

Children's homes inspection - Full

Inspection date	14/04/2016
Unique reference number	SC037984
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Darlington Borough Council
Registered person address	Town Hall, Feethams, DARLINGTON, County Durham, DL1 5QT

Responsible individual	David Mason
Registered manager	Toni Mace
Inspector	Debbie White

Inspection date	14/04/2016
Previous inspection judgement	sustained effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
how well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
the impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good

SC037984

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- Young people have good relationships with staff. They have progressed from their starting point and continue to experience good outcomes. Day-to-day experiences are positive.
- Young people's needs are met by an experienced staff team. They have good educational outcomes and are fit and healthy. Young people access the services they need, which include specialist services.
- Good inter-agency working provides young people with access to a range of professionals who are trained in particular areas of care. This additional support gives young people a scope of options to meet their needs.
- Leadership and management outcomes are good. The registered manager and senior residential worker provide a consistent oversight of the care delivered and ensure young people live in a stable environment.
- Young people are safe and their rights are promoted. Their views and wishes are sought and listened to. They are included in making important decisions about their lives.
- Young people rarely go missing and when they do, robust protocols are followed. However, the registered manager is not adequately evaluating missing incidents.
- Overall, behaviour is managed positively and there have been no restraints. Sanctions are rarely used, however, where they have been implemented they are not always appropriate or restorative.
- Young people's care plans are not always consistently in line with young people's local authority plans; nor do they fully include all young people's known needs and risks.

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

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets 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 with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
6. The quality and purpose of care standard 6. In order to meet the quality and purpose of care standard, with particular reference to the quality of the home's written residential care plans and transition planning, the registered provider must ensure that staff; (2)(b) (iv) provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background.	31/05/2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that all incidents of discipline are subject to regular scrutiny to ensure that their use is fair, and that any sanctions used should be restorative in nature to help children recognise the impact of their behaviours. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 46 paragraph 9.36 and 9.38)
- ensure that following an incidents of a child going missing, an evaluation of missing incidents is undertaken to identify any gaps in training, skills or knowledge for staff or to record and retain evidence of what worked well. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 46 paragraph 9.31)

Full report

Information about this children's home

This children's home provides care and accommodation for three young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is operated by a local authority.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
17/02/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
27/08/2015	Full	Good
24/03/2015	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
10/12/2014	Full	Good

Inspection Judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	good
Staff understand the importance of building positive, trusting relationships with young people. They are experienced working with teenagers and adapt their approach to each young person's personality and individuality. As a result, young people have positive experiences and learn to trust staff and make appropriate bonds. This enables young people to feel settled and relaxed in their home. The home is very nicely furnished and decorated and has a homely feel. It is located close to the town centre and all local amenities. Young people's friends live nearby and they have good links with the local community. Young people take pride in their home and have personalised their bedroom. This shows they value their environment and feel comfortable in their surroundings. Young people's relationships with staff and each other are in the main harmonious. Young people respect each other and get along well together. Staff speak to young people about any issues that arise and proactively seek their views and wishes while reinforcing the homes expectations. They respond well to challenging behaviour by showing a good level of insight into young people's situations. This level of understanding, by staff, and negotiation helps young people develop empathy skills and tolerance. A staff member said, 'In our home, young people have the opportunity at all times to have a say in their support and care, whether this be through their meetings, regular key working or consultations.' There are some good examples of needs-led individualised care. Pre-admission assessments ensure the home is an appropriate placement for young people. Social workers provide full referral information that sets out young people's known needs and risks to ensure staff have the skills and knowledge to provide high levels of care and support. Case files contain a wealth of information that inform staff of young people's history and why they are moving into residential care. There are, however, some shortfalls in the home's written residential plans, which set out the day-to-day arrangements for young people. Not all the plans are fully inclusive of placement information provided by social workers. Consequently, in some cases there are no recorded strategies to guide and inform staff about how to address the finer points of how young people are to be consistently supported. Additionally, the home use of pre-populated plans results in a lack of individuality for young people. For example, in some instances young people have the same needs recorded with exactly the same care management strategies. Although this has not significantly impacted on the young people currently living at the home,	

nonetheless, this practice is institutionalised and can potentially miss important factors specific to young people's needs.

