

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 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 38 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 dates: 21 to 23 September and 4 to 6 October 2022

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: 3 November 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
03/11/2021	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
13/04/2021	Full	Outstanding
04/02/2020	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
10/09/2019	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy positive experiences and make good progress in this home. For some children, their experiences are life changing. This is because all staff work together and focus on identifying and meeting children's individual and collective needs.

Children's admissions into the home are well managed. All key information about the child is available. This enables the multidisciplinary team to work together to ensure that essential information is easily accessible and used to inform the child's care. Staff across the centre work skilfully to quickly develop good relationships with the children, and to assess and plan what support each child needs to manage and reduce risks to their safety and to help them to settle into the home.

Staff are skilled and knowledgeable. Children benefit from planned intervention sessions that reflect their personal circumstances, trauma and support needs, and impromptu key-work sessions that provide immediate care and nurture. This approach means that each child receives thoughtful and tailored care.

Relationships between children and staff are almost always positive. They are relaxed, warm and supportive, leading children to seek the company of staff for comfort and reassurance. Children are able to identify numerous members of staff whom they feel able to go to when they need extra support.

Consultation with children is central to the routines in the home. Children's views are welcomed and encouraged and these influence their care plans and the day-to-day running of the home. When suggestions or requests cannot be met, children receive clear feedback about why this is the case. However, responses to children's complaints remain inconsistent. These are not always resolved promptly and there are occasions when the rationale behind the outcome of a complaint is unclear. Ofsted raised this shortfall at the interim inspection in November 2021.

Children take part in a varied range of activities and they enjoy using the excellent on-site facilities, including a gymnasium, sports hall and swimming pool. Additionally, children's individual interests and hobbies are encouraged and developed. For example, using music to express themselves, writing stories and using construction kits help to meet children's sensory needs.

Children keep in contact with their families and people that are important to them. As they make progress, some children have family visits in the local community. Staff are acutely aware of the importance of these relationships and are also aware that, at times, some of these relationships are strained. Their support and understanding in these circumstances is commendable.

Diversity and difference at this home are embraced. Each child's unique identity is valued and their diverse needs, whether based on cultural or religious background,

are acknowledged and celebrated. This helps the children to feel they are a meaningful part of their community and that their views are welcomed and valued.

Staff support children as they prepare to leave the home. Staff tailor mobility trips and activities away from the home to increase children's independence, and this helps them to adjust to less restrictive situations and environments. This approach, coupled with staff providing ongoing support for a period when children have left the home, increases the likelihood of the children's next placement being successful.

Children's education and learning: good

Managers clearly articulate their strategy and ambition for the education curriculum they provide. Their intent is that it should re-engage children with education, support them to develop their character and resilience, and prepare them for their next steps when they leave the home. Through attending and participating in education, most children make good progress against this intention.

Managers' actions to improve the sequencing and implementation of the curriculum have led to improvements to the quality of education in most subjects. However, the pace of improvement has not been consistently good in all subjects. In the large majority of subjects, teachers plan the sequence of the curriculum and teach topics and lessons well. This enables children to make good progress in developing subject knowledge, skills and behaviours.

In a few vocational subjects, teachers do not take sufficient account of children's sometimes very different starting points. They do not consider in sufficient detail how, through the practical task-based activities they plan and the way they teach lessons, children will develop significant new knowledge and skills over time.

Managers have increased the range of subjects that children study so that it meets the needs and interests of children. In English, mathematics and information and communication technology, children can achieve functional skills and, where appropriate, GCSE qualifications. In vocational subjects and PE, children can achieve accredited awards that recognise their achievements. These are sometimes the first recognition for education achievement that children have received. This motivates most children to engage well in education.

If individual children require specialist support to continue learning in subjects they had been studying before they arrive at the home, managers take effective action to make arrangements with external tutors to provide this. Recent examples include engaging specialist tutors for Welsh, Spanish and equine studies.

Managers establish children's starting points and learning support needs quickly and accurately when they arrive at the home. Staff work closely with health staff and care staff to ensure that their plans for the children's education align well with the wider care and welfare needs of children.

Education staff collaborate well with healthcare staff to use a trauma-informed and recovery approach to children's education. For example, the decision to continue to educate children in house groups has been effective in establishing and sustaining stable relationships and has reduced incidents of conflict which can disrupt learning. However, not all teachers plan and teach a sufficiently individualised curriculum for each child that matches the very different needs and abilities of children within groups that this decision leads to.

