionals and parents with good information about the services and support the centre offers. However, the current document does not sufficiently detail the experience of staff working in the centre or reflect the recent changes in management.

The home has sufficient numbers of staff to provide good levels of support to young people. New staff are well inducted and provided with appropriate opportunities to gain a recognised childcare qualification. Records confirm that staff receive regular formal supervision and have their performance appraised annually. However, a number of records seen were noted to be incomplete. Staff confirm that they receive good day-to-day support and feel that access to, and support from senior managers has vastly improved. Managers and staff have had to deal with a number of challenges over the last 12 months, many staffing related, and it is to their credit that they have shown resilience and a committed effort to maintaining the quality of care for young people.

Procedures for reporting serious incidents have improved significantly over recent months. Prior to this, records consistently lacked incident details and made it difficult for the reader to make any level of assessment about how the incident had been managed. Recent notifications have been subject to rigorous quality assurance, confirming the robust management of significant events such as complaints, allegations and safeguarding concerns.

The recommendation from the previous inspection has been suitably addressed. A great deal of effort has been put into improving the systems for managing information about young people with a large majority now being kept electronically. However, this is an area for ongoing development and despite the introduction of focused monitoring processes, there are still too many gaps in records generally. This includes children's files, supervision and appraisal records for example. These shortfalls are noted to be minor and have no impact on the welfare or care of young people.

Outcomes in education and related learning activities

good

Most young people make good gains in their knowledge and skills. Given their chequered educational history, education provides them with the stability and structure necessary to promote their learning. Young people are generally interested, engaged and enthusiastic whilst in class and are able to articulate progress made in the lesson and apply newly acquired knowledge and skills effectively. Attendance is good. A high proportion of young people with longer stays have developed a personal and sustained interest in subjects such as art, motor vehicle or food technology. They are trusted in lessons, make good progress and learn to value education.

Teaching and learning are good with the majority of teaching offering sufficient challenge and interest to meet the assessed needs and wants of young people. Teachers adapt their approaches swiftly to accommodate changing group dynamics and potential disruptive individual behaviour. In order to check young people's progress, teachers skilfully use open questioning to tease out their understanding and application of new concepts and skills. Marking and written feedback clearly and sensitively inform learners how to improve their work.

A few young people fail to make enough progress where a minority of teachers do not deploy relevant approaches and activities to interest and motivate. In such instances young people become distracted because teachers do not plan well enough or provide sufficient inspiration and challenge. A lack of teaching expertise in order to change tack and re-engage learners through alternative approaches escalates poor behaviour that further disrupts learning. In a minority of subjects, marking and feedback on work is often formulaic and does not help young people understand what to do to improve.

The curriculum offers core subjects appropriate to young people's key stage including English, mathematics, science and physical education, in addition to vocational options such as bricklaying, motor vehicle, textiles and hair and beauty. Implementation of functional skills awards in English and mathematics as stepping stones to GCSE and level 2 standard is needed in order to promote progression to further education and/or employment. The curriculum continues to develop and managers are alert to the need to review and innovate to meet young people's educational, behavioural and social needs. Programmes offering courses in, for example, small animal care, street dance and fitness have been introduced. Weekly assemblies help create a 'whole school' ethos and allow young people and staff to celebrate success. Staff recently reviewed and altered the structure of the day by introducing morning social time and refreshments between lessons. Not all such ideas work well, but are attempted for well-considered reasons.

Young people's academic progress is monitored well through the use of national curriculum data and internal course indicators. Records of learning in lessons lack sufficient linkage to set targets and goals and offer minimal focus on progress made by learners. Young people do not regularly review and input into their recordings of progress made in lessons. As a result, not all learners are clear as to how to improve or are motivated to make sufficient progress. A few young people are studying subjects at too low a level, in for example information and communication technology (ICT) and physical education.