Young people are doing really well in their education and work placements. Staff fully support educational outcomes and actively advocate on behalf of young people. This ensures they have the support to fulfil their potential. Regular communication with schools and work placements assists young people to get through difficult periods in their lives. The ongoing support and encouragement staff and professionals provide is impacting positively and has led to maintained long-term placements.

Young people are fit and healthy and they access the healthcare services they need. The looked after children's nurse said, 'Staff are good about communication about the young people so I know their healthcare needs. Young people get lots of good advice from staff and they are good at networking and involving other agencies.' Meals are healthy and nutritious and staff engage young people in healthy activities such as going to the gym and walking.

Staff have received additional training in matters particularly relevant to caring for teenagers and use this knowledge in key worker sessions. For example, training in positive sexual health; risks associated with substance misuse; and risks around exploitation and social media. This informs and guides young people to understand all aspects of positive health and well-being.

There are mixed outcomes for young people moving into the home and for care leavers. New young people are very well supported and introductions to the home are planned in accordance with young people's needs, wishes and feelings. Staff go over and above to make young people feel welcome. They spend time with them, meet regularly for coffee and take them shopping for new bedding and fixtures for their bedroom. Young people visit for tea and extend their time at the home until they feel ready to move in.

A young person recently admitted is doing her final exams at school, so staff have furnished a spare room with a desk and other equipment so she can concentrate on her study in private. They have also arranged for the young person to have a peer mentor to help with a particular exam, which has given the young person the confidence she felt she lacked. This additional encouragement and support has enhanced the young person's chances of success during an important phase in her life. An independent reviewing officer said, 'My young person is newly accommodated and I'm really impressed with the planning and transition. It was a good move, very positive. They did all her room for her, in her choice. They seem to know her and her needs.'

The transition of a young person moving on from the home lacks robust planning and preparation for independent living. A young person that is very close to moving onto supported accommodation does not have a pathway plan. The level

of support provided to him is unclear and his care leaving care records do not demonstrate his skills and ability to function independently. This compromises his potential for success.

Despite the shortfall in maintaining records, the young person has been well supported in some areas. He engages with a personal advisor and has regular meetings with his social worker. Staff actively advocate on his behalf to promote his wishes. This has resulted in plans for the young person to be moved to his choice of accommodation. Additional input from a local authority housing officer has enabled the young person to better understand his options and housing rights. A reviewing officer said, 'The staff challenge on behalf of young people, which in my experience is rare for a children's home. Overall, I am happy with the placement and transition. I feel staff provide good care.'

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
Young people are safe and they are supported to live a safe lifestyle. Staff receive regular child protection training and know what to do if they are concerned about a young person's welfare. Recent staff training with a view to keeping young people safe includes radicalisation; e-safety; child sexual exploitation and safe relationships. Such training helps increase staff's knowledge and awareness of emerging risks to young people. Young people rarely go missing, however, on the few occasions when they do, robust missing protocols are implemented. Staff do a lot of preventative work to keep children safe. This includes regular telephone contact when young people are away from the home for long periods; checking where young people are and where they say they will be; and checking that young people are not socialising with peers who encourage anti-social behaviours. Staff have a good relationship with local police who assist when a young person is reported missing. Good communication includes advising police where young people are deemed vulnerable or at risk. When young people return from being missing they have an independent return home interview and key-worker sessions to establish why they have been missing. This supports young people and reduces the likelihood of recurring missing incidents. A local police officer said, 'I think the home is really good. We have a good relationship with the staff and call in regularly to meet with young people informally to establish good relationships. We	

meet with staff to discuss vulnerabilities or known concerns. We don't have any concerns about young people going missing.'

There have been no incidents of bullying and no complaints since the last inspection. Young people know how to complain and know how to access local advocacy services. They are regularly consulted, in private, by the independent visitor and have access to other adults who are independent of the home. For example, school teachers and parents. These measures ensure young people are able to talk to an independent adult if they have any worries or concerns about living at the home.

Behaviour management encompasses a range of techniques. Staff are trained in the safe restraint and handling of young people and utilise their de-escalation techniques well. They know to avoid undue confrontation and take into account young people's distress and emotional state when behaviours escalate. The outcome of this is there have been no restraints since the last inspection. This is a positive outcome for young people.