Children attend well and have good attitudes when participating in education. Children follow the instructions of staff and understand the importance of adopting safe working practices and the need to use protective equipment when performing higher-risk activities such as cutting bricks. Staff challenge poor behaviour in well-considered ways with the aim of de-escalating the situation. They challenge the occasional instances of inappropriate or derogatory language well in almost all, but not every, circumstance.

Managers engage an independent specialist careers adviser who works well with children to develop career plans. Managers use their good links with partners such as colleges and Department for Work and Pensions advisers to help children prepare for their next steps, for example by helping them to write CVs and prepare for job interviews.

Managers and staff ensure that children can engage in a good range of enrichment activities. Where appropriate for children, this includes educational mobility activities.

Staff include topics in assemblies and through the PSHE curriculum that are effective in raising children's awareness about safe and healthy relationships, diversity and the importance of tolerating differences in society.

Children's health: outstanding

There is a broad mix of expertise and experience in the multidisciplinary health and well-being team. The team is dedicated and passionate about providing excellent healthcare to the children in this home.

Children's views and wishes are the focus of their healthcare planning and formulation. They are supported to express their physical and emotional needs as they see these to be, and help staff to develop strategies to support them. This collaborative approach gives children confidence in the bespoke support that they receive and ensure that they make significant and sustainable progress in all areas of their development.

The health and well-being team provides targeted training to care managers and care staff. This ensures that there is an exceptionally well-coordinated approach to Secure Stairs, which is fully embedded in practice. The whole ethos of Secure Stairs is embraced by all staff, and this creates an integrated centre-wide approach to

supporting the children to feel safe and improve their emotional health and self-esteem.

The impact of the health and well-being service on children's progress and development is exceptionally well monitored and evaluated. Research-based practice developed and embedded in the daily routine of the home is widely disseminated, through national publications, to inform practice across the secure children's home estate.

Together with an occupational therapist, the health and well-being team helps care staff to recognise the importance of exploring children's sensory needs. This understanding helps staff to support children to develop their own strategies to manage their anxieties and frustrations and build emotional resilience.

A speech and language therapist categorises each child's communication abilities and identifies what support they need going forward. Innovative approaches, such as the use of comic strip conversations, help children to understand concepts that they find particularly difficult. This helps children to develop their emotional literacy and enables them to express their emotions and feelings.

The highly skilled primary care team meets the health needs of the children, helping to maintain and improve their physical well-being. Each child has a named nurse. This helps develop relationships and trust and provides consistency of care. Medicines management and administration is safe and effective, with good oversight from the primary care team.

The experienced substance misuse team uses its expertise and skills to build positive relationships with staff and children. The team uses a series of tailored interactive sessions to help educate and inform children about the dangers of alcohol and drug use. The team also delivers a training package for all new staff, to help educate and raise awareness across the entire home.

Children's transitions with regard to meeting their continuing health needs are extremely well thought out and carefully planned from the moment the child arrives at the home. This includes ensuring that children receive clinical support such as CAMHS care when they move on from the home.

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

Managers and staff prioritise seeking and sharing information in order to know and understand each child's individual risks and vulnerabilities. Children's daily routines and lived experiences inform the regular multidisciplinary team around the child meetings and formulation meetings. Importantly, children consistently contribute to these meetings and their views are skilfully sought and shared. During these meetings, staff agree and review what responses work for individual children and what responses are unhelpful or ineffective. This bespoke approach helps children to become increasingly safe.

Children understand and respond well to the reward system used in the home. This helps children to achieve their personal goals and learn to take responsibility for their actions and behaviours. Safe and consistent boundaries help children to develop the skills and strategies that they need to make positive choices and appropriately manage their anxieties and frustrations.

Staff skilfully use their positive relationships with children to de-escalate situations and incidents that may otherwise result in the use of physical restraint. When physical restraint is necessary, this is only used as a last resort and in line with the legal criteria. Leaders and managers effectively scrutinise restraint practice, and a selection of incidents are also reviewed by the independent visitor and by an independent monitor reporting to the local authority safeguarding partnership. This open and transparent practice helps to keep children safe and protect them from harm.

