

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 provides care and accommodation for three young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. It is operated by a local authority.

Inspection dates: 5 to 6 September 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 18 January 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: Improved effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- The staff are skilled at developing meaningful relationships with young people. As a result, young people feel able to confide in trusted adults.
- The registered manager and her staff team are effective in working with young people's families. This supports young people to maintain their sense of identity and belonging.

- The staff team works proactively to reduce episodes of going missing. They work effectively with the professionals involved in safeguarding young people. There are good protocols in place and communication is maintained at a high standard.
- The young people are supported in their understanding of personal safety, and meaningful key-worker sessions frequently take place. These cover a range of topics highlighted within their individual risk assessments and associated residential placement plans.
- Overall, behaviour is well managed and restraints are rare. Any achievements are recognised and positive reinforcement is routinely implemented.
- The registered manager and staff ensure that young people's views and wishes are sought and listened to. The young people are supported and encouraged in their individual educational placements to make the right choices.
- The staff team is well supported by the registered manager and senior residential worker. Stability within the staff team ensures that young people are provided with a consistent level of care by familiar, trusted adults.

The children's home's areas for development:

- Any records for the purpose of inspection and review should be made accessible for professionals with a legitimate need to view them.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
18/01/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness
14/04/2016	Full	Good
17/02/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
27/08/2015	Full	Good

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- A record of supervision should be kept for staff, including the manager. The record should provide evidence that supervision is being delivered in line with regulation 33(4(b)). In particular, access to such records should be made available to relevant professionals with a legitimate need to view them and, if required, to be reproduced in a legible form. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.3)
- Children's home staff should seek to identify and provide appropriate opportunities for children to develop themselves in accordance with their wishes and feelings and as part of the home's plan for their care. Each child's talents and interests should be understood and nurtured, with children selecting activities based on their personal preferences and abilities, so far as is reasonable. Staff should also support children to try activities that are 'new' for them, where appropriate. The registered person should ensure that children are offered a wide range of activities both inside and outside of the home (where appropriate) and are encouraged to participate in those activities. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 31, paragraphs 6.4 and 6.5)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The young people benefit from a stable and competent staff team. The staff provide consistency in their approach and ensure that communication and reporting of information is accurate and frequently shared.

Both young people are in education: one is attending a mainstream school and the other young person is completing a college course of her choosing. The staff team is proactive in preparing and supporting young people to attend and developing their individual interests and preferences. One young person is encouraged to develop her long-term goal of working with animals, and her chosen course is helping her achieve this aim. The staff also support young people to attend and participate in extracurricular activities that interest them, such as volunteering at animal sanctuaries and team membership of football clubs. Previously, young people were given the opportunity to support other young people who have learning difficulties in a caring role. This level of engagement and encouragement supports young people to develop confidence, resilience and self-esteem.

The young people are in general good health. They are able to access the services that they need to address their physical and emotional well-being. Services are available from child and adolescent mental health services. Appointments are not always taken up by young people, but consultation is still provided to staff to ensure that they are skilled to

meet individual needs. Support is accessible and provided through private agencies with specialist skills in child sexual exploitation and missing from care. The young people are encouraged by staff to engage with and participate in the services offered. This support also helps young people develop positive relationships with other adults. The support enables their individual resilience and emotional stability to grow. Relationships with professionals and young people's families are good. Communication is a particular strength within this home.

The staff are skilled in developing trusting relationships with young people, providing a non-judgemental and nurturing environment. A mother said, 'My contact with staff is brilliant and they are very friendly; they maintain contact by either text or by telephone. My correspondence with the home is very good and I think they do their job really well. I have no concerns.'

The home is well maintained and decorated to a good standard. It is close to local amenities and the town centre. The young people have positive friendships outside in the local community. However, staff also ensure that consistent messages are given in reference to socialising with peers who are known to engage in anti-social behaviour. The young people are made fully aware that if they go missing, names and addresses will be shared with the relevant agencies, namely the police. Staff are mindful to celebrate and praise young people when they come back to the home on time and they support positive friendships. The home has a very child-friendly system of giving a 'goody bag' when small achievements have been made. These are put together in agreement with young people, who get to choose which one they would like. Bags have an individual theme, including nail products and hairstyles. This practice enhances the young people's emotional well-being on a regular basis.

Matching processes prior to potential admission are robust. Information from social workers is comprehensive, and files for individual young people provide essential detail, including known contacts, addresses, history and, importantly, likes and dislikes given by the young person themselves. This ensures that preparation and planning for a young person prior to them living at the home can take place, which contributes to the stability of placements.

The transition of a young person moving on from the home recently was difficult as her relationships were positive but she was supported to deal with her emotional difficulties and move on positively. Contact is maintained, which supports young people's emotional understanding and enhances resilience.