On arrival, assessments are carried out including in literacy, numeracy, additional educational needs and speech and language therapy. Comparative assessments are also made when young people leave the unit, the outcomes of which provide managers with evidence of the progress they have made during their stay. The assessments on entry are detailed, conducted well and inform personalised learning timetables and individual action plans to support teaching and learning in

the classroom or workshop. Not all teachers however draw sufficiently well on these plans.

Against a backdrop of generally good teaching and learning, English and mathematics are not promoted sufficiently well in too many subjects. There is a lack of understanding among many teachers of the need to enhance and make relevant English and mathematics skills within their particular subject or vocational area. A coherent and integrated cross-curriculum approach that promotes the importance of these essential subjects is not in place. In contrast, a well-conceived literacy programme takes place daily for all young people. The sessions are targeted very well to need, valued by young people and effectively promote reading skills. Staff demonstrate a high level of understanding of the diverse needs each young person has. However, there is a need for a greater planned promotion of equality and celebration of diversity across education.

Effective use is made of dedicated and experienced teaching assistants to support and motivate young people throughout each lesson. Good resources stimulate young people's interest and foster their ownership of learning. Classrooms, workshops and games areas provide purposeful learning environments. However, a few of the interactive electronic white boards do not function, thus limiting the range of technical approaches available for teachers to use. Practical workshop space for learning brickwork, catering, art, textiles, design and technology, motor vehicle maintenance and hair and beauty skills is clean, purposeful and well equipped. There are few displays in the education area that illustrate young people's work in order to inspire others to learn and achieve.

An effective performance management system is in place enabling teachers to be assessed and rated against various targets and actions. As a result, underperformance is tackled well. The capacity of managers however to ensure high performance is impaired by a long term dependency on agency staff. Improvements within specific subjects are equally inhibited by unstable staffing arrangements.

Information, advice and guidance are secured through a contract with the local County Council. The work is delivered by an experienced adviser who concentrates in a very practical and realistic manner on tackling barriers to enable young people to progress to work or further education. Individual sessions with young people sensitively and skilfully tease out agreed actions matched to realistic ambitions. A detailed report is produced which provides the young person with current and accurate information about, for example, the implications of the raising of the participation age (RPA) as well as personalised guidance on their next steps. The report is disseminated to the young person's case manager, youth offending team and social worker. The external adviser brings in-depth knowledge of local providers and courses to the unit.

Young people have access to a sufficient range of enrichment and activities.

Enthusiastic staff promote the importance of health and well-being to young people aided by well-equipped sports and physical recreation facilities. As a result, the majority of young people are motivated to develop their physical fitness. Themed weeks run during the school holiday periods but managers and staff express concern that these do not always engage young people as fully as they should.

Young people's understanding of risk behaviours is promoted effectively by care and education staff through an intervention programme entitled 'Life Skills'. This programme is well received by young people and offers a range of courses including victim empathy, emotional resilience and sexual exploitation. Citizenship workshops place emphasis on anti-social behaviour, family life and peer relationships. Young people's progress within the enrichment programme is monitored and reviewed regularly.

Staff meet at the start of each day to ensure appropriate planned actions are in place to mitigate any concerns relating to individual young people. This enables teachers and support staff to manage poor behaviour and plan approaches that promote interest and learning. Low level disruption to learning is caused by young people leaving lessons mid-way through to attend, for example, health appointments and specialist reviews. Movement between lessons and units is well-ordered and procedures to report, investigate and deal with non-attendance work well.

Managers are keen to ensure on-going improvement and have acted well to deal with previous weaknesses. Their self-assessment is broadly accurate and ambitious. They encourage teaching staff to link with local authority or regional subject networks with a view to keeping up-to-date with curriculum developments. Education staff are positive, self-critical and keen to improve. Managers are aware however of the impact of a significant minority of teachers and instructors having limited experience in areas such as lesson planning, teaching strategies and classroom management. The long-term use of agency staff also continues to limit the capacity to secure improvement.

What inspection judgements mean

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Good	A service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements.
Adequate	A service that only meets minimum requirements.
Inadequate	A service that does not meet minimum requirements.

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The 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 relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the framework of inspection for children's homes.