

SC392549

Registered provider: Duty of Care Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is owned and managed by a private provider. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to three children who may have emotional and/or social difficulties.

The manager registered with Ofsted in 2016.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this setting on 9 July 2019, to carry out a full inspection. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 22 to 23 June 2021

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: 9 July 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
09/07/2019	Full	Good
12/06/2018	Full	Good
10/10/2017	Full	Good
07/03/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are settled in the home and are making good progress from their starting points. Children have trusting relationships with staff who are committed to them and to ensuring that their views are listened to. Staff use a wide range of forums to achieve this, including weekly children's meetings and a secure post box in the home. One child scored living in the home as ten out of ten and said, 'All of the staff are my favourite in their own individual ways.'

The home is warm and welcoming and has recently been redecorated to a high standard. Children's views are sought when deciding on colour schemes for the home and their bedrooms, with one child having been supported to paint his bedroom himself. There are photographs of the children displayed throughout the home and lots of board games and books for them to enjoy. There is a sensory area in the 'snug', which the children use regularly. The manager has plans to convert the summerhouse outside into a large sensory room for the children to access. The care that staff put into the home helps children to feel valued and to develop a sense of belonging.

Staff are creative in finding challenges for the children to take part in that link to their monthly incentive targets. An example of this is the 'clean mouth award', which targets the use of swearing in the home. Staff recognise children's achievements through awards and certificates. These are exhibited in the home, which provides children with a reminder of their successes and boosts their self-esteem.

Staff encourage children to develop their independence skills that are linked to individual targets and are reviewed bi-monthly. One child proudly described menu planning, going out with staff to buy food, and then cooking a weekly meal for the whole home. This provides children with opportunities to learn new skills and to prepare for their future.

Children do well at school and have excellent attendance. Staff attend all education meetings and advocate for the children. Staff communicate with schools daily by way of a handover. One education professional described this as being extremely helpful as it allows the school to understand in advance any issues, which they can then respond to accordingly. Working in partnership so effectively supports children with continued education progression.

Staff ensure that children's health needs are met. Staff support them to attend all health appointments, including therapeutic work. Staff promote healthy eating and exercise in the home and alongside the children, and take part in activities with them such as the 'step challenge'. This sets a good example to children of leading a healthy lifestyle. One child's looked after health assessment is overdue and this has not been followed up by staff. The manager was unaware of this and, while this has not negatively affected the child, it shows a lack of management oversight.

Children know how to complain and are confident in speaking to staff should they want to raise an issue. The complaints forms are readily accessible in the home, so if children want to make a complaint confidentially, they can. This provides children with a range of options should they wish to make a complaint, thus empowering them to do so.

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

Children feel safe living in this home, which is in part due to the consistent approach taken by staff in managing children's behaviour. There are clear rules and boundaries in place which children understand and respond to. Staff, particularly the manager, know the children well and the triggers for their behaviour. Professionals share this view, with one stating that the manager knows the child 'inside out' and how to respond effectively to them. As a result, the home has no missing from home incidents, no complaints, and the incidents requiring physical intervention are low. This approach helps children to further develop their relationships with staff, thus keeping them safe.

Staff understand safeguarding procedures and follow them, which reduces the risks for children. Children's risk assessments and behaviour support plans are detailed, easy to understand and are kept up to date. However, there are two examples of a behaviour support plan providing conflicting information. This has not negatively affected any children, but could lead to inconsistent care.

The manager is actively addressing bullying in the home and has developed a 'first strike' system, which has been successful in reducing the number of incidents. When bullying occurs in the home, work takes place with the child to address the issues as well as to raise awareness of the impact. Children are encouraged by staff to apologise to each other, and mediation is offered. This approach provides a clear message that bullying is not acceptable in the home.

Staff only use physical intervention as a last resort and to protect the child and those around them from harm. Recording of the use of physical intervention is thorough and details what led to the incident and the specifics of how the child was held. Debriefing sessions take place with the child and separately with staff involved. The records are scrutinised by the manager, thus ensuring good staff practice, which keeps children safe.

Four key-work sessions with each child are planned each month, with additional sessions taking place following any significant incidents. This gives children the opportunity to increase their knowledge and understanding in certain areas, for example mental health awareness, as well as time to discuss and reflect on their behaviour. Occasionally, staff use stigmatising and blaming language in these records which could be misleading and is not useful for children.

The locality risk assessment is out of date. This means that, without a review of the physical environment, the manager cannot be assured that it is safe and secure for the children living in the home.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is suitably qualified and experienced. She has a strong presence in the home, ensuring that she spends time with the children. The manager is supported by a small, stable staff team. This means that children benefit from consistent staffing arrangements, which help to provide children with stability and security.

Safer recruitment processes are followed when staff are appointed, which provides assurances that staff are suitably vetted and qualified to provide care. New staff complete an induction period to help them learn each aspect of the role and to help them understand how to respond to the children's presenting needs.

Staff receive monthly supervision which is thorough and focuses equally on the health and development of staff as well as the needs of the children. Staff feel supported by their manager and are confident to seek advice and support. One member of staff commented that they have never had a job before where they felt so supported and that the manager helps them to improve their practice.

The manager ensures that staff have a structured training programme that is relevant to the individual needs of the children. The manager and her team complete mandatory training. Training records are up to date and are clear with regards to the type of training completed, for example face-to-face or online, and when training needs to be reviewed. Staff also have regular access to the services of a child psychologist who supports them in the delivery of the home's therapeutic model of care, as outlined in the home's statement of purpose.

Children are not regularly given the opportunity to speak with the independent visitor about their experiences in the home. There have been four occasions where children and parents have not been consulted with as part of the independent visits, the last two visits being undertaken while the children have been at school. This means that there is a lack of independent scrutiny which potentially places children at risk by limiting the opportunities for them to talk.

The manager and staff have developed positive working relationships with children's social workers and professionals to ensure that children's needs are met. One social worker described the level of communication with the home as being very good, stating, 'I find the weekly update reports really helpful. I haven't come across anywhere else that does this.' This partnership working results in the children receiving good-quality care that meets their individual needs.

However, the manager acknowledges that there is more work to be done to build better relationships with parents and family members. Monthly newsletters are sent out to parents, but there is little consultation that takes place. As a result, the views of families are not included in the report on a regular basis.

The manager has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home and her staff, as well as her own areas of development. She has some effective management auditing processes in place; however, due to the amount of 'hands-on' work she does with the children and staff, this has led to some shortfalls. During the inspection, she failed to record a telephone conversation detailing a significant event, which was then not shared in handover by a member of staff. While this did not negatively affect the child, staff not having the most up-to-date information could affect their ability to care for the children, thus placing them at risk.

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; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate; ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(c)(h))	23 July 2021

Recommendations

- The registered person should oversee the welfare of the children in their care through observation and engagement with each child's family/carers where appropriate. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.23)
- The registered manager should ensure that all children's case records are kept up to date and are dated by the author of each entry. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)
- The registered manager should ensure that staff are familiar with the home's policies on record keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective, and clear recording. Staff should record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that

will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

- The registered manager should ensure that the appropriateness and suitability of the location risk assessment is reviewed at least once a year. The review should include the identification of any risks and opportunities presented by the home's location and strategies for managing these. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 64, paragraph 15.1)
- The registered provider should ensure that the independent person consults regularly with children, families and other professionals and records the outcome in their report. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 65, paragraph 15.8)

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: Rachael Postill

Registered manager: Susan Kells

Inspector

Paula Shepherd, Social Care Inspector

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