

Children's homes inspection - Full

Inspection date	27/08/2015
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	Mrs Jennifer Cooke
Registered manager	Miss Toni Mace
Inspector	Ms Michele Hargan

Inspection date	27/08/2015
Previous inspection judgement	Declined in 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:

- The homes most significant strength is the quality of the staff and their ability to achieve meaningful relationships with young people. As a result, young people make incremental changes that improve their life chances.
- Young people's emotional wellbeing and resilience improve. This is because staff demonstrate and show young people alternative ways of managing difficult feelings.
- Staff are effective at working with the professionals involved with young people. There are good systems in place to ensure that actions needing to be taken on behalf of young people are addressed.
- Staff work well with young people's families. This supports young people who spend time with their families and eases the transition between the family and the children's home.
- Risk taking behaviour, including incidents of missing, are reduced and there are effective systems in place to follow up on any concerns. Young people's understanding about their personal safety and wellbeing improves. They recognise unsafe situations and bring this to the attention of a safe adults like teachers and the police.
- Staff recruitment systems are robust and the Registered Manager has oversight of this and verifies all references. Support for new and established staff is good.
- Young people receive a consistent response from staff about boundaries. Young people know what is expected of them, reducing the need to test this out. Staff do not need to use physical restraint in response to young people's behaviour. Young people come to understand that their positive behaviour and achievements large and small are recognised by staff and often rewarded.
- The Registered Manager brings to the attention of those who need to know when the home can no longer meet a young person's needs. Multi-agency meetings take place so that suitable alternative accommodation is identified. Young people leave the home in a planned way with time to make appropriate endings.
- The home is well run and organised. This helps young people with establishing routines. There are good systems to ensure young people's records are up to date and meaningful key-worker sessions frequently take place. There is a stable staff team with a good skill mix who demonstrate

significant commitment to their continuing professional development.

Recommendations

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

- Ensure the home provides a domestic and homely environment, specifically that young people do not have to routinely sign any documentation as a means of indicating compliance with activities of daily living. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 15 paragraph 3.9)
- Ensure the home's records on each child represent a significant contribution to their life history. Staff should keep and encourage children to keep appropriate memorabilia of the time spent living at the home and help them record significant life events. Specifically, that reports for looked after reviews be written primarily for the benefit of young people to aid their understanding of their life events. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 62 paragraph 14.5)
- Ensure children are actively encouraged to read their records and to add further information to them. They should be regularly reminded of their rights to see information kept about them and be given information about how they might be supported to access their records in later life. Specifically, that any information about young people be retained on their records and not within the staff handover log. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 62 paragraph 14.6)

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home may provide care and accommodation for no more than three children with emotional or behavioural difficulties (EBD). The home is operated by a local authority provision

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
24/03/2015	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
10/12/2014	Full	Good
20/03/2014	Interim	Good Progress
18/07/2013	Full	Good

Inspection Judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	good
Staff know how to establish and maintain trust with young people and this underpins meaningful relationships between them. As a result, young people are helped to manage their behaviour in ways that increase their self-regulation. A member of staff said, 'It doesn't take the young person quite so long to settle back down.' Staff are knowledgeable about the impact of difficult experiences on young people's behaviour. They help young people who vent challenging feelings by calm responses, modelling resilience and promoting positive choices. Young people have ample opportunity to talk to staff who proactively invite them to do so about any aspect of their life that they wish. As a result, frequent key-work sessions with young people take place demonstrating that young people receive help to address important issues affecting their lives. Young people learn staff are sincerely interested in their overall welfare and increasing feelings of belonging and security. A member of staff said, 'But it's not just me he talks to, he knows he can talk to any of the staff and we all do key-worker sessions.' Young people's participation in education and/or training is accorded a high priority. A member of staff said about a young person, 'Not only has his school attendance improved but his engagement when he's there is better.' About another young person, 'He tried really hard with his exams, he went to revision classes and because of this we thought he deserved a reward.' Young people's motivation to try hard at school and to do further training increases because staff persevere, helping improve young people's life chances. Young people have ample opportunities to take part in activities at home and within the surrounding area. This improves young people's physical, social and emotional development helping them make the most of their leisure time. A member of staff said, 'Each young person has a bus pass and they like to use their bikes. Staff take them on bike rides, they go to the local leisure centre and they like to go swimming.' A young person leaving school who wants to gain employment is accessing a course to help prepare him for an apprenticeship. This approach significantly improves young people's overall life chances. A member of staff said, 'They explained everything to him. He is going to start in September and wants to be a car mechanic. He will get paid twenty pounds a week.' Young people receive good support with their basic health care needs and where smoking and alcohol use is an issue, staff enlist the help of other agencies. This	

