

SC037984

Registered provider: Darlington Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is owned and managed by a local authority. It provides care for up three children who may experience social and/or emotional difficulties. Three children were living in the home at the time of the inspection.

The registered manager left the home in January 2022. A new manager is in the process of applying to register with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 August 2022

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 1 March 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
01/03/2022	Full	Good
14/08/2019	Full	Good
15/05/2018	Full	Good
05/09/2017	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Children's overall experiences and progress are inadequate because of serious shortfalls in the help and protection of children and the leadership and management of the home.

The quality of care for some children is poor. Staff carry out one-to-one sessions with the children about their health and lifestyle choices; however, these are ineffective. For example, one child's health continues to deteriorate. Some children either do not attend their medical appointments or they do not follow the advice given at these appointments. Staff do not help children to understand the wider and long-lasting implications of not looking after their physical and emotional health.

Staff do not prioritise forming good relationships with children. This means that children are reluctant to engage in activities with staff or spend time with them. This prevents children from being able to establish supportive and trusting relationships with staff.

Some children's bedrooms are not welcoming. The carpets and bedding are dirty and some furniture is broken. The failure to provide children with a clean and suitable private space does not help them to feel valued and does not promote their self-esteem.

Staff do not allow children, regardless of their age or ability, to use the cooker, and the kitchen door is locked at set times of the day. Staff leave some food, such as cereals or sandwiches, in the lounge should children want a snack. This creates an institutional environment rather than a welcoming home.

Children's experiences and progress in education are mixed. One child left school with 100% attendance and aspires to be a builder. Where children struggle with education, multi-agency meetings are held to discuss the next steps. For one child, this has resulted in a more suitable provision being identified.

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

Poor matching and decision-making by managers have affected the overall stability of the home and place children at risk of serious harm. Children are influenced by the behaviours of other children. This has resulted in an increase in substance misuse for children and the presentation of other behaviours that have not previously been known or apparent.

Some children's risk assessments are of poor quality and do not include actions for staff to follow to reduce the risk of harm to children. For some children, while the

risk of self-harm is known and recorded, the risk assessments do not detail strategies for staff to use to manage and reduce this risk. This is particularly pertinent when self-harm occurs at night and there are fewer staff available to support the children. Consequently, staff are not clear how to respond to these risks to keep children safe.

One child's bedroom window is also a designated emergency exit route. One child has climbed onto the porch roof to speak to another child through this window. Although the risk assessment in place identifies that changes can be made to this exit route if specific risks occur, action has not been taken and the window remains unsafe. The risk assessment in place is poor. There are no steps for staff to follow should they need to use the window in the event of an emergency. This failure places children and staff at risk of serious harm should they be unable to exit the home in the event of a fire or other emergency.

There is a multi-agency response to missing-from-home incidents. Nevertheless, staff do not consistently follow the home's missing-from-care protocols. Some staff said that, at night, after they have reported a child missing, they can go to bed. If accurate, this is not reflected in children's risk assessments or in internal policies. This inconsistent approach does not protect children or to help to ensure their safe return.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The registered manager left the home in January 2022. A new manager is in day-to-day charge of the home and has applied to register with Ofsted.

Currently, the home does not meet the aims and objectives set out in its statement of purpose. The home does not provide a nurturing environment for the children. Staff are unable to build positive, effective relationships with the children and they are not meeting the children's physical and emotional needs. Leaders and managers do not consider how the quality of care that children receive influences their experiences and progress. This shortfall means that the manager is unable to develop the home to improve outcomes for children or to improve staff practice.

Multi-agency strategy meetings are held in response to the escalating behaviours from some children when they are in the local community. During these meetings, children's safety plans are reviewed. Currently, these plans are mostly ineffective. They do not sufficiently guide staff to manage and reduce risks to children's safety or better protect them from harm. For some children, this failure means that they continue to be at risk of criminal exploitation.

Staffing levels in the home are insufficient to support children and keep them safe. For example, there is only one staff member on duty throughout the night. This does not reflect the needs of the children currently living in the home. Staff say that they are often tired on shift because they have stayed up throughout the night to respond to children's behaviours or to manage missing-from-home incidents. A senior manager took steps to address this shortfall during the inspection.

Staff complete mandatory training, including first aid, safeguarding and physical restraint training. Nevertheless, some staff have not completed specific learning that reflects children's individual needs. As there are often occasions when staff lone work, this places children at risk of harm and is detrimental to children's progress and well-being.

Supervision session records are detailed. These sessions provide staff with an opportunity to reflect on their practice. This helps staff to develop their practice and share their experiences.

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 quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— protect and promote each child's welfare; provide to children living in the home the physical necessities they need in order to live there comfortably. (Regulation 6 (1)(b) (2)(ii)(vii))	25 September 2022
The health and well-being standard is that— the health and well-being needs of children are met; 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 staff help each child to— achieve the health and well-being outcomes that are recorded in the child's relevant plans; understand and develop skills to promote the child's well-being. (Regulation 10 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(i)(iv))	25 September 2022
*The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on—	25 September 2022

mutual respect and trust; and positive responses to other children and adults. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— strive to gain each child’s respect and trust; that each child is encouraged to build and maintain positive relationships with others. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(c) (2)(a)(viii)(b))	
*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 staff— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child’s relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child; and that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed, furnished and maintained so as to protect each child from avoidable hazards to the child’s health. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(d))	25 September 2022
*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;	25 September 2022

ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child; 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; demonstrate that practice in the home is informed and improved by taking into account and acting on— research and developments in relation to the ways in which the needs of children are best met. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(c)(d)(f)(g)(i))	
*The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home's statement of purpose. (Regulation 14 (1)(a) (2)(a))	25 September 2022

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

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

Gemma McDonnell, Social Care Inspector

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