

SC064931

Registered provider: Pear Tree Projects Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is operated and managed by a private company. It provides care for up to eight children who may have social and emotional difficulties.

The manager registered with Ofsted in 2018. She holds suitable qualifications for this role.

Inspection dates: 15 and 16 March 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

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
10/12/2019	Full	Good
10/09/2018	Full	Good
13/09/2017	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The children benefit from living in a home that is warm, welcoming and cosy. One professional said, 'You can feel the positive vibe running through the home.' This is a family home with the presence of the children felt throughout. There is an abundance of photos and memory books of important occasions, which have been lovingly put together by the staff. This helps children to feel cared for and have special mementos to take with them when they move on.

The children have ample opportunities to socialise with their peers in rooms that are carefully decorated and furnished. Their bedrooms are spacious, comfortable and full of personal touches. This is important for when they need time alone. Games, play equipment, books and DVDs are plentiful and have been chosen with the children's interests and needs in mind. As a result, children learn while having fun.

The children have a particularly strong sense of belonging to the home. They want to stay here until they reach independence. One child described the home as 'perfect' and another as 'cushty'. All the children rated the home 10 out of 10 and could think of nothing that could be better. The children have excellent relationships with the staff, who nurture and help them. The children talk to the staff about their worries and the staff listen to them. One child said, 'They pick you up when you are feeling down.' A professional said, 'Staff rally round when [name of child] is upset.'

Children make exceptional progress emotionally. One professional said, '[Name of child] is no longer sad and withdrawn. He is thriving.' Another said, '[Name of child] now has a much brighter personality; he will engage in conversation and try out new experiences.' The children are helped by staff to learn ways to self-regulate, which improves their mental health and provides them with lifelong skills. It also reduces serious incidents in the home, which benefits all the children.

When children do experience difficulties and concerning behaviours emerge, the manager is proactive. Professional advice is sought, and training is arranged. This upskills the whole staff team and means that staff can better meet the children's ever-changing needs. Staff are able to reflect on and learn from incidents to improve their practice.

All children are in an education placement and attendance is excellent. This is a major accomplishment and an area of significant progress for the children. Staff understand the value of education and the influence it has on all areas of a child's life. Staff instil this value in the children, which helps them to succeed.

Staff support children to gain apprenticeships or a place at college. The manager works closely with professionals to ensure that the children's wishes are realised. This helps children to achieve.

Children's time with their families is actively promoted and facilitated. Staff understand how important this is for children's well-being and for their sense of identity. Significant progress is made by staff in establishing or developing these relationships. One parent said, 'I couldn't ask for a nicer bunch of people. They are like my extended family.' Another family member said, 'Staff have been brilliant in helping me engage with my nephew.'

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

Arrangements and procedures are in place to ensure that the children are safeguarded within the home. As a result, children feel safe. The managers and staff are alert to concerning behaviours. They act swiftly and effectively to ensure that protective measures are put in place where needed.

Children's risk assessments are clear, thorough and individualised. They are regularly reviewed and updated. Comprehensive plans are in place to manage the children's risks. Staff are familiar with them and there is regular communication from the manager, which helps ensure that a consistent approach is provided to the children. As a result, staff have an excellent understanding of the children's risks and how to reduce them.

Staff are highly skilled in de-escalating situations. They are attuned to the children's individual personalities and are careful to respond and challenge in ways that are productive rather than destructive. As a result, physical restraints have reduced considerably. This represents a significant area of progress and demonstrates that the children are settled and happy.

Direct work is undertaken daily with the children. A significant amount of learning is achieved. The children are helped to understand the impact of their behaviours on themselves and others. Staff involve other services to further protect the children. The children told inspectors how staff have helped them. One child said, 'They have helped me make better choices.' Another child said, 'They have helped me understand how to say things to people.'

The family ethos and culture in the home have created a strong sense of attachment for the children. This has resulted in very few missing-from-home episodes. If children do go missing, staff know what to do and they follow the procedures that are in place. Staff are proactive in looking for children. This reduces the time children are away from home and makes them safer.

Consequences are used to help children learn that unwanted behaviour can have implications for them. Consequences are discussed with the children and their views are taken into account. This resulted in the duration of one consequence being reduced. The children told inspectors that they understand the need for consequences and that they have had a positive impact on their behaviour and made them safer.

The manager recognises that the children sometimes need to speak to someone independent. She has therefore been proactive in welcoming an advocate into the home who has been helped to get to know the children. The advocate said, 'The children feel able to speak with me, which shows they feel safe.' The advocate has supported several of the children. The children's wishes have been listened to and acted on. As a result, their needs have been met and they are happier.

Measures are in place and followed to ensure that new staff are recruited safely. This prevents unsuitable people from being recruited to work with the children who live in this home.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers care deeply about the children. They invest in the children. They think innovatively about how to support the children when they move on from the home into independent living. This means children are helped to adjust at what is a particularly important time for them.

The manager has high aspirations for the children. She advocates on their behalf, taking action when necessary to safeguard them. She challenges professionals and services when children's needs are not being met or when decisions are not in the children's best interests. One professional described the manager as 'incredibly proactive' and said that she 'doesn't let things drift'.

The manager is supported by two able deputy managers and a diverse staff team that brings a range of experience, knowledge and skills to the children. The manager is described as 'running a tight ship' by one professional. Staff reported on how 'organised' the home is, which contributes to its 'smooth running'.

Staff enjoy working in the home. One staff member said, 'I look forward to coming into work every day to support and spend time with the children.' Another said, 'I have nothing but positives to say regarding my role. I thoroughly enjoy my job.' Staff reported that managers have supported them with personal issues by providing them with flexible working arrangements.

Not all staff receive regular formal supervision. Instead, it often takes place on an ad-hoc basis after an incident or when an issue needs to be addressed. This means an inconsistent approach is taken. Some staff reported their unhappiness with the 'lack of face-to-face organised supervision'. One staff member described supervision as 'a one-way conversation, with only criticism and no praise'. Another said, 'There is a lack of recognition for when we go above and beyond.' This does not help staff feel valued.

The manager ensures that staff complete mandatory training. They also obtain additional skills through a programme of ongoing training. This enables staff to better understand and respond to children's specific needs and risk issues. This means that children are better safeguarded and cared for.

The manager deals with children's complaints swiftly and thoroughly. This helps children feel that their views are taken seriously. She provides the children with feedback throughout the process. This helps the children to understand what is happening. One child reflected positively on how his complaint was managed.

The manager has excellent oversight of any incidents that take place in the home. This means she can oversee staff practice to ensure that it is safe and proportionate. She follows up with the children to find out how they are feeling and to reassure them.

The manager's monitoring systems identify areas of progress for the children. Action is then taken to address any concerns. This means that children are helped according to their fluctuating needs. However, a significant amount of the important work that staff carry out with the children goes unrecorded. As a result, the manager is not able to fully scrutinise this work. It also means there is a lack of staff accountability.

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, 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 registered person must ensure that all employees— receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33 (4)(b))	27 April 2023
The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which— are kept up to date; and are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36 (1)(b)(c))	27 April 2023

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: SC064931

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Pear Tree Projects Limited

Registered provider address: Peartree House, Bolam, Darlington, County Durham DL2 2UP

Responsible individual: David Bartlett

Registered manager: Diana Hewick-Crawford

Inspectors

Emma Ridley, Social Care Inspector
Joanne Wallis, Social Care Inspector

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