Rewards and praise are also used to encourage and celebrate good behaviours. This focused approach teaches young people good social skills and increases their confidence and self-esteem. A youth justice officer who has worked with staff said, 'I have recently been involved with a young person at the home and the staff were very knowledgeable. They supported my work with the young person around behaviours and I am confident they can continue to support (name) in the future.'

Sanctions are rarely used. However, in some instances where sanctions are given these are inappropriate and not in line with permissible sanctions as listed in the home's behaviour management policy. This undermines other good behaviour management practice and disempowers young people. For example, a young person had the electricity supply to his bedroom turned off overnight for coming in late. Other sanctions are repetitive in that the same sanction has been used a number of times for the same young person for the same misdemeanour. This strongly indicates the sanction is not effective. Also, in the sanctions recorded there is no indication that a restorative approach was considered as the primary behaviour management strategy to help young people understand the impact and effect of their behaviours.

The registered manager oversees health and safety and ensures regular safety checks are carried out to keep young people, staff and visitors safe. Utilities are regularly checked and serviced and all staff have a first aid qualification to support young people in the case of accidental injury. All visitors are checked, and vetted, and sign the visitor's book.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
The registered manager has been in post since September 2013. She has worked for the local authority for a number of years during which time she has accrued a wealth of childcare experience. She had the required qualifications to manage a children's home. A senior residential worker deputises for the registered manager and they work together effectively. Staff feel leaders and managers are open, transparent and fair. Staff members commented, 'I feel supported and listened to' and, 'managers have an open door policy'. Young people are supported by an experienced staff team. They have a diverse range of skills and come from a range of childcare backgrounds. All staff spoken to during the inspection were very positive about the team. Examples given include the team are 'strong' and, 'consistent' and, 'work really well together.' Regular staff meetings and staff handovers ensure time is allotted to discuss young people's needs and their individual progress. This promotes consistency and continuity. A staff member said, 'We communicate effectively with each other and this is a strength of the home. It enables the team to work well and consistently with the young people.' All statutory training is up to date and staff have attended a number of additional training courses to further their knowledge. This motivation to increase staff's knowledge base and understanding of theories that underpin their practice is good. Staff feel supported and valued. They receive regular one-to-one supervision and annual staff appraisals. This level of oversight and support is seen as very positive. A staff member said, 'Both informal and formal supervisions occur throughout the working month I feel encouraged and supported to pursue areas of interest and attend all available training.' Leaders and managers have a good knowledge of the young people and their progress and outcomes. They are actively involved in young people's day-to-day care and regularly consult with social workers and other professional agencies. Statutory reviews are held as required and staff contribute by attending meetings and providing detailed reports. This informs independent reviewing officers' and other professionals of young people's progress and any shortfalls in care planning. The home operates within its statement of purpose and meets the aims and objectives, which set out what the home proposes to deliver in term of services to young people and their families. Young people are very well informed of the home's expectations in the children's guide and in additional, supplementary information and guidance. Parents are fully included in decisions about their children, where applicable, and social workers are kept fully up-to-date with	

significant events. This proactive information sharing includes young people, and those people important to them, in important life decisions.

The registered manager monitors the home's performance and she has a good knowledge of strengths and weaknesses. Written action plans inform practice improvement and the home's development. For example, staff requested information about the role of the virtual head so the registered manager arranged for him to attend a team day to talk to staff. As part of a young person's transition into independence the registered manager arranged for the housing officer, responsible for care leavers, to talk to the staff about the young person's rights and housing legislation. This responsive intervention focuses on current young people's needs and positive outcomes.

There are some omissions in the home's overall monitoring relating to scrutinising some areas of practice. Namely, evaluating instances where young people go missing and the use of sanctions. This additional oversight is important to ensure any triggers or patterns of behaviour are recognised and addressed; and that sanctions are fair and reasonable.

There are no actions from the last inspection. There is one requirement and two recommendations arising from this inspection.

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection*.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of looked after children is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place, however, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, 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 who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service 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*.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted*, which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, workbased learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It inspects services for looked after children and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2016