The staff team provides activities for young people, and during holiday periods young people are encouraged to decide on which activities or places they would like to do or go to. Each young person experienced individual activities during the recent summer break. There is, however, a need for staff to consistently provide a range of activities on a weekly basis that encourage young people to engage with staff or new groups that develop their experiences. This is especially important to help divert young people from episodes of going missing and to encourage positive relationships with acceptable boundaries.

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

When children go missing, staff are proactive. They go out and look for them. Robust missing protocols are followed. The staff team gathers intelligence and shares this with the local police and other relevant agencies to promote the safe return of the young people. Regular calls are made to young people when they are away from the home for long periods to check that they are safe and well. Independent return home interviews are carried out and the staff team ensures that time is spent with young people through key-worker sessions. This enables an open discussion to identify why they have been missing and to highlight areas of concern. It also supports and strengthens relationships between staff and young people to enable a reduction in missing episodes. A local police officer said:

'I feel they are doing everything under their power to safeguard the young people, following procedures and protocol. They also go out looking for the young people. I have observed the staff on a weekly basis engaging positively with the young people. They clearly have a good bond.'

The leadership and management team ensures that all staff receive regular safeguarding training. Recently, all staff completed training on extremism and radicalisation. This level of specific training ensures that staff and management are skilled in identifying and responding to current and emerging risks to young people. External professionals who work directly with staff and young people were particularly positive about the home. One external professional said:

'Information that is sent through is comprehensive and they always keep us up to date. The home is particularly good at intelligence gathering and sharing. They clearly support risk reduction and they are a competent staff team.'

Boundaries and expectations are made clear to young people prior to arrival through discussions with the manager and by their receiving a welcome pack. This includes the children's guide, which informs the young person exactly what is expected of them and what they can expect from staff. Individual risk assessments highlight concerns with mobile phones and other social media equipment. Therefore, contracts of expectations will be drawn up and signed by all parties, including young people. The young people are helped over time to understand the consequences of the choices that they make. The staff team is skilled in talking to young people to empower them to reflect on their actions and promote their development in making informed choices. Self-esteem and confidence are developed.

Bullying is not an issue in this home. The young people were observed to have friendly and positive relationships, despite their different interests.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is very experienced and is supported by a senior residential worker who deputises when required. Another member of the staff team, who works alongside the leadership team, is also qualified to the appropriate management level,

enhancing the overall support provided to manage the home. The staff team feels supported at all times. A staff member commented, 'Both the manager and her deputy are very approachable; you can always text, if need be, on shift for advice. One of them is always available, the whole team is very much the same.' This level of support enables high morale, leading to a positive atmosphere for the young people to live in.

Handovers are done well, ensuring that each young person's individual needs and progress are discussed. The staff team maintains positive focus on each young person throughout the meeting, and small achievements are celebrated. Emphasis is maintained on progress relating to recent behaviours, for example attendance at school and college that day and each young person coming back on time without prompts the previous evening. This planning and consistency of approach is motivating and provides a positive vibe to the home and to the young people who live there.

The young people engage well with staff and the management team. Banter was evident between all parties and there was lots of laughter. The home is very small. Young people only have privacy when they are in their bedrooms, so they are together as a group a lot of the time. This is unavoidable, but the atmosphere is mostly positive. A young person said, 'I always feel able to talk to staff. Although the manager, [Name] is not just a manager but someone you are always able to talk to easily.'

The staff receive regular one-to-one supervision and appraisals. However, relevant professionals are not always able to access records to review for the purpose of monitoring quality. A member of staff said, 'Supervisions are monthly. If you require more you can always request. We discuss the young people all the time and training opportunities are available.'

The home's statement of purpose meets its aims and objectives, which set out how it intends to deliver to young people and their families. Parents are fully involved in the care being provided to their child. A member of staff said, 'We work closely with parents. [Name] is very positive and our strong relationship supports any work around trying to reduce risks associated to [Name].' A parent said, 'In terms of missing, I feel that they do everything they can. They report immediately when [Name] goes missing and let me know straight away.'

The registered manager monitors the home's performance and she has clear actions to improve on the service being provided. Practice is monitored routinely during supervisions, informally and formally. Due to the registered manager and senior residential worker being very much a part of every shift, close scrutiny is proactive. Maintenance of young people's records is good and engagement with young people is positive. There are no requirements from this inspection. However, there are two recommendations to maintain consistency in practice and to allow for practice to be monitored by relevant professionals.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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

Responsible individual: Jane Kochanowski

Registered manager: Toni Mace

Inspector(s)

Michael Dack, social care inspector

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