When children's behaviours or actions place them or others at risk of serious or immediate harm, staff follow the home's policies and procedures to effectively manage these incidents. Children are sometimes separated from their peers for short periods of time or managed away from their peers until the safety of all can be assured. In these circumstances, children are carefully and regularly monitored to ensure that these measures remain necessary and lawful. On some occasions, in order to reduce the risk of harm during an incident, items are removed from children's rooms. In a small number of the incidents reviewed, the rationale for this was not always clearly recorded.

Managers use a range of qualitative and quantitative information to improve their understanding of risk across the home. These systems include peer audits and the assessment of data. This evaluation helps managers to identify any emerging safeguarding patterns that may indicate if risks to children are reducing or increasing. Accordingly, staff are able to refine their practice to better support children in crisis.

Managers and staff across the home and from all disciplines have a good understanding of child protection and safeguarding procedures. Referrals to local authority designated officers are prompt and detailed, and children are well supported through this process.

As children progress and risks to their safety reduce, and when this is reflected in their agreed plans, they are able to spend time away from the home taking part in activities. These activities help children to readjust to being outside of a secure setting and prepare them to leave the home. Their time away from the home is continually assessed to ensure that they are able to manage this responsibility and make positive choices. Nevertheless, there has been a recent occasion when a child went missing on their return to the home. Managers did not appropriately review this incident at the time or adjust practice. This led to a second similar incident that could have been prevented.

As part of their continual review of risks to children, staff sensitively monitor changes in children's moods and demeanour, and use this information to amend children's support plans and risk assessments. Children's risk of self-harm reduces over time because of the effective multidisciplinary working from professionals across the home.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers across all disciplines work collaboratively to ensure that children receive good-quality care and exceptional support that is tailored to their individual needs. This seamless and cohesive approach is a significant strength of this home.

There is strong partnership working with external professionals and agencies. Social workers praised the effective communication between managers, staff, children's families and other professionals, and spoke of how this supports children's progress.

Managers at all levels and across all disciplines are strong advocates for children. When the actions of others fail to effectively support children or enable them to access the help and support that they need, managers challenge these decisions. This has been particularly successful with regard to children receiving CAMHS support in the community when they leave the home.

Leaders and managers ensure that staff training equips them to recognise and meet children's diverse and often complex needs. Training focuses on a model of trauma-informed practice to help staff to understand antecedents to children's behaviours and develop the skills necessary to support children's progress. This successful approach provides children with consistent and nurturing care.

New staff benefit from a well-structured and effective induction programme. This is strengthened by regular staff supervision sessions and appraisals that encourage staff to consolidate their learning. Managers focus on supporting staff across the centre to reflect on how developing their skills will impact on the quality of care that children receive. Importantly, managers hold staff to account if their practice falls short of acceptable standards.

Maintaining staffing has been a challenge. Leaders and managers now use an agency to assist in the recruitment of staff. This is helping to address previous staffing shortfalls. Managers understand that there is additional pressure on established and experienced staff to provide support and mentoring to new staff. Despite these pressures, safe staffing levels have been maintained across the home.

Senior leaders and managers take a rounded approach to reviewing the quality of care across the home. Although there is a drive to learn from incidents, there have been missed opportunities for learning to be disseminated across the home in a timely manner. For example, the learning from a recent restraint where a child was injured had not been shared with all staff.

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 protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(v)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that when children return from time away from the home their arrival is safely managed.	30 November 2022
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, the registered person must ensure that any learning points from incidents are disseminated to all staff in a timely manner.	30 November 2022
The registered person must ensure that a record is made of any complaint, the action taken in response, and the outcome of any investigation. (Regulation 39 (3))	30 November 2022

In particular, the registered person must ensure that records consistently show how complaints have been resolved and that they were addressed in a timely manner.

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)
- The registered person should ensure that staff continually and actively assess the risks to each child and arrangements in place to protect them. In particular, staff should record the reasons why they have removed items from a child's bedroom in order to keep them safe. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 42, paragraph 9.5)

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 5UJ

Responsible individual: Martyn Stenton

Registered manager: Valerie Haigh and Selwyn Morgans

Inspectors

Paul Taylor, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Cathey Moriarty, Social Care Inspector

Debbie Holder, Social Care Inspector

Malcolm Fraser, His Majesty's Inspector, Further Education and Skills (4 to 6 October 2022)

Gary Turney, Health and Justice Inspector, Care Quality Commission

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