

SC040583

Registered provider: Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

A local authority owns and manages this children's home. It provides care for up to 3 children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

There has been no registered manager since September 2024.

Three children were living in the home at the time of the inspection.

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 December 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	requires improvement to be good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 5 March 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
05/03/2025	Full	Good
26/02/2024	Full	Good
17/01/2023	Full	Outstanding
02/11/2021	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are cared for by a staff team that is invested in their development and futures. Staff provide children with both stability and affection, and this helps them to develop secure and trusting relationships. Children are sensitively supported to understand their past experiences and to process any trauma these may have caused. This provides children with good foundations to learn how to make and sustain healthy relationships in the future.

Children are in full-time education and attend school consistently. They are meeting their individual attainment targets and making good progress. Staff work closely with schools to provide a consistent approach to meeting children's emotional needs. When incidents occur or children are upset, staff communicate these to the school to ensure that children are supported effectively.

Children take part in a wide range of activities that are both stimulating and enjoyable. They are encouraged to explore new hobbies and interests through community clubs. For example, children attend dance classes and swimming clubs. These provide children with opportunities to develop friendships outside of the home while doing something that they enjoy.

When children move on from the home, they do so in a carefully planned way. Staff remain involved in the children's lives beyond their time living in the home. For example, one child who moved on from the home regularly visits and joins in activities. Equally, support and guidance for the children's parents or foster carers continues throughout the child's life. This helps children to maintain the relationship that they have developed with staff and provides a safety net for their families and carers.

Children do not experience care from a diverse staff team because the staff are all female. This is a missed opportunity for children to experience different gender role models, cultures and ethnicities.

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

Risks to children are low due to their age. However, staff have a good understanding of their individual vulnerabilities. Direct work and house meetings provide opportunities for staff to educate children about the world around them. They discuss age-appropriate topics such as stranger danger, safe relationships, internet safety and wider risks in the community. This helps children to develop a good understanding about personal safety for their futures.

Children are given clear boundaries and expectations from staff that help them to stay safe. Praise and celebrations of children's achievements are central to helping children learn how to manage their emotions and increase their self-esteem. Staff take time to

learn about children's triggers and indicators of their wellbeing. They use this knowledge consistently to prevent incidents from occurring.

Occasionally, when children are upset, staff hold children to keep them safe from harm. When a hold occurs, it is carried out sensitively and safely by trained staff. Reflection and learning are always undertaken by the staff and the manager after a child has been held. This helps to develop preventative strategies to reduce the likelihood of future holds being required.

Staff are attuned to environmental stimuli that have an impact on children's stability and wellbeing, for example when there are changes to family circumstances or a child's moving on plans progress. Staff help children to understand these changes in a way that is meaningful to the child. They use these opportunities to teach children strategies that increase their emotional resilience.

More recently, incidents of children going missing have increased. Staff follow clear plans when a child goes missing to ensure that they return home quickly. They work collaboratively with other resources that are available in the local authority to locate the child. Staff focus on understanding the child's motivation to stay away from the home and develop proactive interventions to reduce the likelihood of children going missing in the future.

Recruitment practice is not yet effective. The manager does not sufficiently explore gaps in employment before appointing new staff. This is because the provider's recruitment system only requires the month and year of previous employments. As a result, the manager is unable to identify all gaps in employment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The home has not had a registered manager since September 2024. However, a manager was appointed for several months during this period. The manager made changes to practice in the home, and these negatively impacted on children's stability and progress. Equally, these changes caused unsettlement in the staff team. Senior managers have responded to this effectively. The capable and effective deputy manager is now overseeing the home and intends to register with Ofsted.

Professionals and staff speak positively about the new management arrangements. They highlight communication, investment in the children's futures and a therapeutic approach to meeting children's emotional and psychological needs as areas of strength. However, they also shared their poor experiences during the previous manager's time. For example, one staff member described how a child's relationship with a peer was encouraged by the manager, and this led to an increase in missing-from-home incidents and reduced engagement with staff.

The acting manager creates an environment that replicates a family home. This is important in this home because children live there for a short period of time with a view

that they will return to live with their families or a foster family. Activities, hobbies and interests are all encouraged. There is consideration given to the cost and the expectations that children have around money so that they are similar to what any typical family could afford. This helps children to continue their newly developed interests when they move on from the home.

The acting manager and staff carry out extensive work with children's families and foster carers to ensure that positive reunification is achieved. She facilitates opportunities for parents and carers to spend time with staff who model positive parenting strategies. This helps them to learn how to meet the needs of their children. Parents said that this has given them the skills and confidence to be able to care for their children independently.

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
The registered provider must appoint a person to manage the children's home if— there is no registered manager in respect of the home. If the registered provider appoints a person to manage the home, the registered provider must, without delay, give HMCI notice of— the name of the person so appointed; and the date on which the appointment takes effect. (Regulation 27 (1)(a) (2)(a)(b))	20 February 2026

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that they maintain good employment practice that explores gaps in employment history. They must ensure that recruitment, supervision and performance management of staff safeguards children and minimises potential risks to them. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)
- The registered person should seek to establish a diverse staff team with a range of interests, skills and experiences. They should lead staff to share those interests, skills and experiences with children to enrich the children's lives. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 52, paragraph 10.6)

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: SC040583

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Registered provider address: Municipal Buildings, Church Road, Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1TW

Responsible individual: Debra Farrow

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Beth Forster, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
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Manchester
M1 2WD

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