

SC038237

Registered provider: Darlington Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is operated by a local authority. It provides short breaks for up to five children who have learning and physical disabilities.

The manager registered with Ofsted in May 2014.

At the time of the inspection, there were four children staying at the service. The inspector spoke with all the children.

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 November 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: 18 March 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
18/03/2025	Full	Good
06/02/2024	Full	Good
22/11/2022	Full	Good
22/03/2022	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive safe care and experiences at this short-break service. Children are cared for by skilled and experienced staff who know them well. Consistent care from a stable staff team helps children to build trusting relationships with staff. The children are confident and comfortable in the care of the staff.

Children receive well-planned short-break stays. Children and their families are invited to visit and spend time with staff and other children before they have overnight stays. This ensures that children's individual needs are understood and family and carers are assured ahead of their children's overnight stays.

Ensuring that children have fun experiences is a priority of this service. A wide range of activities are available in the home and community. The staff provide children with choices in activities that they would like to do, which recently extended to children enjoying a holiday. 'My stay' books capture these exceptional experiences for children so that they can share these with their family.

Staff understand children's health needs. Staff receive specialist training to meet children's individual needs and work in partnership with parents and carers when these needs change. Children's plans ensure that children receive consistent care to meet their health and medical needs.

Children are supported in their learning and accompanied to school by staff. For one child, this is the only time that they can access their school due to their individual circumstances. Children's education and health plans contribute to how staff work with children in the home. This ensures that there is continuity of care for the children who visit this service.

Staff build positive working relationships with family and carers. One parent said that there was nothing the home could improve upon. Feedback from children's social workers was equally positive about this valuable service.

Two children moved into the home on an emergency basis. The children's placement at the home did not impact on services provided. However, the planning for those children's care, to move in and move out of the home, was not devised well.

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

Children have plans in place so that staff can understand any known risks or health needs. One child's plan was not up to date. However, other records ensure that the staff are aware of changes.

Since the last inspection, there have been no occasions when a child has gone missing. Staff understand what to do in the exceptional circumstances that this happens. Learning as a team in meetings has helped embed staff learning and understanding.

Staff are trained to administer medication safely. Although there has been one medication error since the last inspection, this was managed well by the registered manager and learning taken forward from this incident to prevent further occurrences.

There has been one occasion when a child has been held by staff to help keep them or others safe. The incident was evaluated to develop learning that was then added to the child's plan. This helps staff to determine how best to support the child when upset or unsettled in the future.

Fire safety within the home has not been prioritised. Fire doors to children's bedrooms do not close securely. External doors are locked with a turnkey, creating a possible barrier to children and staff exiting the building quickly in an emergency. This was highlighted by the fire and rescue department nine months earlier. The registered manager responded quickly to ensure that doors were repaired and a short time frame has been provided for the external doors to be made more accessible.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is committed to providing good-quality care for the children and support for families. The registered manager expects staff to provide high standards of care for the children.

Supervision sessions focus on staff well-being, staff development and how to improve the care that children receive. Staff discuss the children whom they work with in depth with the aim of addressing any concerns and identifying the progress children are making. Staff say that they feel well supported and better able to carry out their duties and improve care for children.

Team meetings take place regularly. They are informative and there is a clear agenda. The registered manager uses this time effectively to undertake team learning activities. This allows her to assess the skills and knowledge of the staff and their ability to help and protect children. Meetings also provide an opportunity to demonstrate how to provide care in a practical way to complement details in a child's plan.

All staff have a qualification or equivalent to work with children in a residential setting. The registered manager considers previous qualifications and experience in her decision as to whether a qualification is equivalent. Training is offered and taken up by staff to ensure that they have the skills to meet children's needs well.

Since the last inspection, escalation by the registered manager to children's social workers when essential records have not been received has improved. However, this is not always effective as accurate, up-to-date plans for all children are not always in place.

In addition, conversations about whether restrictions that are in place for children and whether they remain appropriate are not taking place.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person 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 must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
After consultation with the fire and rescue authority, the registered person must— take adequate precautions against the risk of fire, including the provision of suitable fire equipment in the children's home; and provide adequate means of escape from the home in the event of fire. (Regulation 25 (1)(a)(b))	19 November 2025
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the 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; that arrangements are in place to— ensure the effective induction of each child into the home; manage and review the placement of each child in the home; and plan for, and help, each child to prepare to leave the home or to move into adult care in a way that is consistent with arrangements agreed with the child's placing authority. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iii))	19 December 2025

In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff— if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority's or a relevant person's performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 5 (c))	19 December 2025
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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: SC038237

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: Dawn Burnip

Inspector

Joanne Wallis, Social Care Inspector

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