

Aycliffe Secure Services

Durham County Council
Aycliffe Secure Centre, County Hall Durham, County Durham DH1 5UL

Monitoring visit

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this secure children's home

The home is operated by a local authority and is approved by the Department for Education to restrict children's liberty. The home provides care for up to 34 children aged between 10 and 17 years across 5 houses.

At the time of this inspection, 20 children were living at the home. The home provides care for up to 8 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 is not registered with Ofsted.

Inspection date: 29 January 2026

This monitoring visit

Ofsted carried out a full inspection of this home from 9 to 11 December 2025 and judged the service to be inadequate. This was because leaders and managers failed to take appropriate action to protect children from serious harm.

Ofsted issued three compliance notices under regulations 12, 13 and 20 and raised a further four requirements and two recommendations. The purpose of this visit was to review the actions taken by senior leaders to address the steps outlined in the compliance notices and to review actions taken to meet some of the other

requirements. The remaining requirements and recommendations are repeated and will be reviewed at the next inspection.

Children say they feel happier living at the home and that the racist remarks have stopped. They also say that if other children make inappropriate and unacceptable comments, the staff are quick to respond and challenge these. Furthermore, one child, who previously felt unsupported in raising complaints, reported that the forms are now easily accessible and that staff now provide support to assist them in raising complaints.

Independent oversight arrangements to strengthen children's safeguarding are now in place. Relevant external agencies, such as the local authority safeguarding children's board, now review closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage and records of physical restraint. This provides leaders and managers with additional assurance and enhances the scrutiny of practice, helping to identify learning points and highlighting what has worked well. These reviews also consider whether physical restraint holds used are appropriate and compliant with guidance. To further strengthen independent oversight, the independent visitor routinely samples CCTV footage alongside relevant documentation. This provides an additional layer of challenge and supports continuous improvements in safeguarding practice. However, these improvements are not yet embedded, and their effectiveness to date cannot yet be evidenced.

When children do not get along, staff are vigilant in managing their movements around the home to reduce the risk of incidents. Staff speak about planning movements carefully and how they supervise children closely to ensure that they do not see others where this may increase tensions. Communication between staff is improving, and routines are adapted as needed to maintain children's safety.

Leaders and managers have ensured that staff are well informed about the home's whistleblowing procedure. There has been a focus on educating staff about how to raise concerns, including through regular training and clear guidance. Understanding of whistleblowing is routinely reinforced, as it is now discussed during formal supervision sessions and team meetings. This helps staff remain confident about their responsibilities and assured that concerns will be taken seriously and responded to appropriately.

Leaders and managers now act without delay when there are concerns about staff conduct. This has resulted in staff being suspended when their practice falls short of acceptable standards and further training for staff to develop their skills and knowledge when providing care to children.

There have been improvements in the use of restraint, which is generally applied for the minimal time necessary and is not used routinely. Staff are increasingly demonstrating effective attempts to de-escalate situations before restraint is considered. Management oversight has strengthened, and the introduction of panel meetings provides an additional layer of quality assurance. However, oversight at the

duty manager level is not yet fully effective and does not consistently identify shortfalls in all aspects of restraint practice. As a result, some issues remain, including reflective supervision not always being carried out as recorded and additional guidance used during incidents not being consistently reflected in written records.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
09/12/2025	Full	Inadequate
28/01/2025	Full	Good
11/07/2023	Full	Good
21/09/2022	Full	Good

What does the secure 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, The 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 with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff— seek to involve each child's placing authority effectively in the child's care, in accordance with the child's relevant plans; and seek to develop and maintain effective professional relationships with such persons, bodies or organisations as the registered person considers appropriate having regard to the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the children's home is to provide care and accommodation. (Regulation 5 (a)(d)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that children's external professionals are kept up to date with all relevant information.	25 January 2026
*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))	15 March 2026

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the necessary support is provided to children to enable them to access their education or training. In particular, there should be a clear post-16 offer that children can access. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 28, paragraph 5.13)
- The registered person should ensure that incidents of single separation are fully recorded about what checks are undertaken and that these are carried out in line with the home's policy. Any education or activities offered while a child is in single separation or being managed away should be recorded. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 50, paragraph 9.65)

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this visit was to monitor the action taken and the progress made by the children's home since its last Ofsted inspection.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC035648

Provision sub-type: Secure unit

Registered provider: Durham County Council

Registered provider address: Fostering & Adoption Team, Spectrum 8, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham SR7 7TT

Responsible individual: Clare Nicholls

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Gemma McDonnell, Social Care Inspector
Leanne Lyon, Social Care Inspector

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