way of working makes gradual inroads changing young people's behaviour over time while helping them learn more about what being healthy really means. A member of staff said about a young person, 'He doesn't smoke quite as much, sometimes he can go all day without one.' About another young person, 'He stopped smoking for a while.'

Young people receive effective support from staff to help them stay in touch with family members. This means staff know that for young people sometimes contact with their families can raise difficult feelings. They are sensitive to this and encourage young people to talk about any worrying issues, helping them reduce anxious feelings. Staff and parents work together in agreeing contact arrangements causing the least disruption possible to young people undertaking further training. This means increased levels of contact, such as overnight stays, take place at weekends helping young people make the most of the opportunities available to them.

Young people's needs are central to the running of the home. As a result, staff routinely discuss and agree at shift handovers what they will do to meet them. This type of planning promotes effective communication. Young people know that staff talk about issues they raise within them at staff team meetings. This helps young people learn about compromise and negotiation. A member of staff said, 'Young people know we talk about their meetings in our team meetings and a young person said to me about a request he made, "why don't you take it to your team meeting?"' The staff handover log is regularly used as a means of conveying information about young people. This does not respect young people's right to confidentiality and does not enable them ease of access to information held about them.

Young people learn what safe and supportive adults do to help establish feelings of security and self-esteem. This means they notice young people's achievements, skills and talents and they reinforce these by providing them with various rewards. For example, a member of staff said about a young person, 'He's really good at drawing, so we bought him some art supplies.'

Young people routinely sign a range of various documents to demonstrate their participation in everyday aspects of daily living. This is unnecessary and at odds with the ethos of the home which is primarily about building trusting relationships with young people. This practice makes young people different to their peers and does not fit with life in a domestic setting.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
Young people's risk taking, including challenging and offending behaviour, has markedly reduced and their ability to show empathy is more evident. This is because staff gain young people's trust by showing them they can effectively meet their needs including de-escalating situations. As a result, young people realise that their safety and wellbeing is of paramount importance. About an episode of challenging behaviour by a young person the member of staff concerned said, 'He asked for me by name to spend time with him before he went to sleep. I knew it was his way of apologising, I wouldn't ask him to apologise.' Young people's risk assessments make clear the actions staff take to reduce risks and these are reviewed to ensure they remain effective. This practice promotes the safety of young people. Young people have increased recognition about the unsafe behaviour of other individuals, for example, when using the internet. As a result, they can reflect on this with peers, raise a concern and accept support with progressing this from teachers and the police. Young people learn what to do to keep themselves safe and this is reinforced by other professionals. A member of staff said about the actions of the young people concerned, 'The police told us the young people should be commended.' A young person's missing behaviour is reducing because of a curfew agreement and use of a tag device. Strategy meetings take place after every three episodes of missing to review and identify any additional actions to reduce risks. A member of the police said, 'We have a very close relationship with staff at the home. When I've spoken to staff they have tried their utmost to get the young person to return to the home.' Staff know to go looking for the young person and an independent visitor is asked to visit following any episode. Staff ensure there is a co-ordinated response to incidents of missing behaviour helping keep young people to be as safe as possible. A social work team manager said about staff responses when a young person goes missing, 'Staff have done everything that they can.' Young people receive a welcome pack when they are admitted to the home. This promotes a successful transition for young people and helps allay any misunderstanding about what it's like to live in a children's home. The pack includes the children's guide which informs young people about what is expected of them and what they can expect from staff. This also makes clear how to raise any issues of concern. A senior member of staff said, 'No young person is admitted without an introduction period, they come for a visit so they get to know us and other young people.' Young people gain increased understanding about the consequences of the choices they make. This is because staff are skilled at enabling young people to reflect on	

the consequences of their actions. This encourages young people to make links between their feelings, thoughts and behaviour promoting increased self-awareness and emotional development. A young person said there is 'nothing' that he would change about living at the home. He thought the rules were fair and that his material needs were particularly well met. He said, 'I get loads of money.'

