

SC037984

Registered provider: Darlington Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is owned and managed by a local authority. It provides care for up to three children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

At the time of the inspection, three children were living at the home.

The manager registered with Ofsted in December 2022.

The inspection took place on 3 and 4 September 2024, but the inspector also returned on 12 September 2024 to gather additional evidence.

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 September and 12 September 2024

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	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 25 March 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
25/03/2024	Full	Good
29/11/2022	Full	Requires improvement to be good
22/08/2022	Full	Inadequate
01/03/2022	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children say they feel safe and happy living in the home. The home environment is welcoming, and children's bedrooms are personalised and updated as their tastes and interests change. Children play board games with each other and staff. This contributes towards the family feel of the home. One social worker credited the staff for the good progress one child has made.

All children are making good progress, particularly with their education. Staff support the children well to attend school, even on days where there have been incidents. One child, who was previously not attending school, has completed their GCSE exams. This is because of the compassionate relationships that staff have with the children.

Children are offered a variety of activities to participate in. The children have also been on holiday together, which they say they enjoyed. These opportunities help children to strengthen their relationships with each other.

Staff help the children to develop and maintain friendships out of the home. For example, one child has met with their friend after they moved to a different school. Staff also build positive relationships with children's family members, which helps to support children when they return to the care of their family. Some children stay in touch with the staff after they have moved on. This increases children's support networks.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

When an allegation is made against a staff member, investigations are not always completed appropriately by leaders and managers. One investigation report does not consider information shared by other professionals and all known elements of the allegation. This prevents an effective evaluation of any disciplinary action that may be required. The report is also not shared with the home's manager. This prevents the manager from putting effective strategies in place to mitigate risk, which leaves vulnerable children at risk of harm.

Some staff prevent children from moving freely around the home. This can cause children to become upset, which on one occasion led to an incident. These inconsistencies place unassessed and unreviewed restrictions on children's liberty.

Staff complete checks on children's electronic devices to help to keep them safe. However, when staff identify that inappropriate content has been accessed by children, this is not always clearly documented. This prevents the manager from tracking any patterns in behaviour. Despite this, staff help children to understand

why such content is inappropriate, which helps children to learn how to keep themselves safe.

Staff know children's risks well. Risk assessments are regularly updated as children's risks change. Children have their own version of their care plan that they contribute to. This helps children understand how staff try to help them to keep safe and care for them.

When children go missing from home, staff follow the necessary steps to try to find them. The positive relationships that staff have with children's family members help staff to locate children more quickly and therefore improve their safety.

Consequences are restorative in nature. Children are supported to repair damage in the home that has been caused when they are upset. This helps children to understand the consequences of their actions.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The manager's monitoring and review processes are not always effective. Staff and the manager escalate requests to a child's social worker when information is missing or required. However, this is not always productive, as there is no clear process in place. In addition, not all children's documents reflect the most current information. This hinders staff from having the most up-to-date information required to care for the children.

The manager failed to notify Ofsted of one serious incident. This prevents the regulator from having oversight of safeguarding practice, to be assured that it is effective.

The manager's six-monthly review of the home lacks evaluation of the home's priorities. This prevents the manager from having an effective plan to learn from success or strengthen areas for development.

The language used to describe children's behaviours in documents is not always language that cares. This means language can be considered as stigmatising and unhelpful to children when they access their files.

The manager is passionate about providing good care to the children. She is supported well by a deputy manager. Staff report feeling well supported. This is evidenced by the stability of the staff team. Supervision sessions are held regularly and are reflective in nature. This helps the manager to be assured that staff understand the risks that children face and how to mitigate these risks.

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, 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 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 the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm; that the effectiveness of the home's child protection policies is monitored regularly. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(b)(e))	1 November 2024
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— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate; understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home;	1 November 2024

use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(f)(h))	
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; there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. A notification made under this regulation— must include details of— the matter; the other persons, bodies or organisations (if any) who or which have been notified; and any actions taken by the registered person as a result of the matter; must be made or confirmed in writing. (Regulation 40 (4)(c)(e) (5)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(b))	1 November 2024
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy which— is intended to safeguard children accommodated in the children's home from abuse or neglect; and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect. The procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect must, in particular— provide for records to be kept of an allegation of abuse or neglect, and the action taken in response; describe the measures which may be necessary to protect children following an allegation of abuse or neglect.	1 November 2024

The registered person must keep under review and, as necessary, revise the home's child protection policies. (Regulation 34 (1)(a)(b) (2)(d)(e) (6))	
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Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that, just as in a family home, children are able to access all shared areas of their home unless there are specific reasons why this would not meet a child's needs. Limits on privacy and access may only be put in place to safeguard each child in the home. All decisions should be informed by a rigorous assessment of that individual child's needs, be properly recorded and be kept under regular review. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.10)
- The registered person should ensure that the home works in close partnership with all those who play a role in protecting and caring for the child, but particularly the child's local authority and statutory social worker. The registered person should evidence what they have done to achieve engagement, including any actions taken to escalate concern. In particular, the registered person should ensure that there is a clear escalation policy and process in place which can demonstrate the effectiveness of any escalation that is required. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 11, paragraph 2.3)
- The registered person should ensure that case records are kept up to date and signed and dated by the author of each entry. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 14.3)
- The registered person should ensure that staff are familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Staff should record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. In particular, the registered person should ensure that staff use language that cares when writing about the children. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)
- The registered person is responsible for deciding what each review as set out in regulation 45 should focus on, based on the specific circumstances of the home at that particular time and any areas of high risk to the children that the home is designed to care for, such as missing or exploitation. They will also consider what information or data recorded in the home will form part of the evidence base for their analysis and conclusions. There is no expectation that the registered person will review the home against every part of the quality standards every six months, but should use their professional judgement to decide which factors to focus on. The review should enable the registered person to identify areas of strength and

possible weakness in the home's care, which will be captured in the written report. The report should clearly identify any actions required for the next six months of delivery within the home and how those actions will be addressed. The whole review process and the resulting report should be used as a tool for continuous improvement in the home. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 64, paragraph 15.2 and page 65, paragraph 15.4)

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: Darlington Borough Council, Town Hall, Feethams,
Darlington DL1 5QT

Responsible individual: Christopher Bell

Registered manager: Sharon Davison

Inspector

Julia Hagan, Social Care Inspector

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