

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 children's home is operated by a local authority and is approved by the Secretary of State to restrict children's liberty. The home provides care for up to 34 children aged between 10 and 17 years, living in five houses. There were 23 children living in the home at the time of this inspection.

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 of the home registered with Ofsted in January 2022.

Inspection date: 22 November 2023

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'.

Outcome 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.

Findings from the inspection

Children enjoy and benefit from the warm and supportive relationships that they have with the adults who care for them. They are relaxed in their company and seek their reassurance and affirmation. Staff clearly know and understand the needs of the children in their care and are genuinely interested in and concerned about their welfare. They offer sensitive and skilled support to help children deal with their frustrations and anxieties. This helps children to develop strategies and insight, which in turn enables them to make progress.

Children's complaints are taken seriously, investigated and resolved. Children are able to confirm if they are happy about the resolution, and this helps to ensure that not only do they feel listened to, but that they have a voice and can influence how they are being cared for.

Children's views are encouraged and valued. They are involved and consulted on how they prefer to be cared for. They are encouraged to attend any reviews in order to share what strategies work best for them and how they think they should be supported at times of anxiety or stress. As a result, their care plans are shaped by their opinions and then implemented in practice.

Children also have regular house meetings, involving peers and staff, where they can voice preferences regarding activities, menus and plans for celebrations such as birthdays and Christmas. They also meet with members of staff for key-work sessions, where they can discuss any other issues and seek resolutions to anything that is concerning them. Children have access to independent advocates and visitors if they wish to share their views or concerns with adults who do not work in the home. Consequently, children have numerous avenues and opportunities to share their views and are confident in doing this.

Staff know what to do and who to inform if they have concerns about a child's welfare. Managers inform relevant stakeholders and agencies, such as the local authority designated officer and social workers, if there are issues that need to be shared or investigated. Action is taken promptly to ensure that children are protected whenever a concern arises. Professionals report effective and swift communication whenever an issue needs to be acted on. This approach ensures accountability and transparency in safeguarding practice.

The use of single separation and being 'managed away' (where children are locked in an area when they meet the legal criteria of being a significant risk to themselves

or others) is monitored by managers to ensure it is appropriate and proportionate and only used in line with regulation.

Consequences are also now monitored more effectively by managers to ensure they are relevant and effective. This helps children to link their actions with consequences and provides them with an opportunity to reflect on their behaviours.

The management team has undergone recent changes, and this process is embedding itself and providing stability to leadership as well as an improvement in the monitoring of records. Staff now receive regular formal supervision, and the quality of these sessions and the records of these are of a good standard.

The home uses agency staff to help support the children when necessary. Although these staff are regularly used, the managers of the home have not provided direct, formal supervision and support to them. This means that it is not always clear that they are operating in line with the culture and ethos of the home. Although this has not had an impact on any child's well-being, it is a missed opportunity to ensure cohesive teamwork, consistency and inclusion for the staff concerned.

There have been ongoing challenges in recruiting staff. These reflect a national picture and are not a unique challenge to this home. As a result, the registered manager has decided to temporarily close one of the houses on site. This pragmatic move has meant that staff from that home can supplement staffing in the other homes. Additionally, this measure has reduced the occupancy. Consequently, there are enough staff to provide the support and care that the children need.

The recommendations made in relation to the education provision at the last inspection in July 2023 have not been assessed at this inspection. The requirements related to the care of the children made at that inspection have been addressed.

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 all staff receive supervision of their practice from an appropriately qualified and experienced professional. In particular, ensure that the staff provided by an agency receive good-quality supervision that will help them to reflect on the care of children and be effective in their role. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the ethos of the home supports each child to learn. In particular, ensure that the head of education improves 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, ensure that education leaders and subject teachers provide children with frequent, 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 DH1 5UL

Responsible individual: Martyn Stenton

Registered manager: Valerie Haigh

Inspectors

Paul Taylor, Social Care Inspector

Thirza Smith, Social Care Inspector

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