

Aycliffe Secure Services

Registered provider: Durham County Council
Aycliffe Secure Centre, Copelaw, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham DL5 6JB

Assurance inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this secure children's home

This home is operated by a local authority and is approved by the Secretary of State to restrict children's liberty. The home provides care across five houses for up to 34 children aged between 10 and 17 years.

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 registered with Ofsted in January 2022.

At the time of this inspection, 21 children were being cared for in the home.

Inspection dates: 19 June 2024

Date of last inspection: 11 July 2023

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.

Children have positive, warm relationships with staff. Children and staff take part in a range of activities together, which helps children to build trusting relationships.

Children live in a well-kept and homely environment. Children have opportunities to personalise their bedrooms, some of whom have had their bedrooms decorated in a style of their choice. This supports children to feel valued and cared for.

Children take part in a range of positive activities. A small group of children are taking part in a strenuous physical challenge to raise money for charity. They spoke with enthusiasm about their training for the event and the support that they receive from staff for this.

Children who have lived at the home for a longer period have clear goals for their educational and future employment opportunities. This group of children are welcoming of additional tutoring over the upcoming summer holidays to ensure that they stay on track with their learning.

Purposeful one-to-one work is carried out with children by key workers and casework intervention staff. This helps children to make progress in line with their care and sentence plans. The recording of this work is detailed and provides children with a clear record of these conversations and the progress they are making.

Regular multi-agency planning meetings ensure the effective sharing of information. This process informs children's care and enables staff to plan for children's next steps. Children are supported to contribute to these meetings and to reflect on the discussions and decisions made following the meetings.

Children know how to raise issues and concerns and are confident to do so. There is a prompt response from leaders and managers, and children receive a clear written reply in a timely manner.

Consultation with children is part of everyday life. Children have recently been involved in the refurbishment and redecoration of the family room. This helps to make family visits more enjoyable and relaxed.

Detailed written risk assessments and effective information-sharing help staff to understand children's risks and vulnerabilities provide care in a trauma-informed way.

Children with high levels of need in relation to self-harm and mental health receive well-planned care informed by the skills and knowledge of healthcare staff. For one

child with acute mental health needs, leaders from health and care advocated effectively for the child to receive care in a hospital setting to keep him safe.

Leaders and managers are child centred in their approach. They know children well and have good oversight of practice in the home. Clear monitoring and auditing processes are in place to inform their understanding of the quality of care experienced by children and address any areas for improvement.

Physical restraint is proportionate and only used when necessary. There is good accountability and oversight at all management levels, which includes independent scrutiny. There are a few occasions when children have been placed in single separation. The recording and rationale for this measure of control also demonstrate that this measure of control is only used when necessary to protect children from harm.

Staffing remains a challenge. One of the five houses remains closed. Therefore, the home is operating with a reduced number of children. This ensures that there are sufficient staff to keep children and staff safe. Leaders and managers are focused on strategies to retain existing staff and attract new staff.

A recommendation made at the last inspection in relation to supervision of staff has been addressed. The two recommendations which relate to children's education and learning have not been considered at this visit. These will remain in place and will be considered at the full inspection.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/07/2023	Full	Good
21/09/2022	Full	Good
03/11/2021	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
13/04/2021	Full	Outstanding

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the ethos of the home supports each child to learn. In particular, the head of education should improve 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. ('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, education leaders and subject teachers should provide children with frequent and 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)

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 City, Durham DH1 5UJ

Responsible individual: Martyn Stenton

Registered manager: Valerie Haigh

Inspectors

Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector
Debbie Foster, Social Care Inspector

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