

SC037984

Registered provider: Darlington Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

A local authority operates this home. It provides care for up to three children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

Two children were living at the home at the time of the inspection.

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 June 2025

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: 3 September 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
03/09/2024	Full	Good
25/03/2024	Full	Good
29/11/2022	Full	Requires improvement to be good
22/08/2022	Full	Inadequate

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are making good progress because of the consistent routines that staff put in place for them. Mealtimes are important and are a time when children and staff come together. Children enjoy eating meals together with staff and engage in conversations with one another.

Children have developed positive relationships with most staff. This is because staff are committed to spending time with children and keep them at the centre of their practice. Children present as comfortable and settled.

Children are supported to attend education. Staff work with professionals to encourage children back into education when they face barriers to attending. Furthermore, when an education setting is not meeting a child's needs, the manager raises this, and alternative solutions are found.

The children take part and enjoy activities and days out. Children go to the cinema, bowling and on visits to the beach. Furthermore, children are also able to spend time with their friends in the local community. This supports children's social skills and enhances progress and positive experiences.

Children spend time with their loved ones and staff build positive relationships with those who are important to the children. This shows children that both they and their families are valued by staff. One family member commented that staff keep them well informed and up to date about what is happening for their child.

Staff support children to move out of the home in a positive way. One child has been able to move back home with family, while another has successfully moved into their own home. Staff work with professionals who are skilled in helping children to move on. This has helped children to move on with minimal disruption.

Not all information in children's plans is consistent with their identified needs or individual to what is effective for that child. For example, strategies to support children are duplicated across different children's plans. Nevertheless, the staff know children well and have a good knowledge of their needs and how to meet those needs. This reduces the impact of the inconsistencies in written information.

Children are registered and supported to access local health services. However, they are not always offered specialist care or advice related to their emotional health. This hinders children's progress.

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

Children feel protected and safe living in the home. Incidents of concern are infrequent because of the good relationships staff have with children. Staff know the children's risks well and are proactive at responding to concerns.

When staff suspect there may be a concern arising, they act to ensure the child's well-being and safety needs. On one occasion, staff suspected a child had drunk alcohol. Staff monitored the child throughout the night to ensure that they remained safe. Staff also speak to the children about the impact that such matters can have on their health and well-being. Children have a better understanding of risk and this contributes to the reduction in concerns for children's safety.

Staff understand the risks that the internet may pose to children. There are effective strategies, routines and parental controls in place to manage the risk. Staff also complete work with children about how to keep themselves safe online. This reduces the risk, and children start to learn how to be safer when using the internet.

Allegations or suspicions of harm are investigated thoroughly by the provider. This allows the manager to take effective action to safeguard the children. The information is shared with the relevant professionals and the local authority designated officer. This demonstrates that the manager has children's safety and well-being at the centre of practice.

Staff know how to respond to children when they are upset. Staff regularly praise children and use positive reinforcement, which helps boost their self-esteem. As a result, the use of physical intervention is infrequent. When a hold is required, this is only used to ensure the safety of children. Following a hold, the staff work to repair the relationships with children. The use of consequences for unacceptable behaviour is also minimal. However, there is no review of the effectiveness of any measure used. Staff continue to use ineffective consequences even when this means that children are not learning from them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is actively involved with the day-to-day care of the children and she has a hands-on approach. She attends the children's meetings, goes on activities and comes in on her weekends off to spend time with the children. This shows children that she is invested in them and mirrors to staff how valuable it is to spend time with the children.

The manager knows the home's strengths and areas for development. Where shortfalls have been identified, the manager acts to make improvements and prioritise the progress and experiences of children. This includes challenging professionals when needed and providing staff with additional training to better meet the needs of children. The manager shows commitment to the development of the home and the staff team.

Staff feel well supported by their manager, morale is high and staff work well together. One staff member said: 'The manager has the right balance and respect for her team.' Staff have access to regular formal support, such as supervision sessions, incident debriefs and team meetings. These forums allow staff to reflect on their practice and key events, both together and individually.

The manager completes a review of the quality of care provided to children. She has a good understanding of the home and plans to drive the quality of practice forward. However, the report lacks the required action plan to show how these improvements will be achieved and enable an evaluation of progress against those plans. This has previously been identified as a recommendation and is repeated at this inspection.

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 health and well-being standard is that— the health and well-being needs of children are met; and children receive advice, services and support in relation to their health and well-being. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that each child has access to such dental, medical, nursing, psychiatric and psychological advice, treatment and other services as the child may require. (Regulation 10 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c))	30 August 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should undertake a review that focuses on the quality of the care provided by the home. 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 65, paragraph 15.4)
- The registered person should ensure that any consequences used to address poor behaviour are restorative in nature. This is to help children to recognise the impact of their behaviour on themselves, other children, the staff caring for them and the wider community. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards' page 40, paragraph 9.38)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, using 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 DL1 5QT

Responsible individual: Christopher Bell

Registered manager: Sharon Davison

Inspector

Laura Roberts, Social Care Inspector

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