Bullying behaviour is not an issue. A member of staff said, 'The young people generally get on well, they can wind each other up a bit, but it's more brotherly behaviour.' Staff rarely have to use physical intervention as a means of managing young people's behaviour. Instead, young people learn that there are other ways to manage conflict and disagreement such as compromise, distraction and time out to think about choices. This helps them develop emotional resilience.

Staff are clear about their safeguarding responsibilities regarding young people and they take action when necessary and notify Ofsted about this. This promotes young people's safety and enables oversight of their responses to any concerns. Staff receive valuable support helping them account, through legal channels if required, for any actions taken to safeguard young people. For example, a member of staff said, 'To prepare for this I did a day training about court which was very interesting.'

Young people are cared for by staff who are subject to rigorous vetting and recruitment checks. This approach safeguards young people. A senior member of staff said, 'It's a big responsibility to recruit staff. I take this seriously and I want to make sure that no-one inappropriate slips through the net.'

The home is based within a small local community where there is an expectation that young people behave in socially acceptable ways. This means that when these conventions are overlooked concerns are brought to the attention of staff and the young people concerned. For example, when a neighbour complained about a young person making too much noise this resulted in an apology. A member of staff said, 'The young person went and said he was sorry, we didn't ask him he just did it of his own accord.'

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
The Registered Manager is a suitably qualified and experienced individual. This person promotes a culture of continuing professional development within the home. For example, she has attained a degree in working with children and young people alongside fulfilling the responsibilities of a Registered Manager. Two other	

staff are shortly to commence recognised mental health training. Ensuring staff continue to develop their knowledge and skills clearly benefits young people. A senior member of staff said, 'We make sure we stay up to date with research.'

The Registered Manager takes effective action to address concerns with other professionals when it is no longer in a young person's best interests to remain at the home. This means the young person concerned can move in a planned way to accommodation that will best meet their needs. This also increases the likelihood of a successful transition. Staff are effective at keeping other professionals informed about significant matters concerning young people. This ensures understanding by those involved with young people and promotes shared decision making about young people's needs. Staff also host a bi-monthly 'Sign and Dine' event where professionals are invited to lunch. This is also an opportunity for an informal catch up, sometimes involving young people, coupled with an opportunity to sign off on any outstanding documents.

Staff receive the necessary information about young people prior to their admission. As a result, they compile meaningful residential plans identifying how they meet young people's needs. Systems are in place to ensure young people's records are well ordered and up to date. This means any actions arising from any meetings can be tracked to ensure the responsible person completes this. This means there is no drift in addressing young people's needs. Reports compiled for young people's looked after reviews are not primarily written for their benefit. Because of this they do not aid young people's understanding of their history and significant events.

The Statement of Purpose includes all the information required by legislation and additional information about senior managers, leaders and other professionals aligned to the home. As a result, those who place young people are provided with all the necessary information aiding informed decision making.

Young people receive consistent support from all staff. This is because there are good systems in place to ensure that new staff are well supported enabling them to gain a good understanding about young people. This approach does not disrupt young people's routines and attachments and promotes meaningful relationships with all staff. This also provides young people with a positive experience of how to accommodate change.

Young people are cared for by staff who receive worthwhile support from their leaders and managers. Staff receive regular supervision and take part in team meetings on a monthly basis. These meetings are also used as opportunities to raise awareness about changes and to clarify roles and responsibilities. For example, a member of staff said, 'We had someone from health and safety come and talk to us. This was also an opportunity for this person to understand more about what we do.'

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*.

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