

SC035648

Registered provider: Durham County Council

Assurance inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this secure children's home

This secure home is operated by a local authority and is approved by the Secretary of State to restrict children's liberty. The home can accommodate up to 34 children aged between 10 and 17 years.

It provides care for up to eight children placed by the Youth Custody Service and 30 children accommodated under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 who are placed by local authorities.

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 responsible for the day-to-day running of the home registered with Ofsted in January 2022.

There were 25 children living in the home at the time of this inspection.

Inspection date: 18 January 2023

Date of last inspection: 21 September 2022

Judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Information about this inspection

At this inspection, the inspectors evaluated:

- the care of children
- the safety of children
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers.

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children, using the social care common inspection framework. This assurance 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'.

Findings from the inspection

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance inspection.

The care of children

Children enjoy the reassurance, clear routines and boundaries that staff provide. This provides them with stability and consistency, and helps them to build trusting and warm relationships. Staff skilfully support children during times of anxiety and challenge, and children appreciate these efforts. One child said about the staff, 'They've kept me alive and they've made sure I'm okay. I know they care'

Children are relaxed in the company of staff, and staff are alert to any behavioural changes that may indicate that a child needs extra support. Staff are affectionate towards children, providing hugs and verbal reassurance, if this is what children want. This gives children a sense of safety and belonging.

Staff know and understand children's individual needs well. The multidisciplinary team, which includes physical health nurses, substance misuse specialists and psychologists, provides insight and advice to the staff who work directly with the children. Consequently, each child's individual diverse needs are known and met, and strategies and plans are continually developed and reviewed to help children to make good progress.

Children's views are integral to all decisions made about their care. Consequently, children feel empowered as they have a say in the way they are looked after and are confident that their voices will be heard. For example, they have an influence in choosing activities, making changes to the reward system and are involved in interviewing candidates who are applying to work in the home.

Children know how to complain if they are unhappy about any aspect of their care. Complaints are taken seriously, investigated and acted on. Children receive feedback about their complaint in a timely way. They are offered the opportunity to escalate their concerns to external agencies if they are unhappy about the outcome of their complaint. This approach means that the children have a variety of avenues they can use to voice their concerns and that external scrutiny and support helps to keep them safe.

The safety of children

Children feel safe and supported living in this home. They are cared for by knowledgeable staff who are aware of their vulnerabilities, what makes them anxious and how to reduce risks to their safety. As a result, children become more settled and learn strategies which help them to cope with frustrations and develop their tolerance and emotional resilience.

The use of single separation and children being 'managed away' from their peers is appropriate and suitably monitored by managers. This ensures that the use of these measures of control is proportionate, timely and fair.

The use of restraint is monitored closely by managers. If there are shortfalls in practice identified, they are shared with the appropriate agencies and measures are put in place to ensure that the children are kept safe.

When there are concerns about a child's welfare, these are shared promptly with relevant professionals. For example, multidisciplinary knowledge and expertise are pooled to examine risks, such as self-harm or aggression. Staff are then able to implement support plans to manage and reduce these risks.

Safeguarding and security procedures prohibit smartwatches from being worn in areas of the home where children are present. During the inspection, some staff were observed to be wearing smartwatches. This has the potential to compromise the privacy of the children and allow for unauthorised recordings of incidents and conversations to be made.

Since the last inspection, there have been no incidents of children going missing while they have been out in the community with members of staff. The use of 'mobility' in the community is carefully planned to help children to prepare to move on to their next placements.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

A well-established and very experienced senior leadership team provides consistent strong management and leadership. Its members monitor practice and key records closely and ensure that individual plans for children are tailored to meet their needs and help them to make progress. The close multidisciplinary working is cohesive and a significant strength in this home.

Managers ensure that staff have the skills and knowledge to support the children. If needed, they seek external expertise so that children receive the care they need. For example, staff have now been trained to administer injections for children who need these to manage specific health conditions.

The three requirements made at the last inspection have been addressed. Procedures have been amended when children return from time out in the community and these now include the use of entering the home through the reception area rather than through the secure garage. No children have attempted to run away and the revised procedure makes the return to the home more relaxed for the child.

The requirement relating to the monitoring of complaints has also been met. The monitoring of complaints and their resolution is now closely scrutinised. This ensures that complaints have been resolved to the children's satisfaction or that they are aware of why this is not the case.

At the last inspection, a requirement was made in relation to ensuring that learning from incidents is disseminated across the whole centre promptly. Managers have ensured that the learning, especially from one particular incident of restraint, has been shared and the policy and procedure amended. Consequently, there have been no similar reoccurrences.

One recommendation in relation to the care of children was made at the last inspection. This was made because the rationale for removing possessions from a child's room during an incident had not been consistently recorded. This has been rectified and records now show why such measures have been taken, for example to reduce the risk of self-harm, and when the possessions have been returned.

Managers ensure that all staff receive regular supervision and the opportunity to reflect on their practice. This helps staff to learn from incidents and to address any shortfalls. This process also enables staff and managers to identify training needs and how staff skills and knowledge can be developed.

Shortfalls from the previous inspection relating to education have not been reviewed at this visit and will be considered as part of the next full inspection.

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

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

Statutory requirement

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— the privacy of children is appropriately protected. (Regulation 21 (a)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that all staff adhere to the home's prohibited items policy.	28 February 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the ethos of the home supports each child to learn. In particular, staff in all subjects should use children's starting points and identified learning and support needs to plan learning activities that enable children to make sustained progress in developing their knowledge, skills and behaviours so that they know more, remember more and can do more. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 29, paragraph 5.18)
- The registered person should ensure that the ethos of the home supports each child to learn. In particular, teachers in vocational subjects should plan and teach the curriculum so that they take full account of, and consider in detail, the knowledge, skills and behaviours that children should develop and master through the practical tasks they set for them. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 29, paragraph 5.18)

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 5UJ

Responsible individual: Martyn Stenton

Registered manager: Valerie Haigh

Inspectors

Paul Taylor, Social Care Inspector

Helen Simmons, Social Care Inspector

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