

SC037984

Registered provider: Darlington Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The children's home is operated by a local authority. It provides care for up three children who may have social and emotional difficulties.

The acting manager is not registered with Ofsted.

At the time of the inspection, there were two children living in the home.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 March 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 14 August 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/08/2019	Full	Good
15/05/2018	Full	Good
05/09/2017	Full	Good
18/01/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children make good progress and are developing trusting and supportive relationships with the staff.

Children who have moved on successfully from the home have done so with the support of the staff. Children's moves are managed positively through good planning and communication between all relevant professionals and the children's families. Staff ensure that a visual record is maintained for each child during their time at the home. This is provided to the children in the form of a photo album, which is professionally collated. A child who has moved on wrote, 'The photo book is absolutely class. Thank you so very much.' This visual aid provides the children with a keepsake, which captures their positive memories and supports their well-being.

Children are supported to attend and do well in their educational setting. The staff are proactive and work collaboratively with education providers, which ensures that the communication is effective. These strong partnerships mean that information is shared well, and that good planning takes place. This helps the children to receive a consistent approach and good-quality care. As a result, children are provided with the right learning environment and progress with their education.

The staff work in partnership with a range of specialist health professionals. This ensures that the children have the care and support that they need to meet their emotional and physical health needs. A targeted and supportive approach involves the staff completing specific training, which they have embraced. Children engage with the respective health agencies with the support from the staff, so the children benefit from good health.

Children's residential placement plans are well written and maintained to a good standard. They provide an up-to-date, comprehensive record of the children's daily activities. Staff complete the children's monthly summaries, which analyse and evaluate the care provided, and record any significant events that may have occurred. These are directly accessible by social workers via the shared recording system. This enables good communication and proactive care planning to take place.

Children are supported with their family time. This has resulted in children and families often repairing relationships with support from staff. Children enjoy overnight stays with their families. Staff are readily available to respond to any potential difficulties that may be experienced during these visits. Children and families are aware that the staff can support them and be available at any time. This helps to support and rebuild these family relationships.

Due to the changing interests and levels of engagement of children at the time of the visit, activities offered are rarely taken up. However, staff consistently encourage children to be active and explore what they would like to do. This often results in movie nights and trips to local food and clothing shops. There are photo albums of children who have recently moved on that show a range of activities that they have taken part in.

The children's bedrooms are not maintained to a good standard consistently. There was dirty washing and general waste on one child's bedroom floor, and the bed had not been made. This is not in accordance with what is expected from the children and the staff. These conditions can have a detrimental impact on children's feelings of self-worth.

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

Children's risk assessments are good. The staff work with partner agencies well to ensure that the children's safety plans are bespoke to their individual needs. These plans are developed, reviewed and shared to support the children's safe care. As a result, the children's specific needs and behaviours are known, and the staff and other relevant professionals are proactive in ensuring that the children's safety is prioritised.

The staff follow the children's risk management strategies effectively in order to promote the welfare of the children. These strategies are regularly evaluated, and, when necessary, they are updated in a timely manner. This helps to ensure that children receive a consistent approach from the staff, which helps to keep the children safe.

The staff encourage the children to keep in contact when they are out in the community visiting their family or with friends. Staff carry out welfare calls, and they send text messages to the children, which require a response. However, unless the children are staying out overnight with family or friends, the staff do not maintain contact with the children's friends, families or the children's parents. For example, the staff do not make any attempts to contact the adults to establish if, or when, a child who is persistently late home has left their home. This exposes children to risk as their whereabouts are unknown.

Children who go missing from the home experience a consistent approach that involves the staff working with the police, families and other professionals. This helps to reduce the time that children are away from the home and at potential risk of harm.

Incidents of physical restraint are used as a last resort to keep children and others safe. When the children have been held, they are offered an opportunity to speak to an adult about their experience. These discussions are recorded well, and this process ensures that the child's voice is heard. This helps children to understand appropriate and inappropriate behaviours, so that they can learn how they can manage their emotions and behaviour in a more positive way.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The acting manager is appropriately experienced and qualified. Morale in the team is particularly good. The manager and the staff speak positively about the children past and current. They share a strong commitment to achieving positive outcomes for the children. The strong and reliable staff team are united in their positive comments about the support that they receive from the management team. The manager and staff are skilled in developing excellent relationships and working in partnership with children, families and other agencies, to ensure that the children make good progress.

The manager has positive and effective working relationships with the staff and children, and she has a strong presence in the home. She demonstrates a good understanding of the children's needs, which is supported through her scrutiny and observation of practice and children's records. There is always a strong emphasis on excellent communication. A family member said, 'Joint working is good. There is clear and informative communication.'

Staff receive regular supervision, and the level of training is maintained and supported for all staff. All staff have the required level 3 diploma in caring for children and young people. Staff are encouraged and supported to access higher qualifications and courses during their individual supervision sessions. This supports the staff's development so that they can provide good-quality care to children.

The manager ensures that the communication between internal and external professionals is maintained to a high standard. Incidents of concern specific to the children are shared and discussed. There has been an isolated incident when a child has made an allegation against a member of staff. This has been shared with the designated officer and investigated. However, Ofsted were not informed. This affects Ofsted's ability to provide independent scrutiny and oversight of children's welfare and experiences.

A specific area in the home needs cosmetic redecoration as well as a carpet clean. This is recognised by the manager and is seen as a task to be completed. However, this work has been delayed due to organisational issues. This could make children feel undervalued.

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 registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there. (Regulation 40(4)(c))	31 March 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the children are encouraged and supported to maintain their bedrooms to an acceptable level of cleanliness in order for them to develop their personal skills and to provide them with a nurturing and supportive environment. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.7)
- The registered person should ensure that the maintenance and decoration of the home is done promptly to provide a warm, homely environment. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- The registered person should ensure that the home plays a full part in ensuring that others play their role in maintaining the overall support and safe care of children. In particular, the registered person should ensure that children's time in the community is managed safely through good communication between all parties. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 12, paragraph 2.7)

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'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC037984

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Darlington Borough Council

Registered provider address: Town Hall, Feethams, Darlington, County Durham
DL1 5QT

Responsible individual: Christopher Bell

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector

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