

SC392549

Registered provider: Duty of Care Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is owned and managed by a private provider. It offers care for up to three children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

The manager registered with Ofsted in May 2016.

At the time of this inspection, three children were living at the home. The inspectors spoke with two children.

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 June 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 17 June 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
17/06/2024	Full	Good
05/03/2024	Full	Requires improvement to be good
14/02/2023	Full	Good
22/06/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

There are significant concerns about the leadership of the home, impacting on the manager and staff team, and a knock-on effect on the children and the care that they receive. The shortfalls in leadership and management have had an impact on the overall judgement for this home.

The decor and interior of the home are not maintained to a good enough standard for children. There are areas that need redecorating, replacing or changing. There is a plan to address this. However, the plan does not deal with all the concerns well enough. The manager has no budget from the provider to be able to make changes as she sees fit. This delays work being undertaken, impacting on the homeliness of the environment.

One child has moved on to independence. When their next arrangement was being discussed, the manager raised concerns that there was not enough support for this child. However, the manager did not escalate her concerns and challenge the local authority effectively to advocate for a better plan.

Staff help children to take responsibility for tasks such as cleaning bedrooms, cooking or washing clothes. However, the door to the laundry is locked, reducing children's ability to be independent. Such practice places limitations on the children's development.

Staff encourage children to become involved in activities. They capture the children's memories with lots of photos that the children can take with them when they move out. However, at times, staffing arrangements impact on the children's opportunities, as there are not enough staff available when needed, limiting the children's choices. This leaves staff and children feeling frustrated.

Children go to school and staff help with homework when needed. One child has taken their exams this term and has plans to go on to study further. This is a success for this child.

Children see people who are important to them if they want to. Where children are unsure, staff support them to work through their feelings. One child has been helped to reconnect with a parent and they are now in regular contact.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

The provider's safeguarding policy is insufficient. It does not include up-to-date guidance for staff to follow and refers to obsolete legislation. The management and leadership team has not had oversight of some amendments to the policy to ensure that the policy is fit for purpose.

This policy underpins staff's safeguarding practice. The management team is fortunate that most staff have experience and have worked in residential care for years. However, new staff do not have the same experience or knowledge. This weakens the team's safeguarding practice and unnecessarily increases the children's level of vulnerability.

Staff understand the issues children have in the context of past trauma. Triggers are well understood, and staff use child-centred strategies to support them. Staff help children to feel safe and cared for. One child's risky behaviour has reduced since moving into the home and the need for physical intervention is low.

Staff support positive behaviour through talking to children, helping them understand the house rules and rewarding good choices where possible. There have been no incidents of children missing from the home. Children say they are happy and settled living in the home.

The manager takes allegations from children seriously. She takes any action required, keeping external professionals informed so professionals can take protective steps if needed.

Specialist help is available for children when needed, such as support for emotional well-being. In addition, a psychologist helps staff with their own practice. They have sessions to reflect, discuss strategies and adapt ways of supporting children. This helps staff to be responsive to the children's needs.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The management arrangements at this home put at risk the oversight of the team and the care of children. The manager is also registered to oversee another home. The manager is overstretched, working significant hours to fulfil expectations, including managing the other home. She is unable to take time off and her well-being is at risk. The provider's infrastructure is weak. There is no contingency plan about what would happen if the manager was off work without warning. This would have a significant impact on children, their care and staff.

The home is managed by an experienced person. She is committed to both the children and the staff in the home. She wants the best for them, but has been open about the difficulties she has experienced. The staff team knows the children well and things that are important to them. However, the team is ground down and morale is low. The manager feels this has filtered down from the demands placed on her role, as she is feeling like this also.

Limited help or support is given to the manager. Role-specific training aimed at developing the leadership arrangements has not resulted in the required improvements to senior leadership. The provider does not have effective monitoring systems, so has very limited knowledge about the manager and staff's performance. The responsible

individual has not completed all the mandatory training to understand the model of care used in the home, demonstrating a lack of investment in their responsibilities. As a result, there continues to be important gaps in the responsible individual's knowledge to fulfil the role.

Policies are insufficient, and some not accessible or easy to find. This level of disorganisation does not help new staff understand their role or responsibilities. A qualified external professional has offered advice, with several recommendations outlining the changes that are needed to the home environment, policies, IT systems, paperwork and development for staff. However, the leadership team has not acted on the advice about what needs to be done to improve things.

The responsible individual has not made child-centred decisions about children coming to live at the home, by-passing the manager and speaking directly to a placing local authority. They have not considered the time needed to plan for the other children already living in the home and have taken away the manager's delegated decision-making responsibilities.

Staff like working at the home and caring for the children. They describe the team as a close-knit family, having good support from the management team. Issues for the children and staff practice are discussed in team meetings and followed up in supervision, which are reflective.

Feedback from the wider professionals is positive. They are happy with the care the children receive. Professional relationships are effective and help staff plan for the children's care.

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 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; promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— 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; and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(d)(f)(g)(i)(h)) In particular, the registered provider must ensure that management arrangements for the home give the manager sufficient time and capacity to fulfil their role.	18 August 2025

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— are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies; that the effectiveness of the home's child protection policies is monitored regularly. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(vii)(e))	18 August 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))	18 August 2025
The quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children; 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— ensure that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed and furnished so as to— meet the needs of each child; and enable each child to participate in the daily life of the home. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c)(i)(ii))	18 August 2025

A responsible individual must— have the capacity, experience and skills to supervise the management of the home, or the homes, in respect of which the responsible individual is nominated. (Regulation 26 (7)(b))	18 August 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: SC392549

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Duty of Care Limited

Registered provider address: 13 Front Street, Staindrop, Darlington, County Durham
DL2 3LZ

Responsible individual: David Heartfield

Registered manager: Susan Kells

Inspectors

Miriam Dolman, Social Care Inspector
Karen Karlsson, Social Care Inspector

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