

SC392549

Registered provider: Duty of Care Limited

Assurance 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.

At the time of this inspection, three children were living at the home. No children were home during the inspection.

The manager registered with Ofsted in May 2016.

Inspection date: 30 September 2025

Date of last inspection: 10 June 2025

Judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Information about this inspection

At this inspection, the inspector evaluated:

- the care of children
- the safety of children
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers.

The inspector has looked closely at the experiences and progress of children, using the social care common inspection framework. This assurance 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'.

Findings from the inspection

Ofsted did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance inspection. However, concerns remain regarding the provider's leadership and management arrangements at the home.

Children continue to be settled at the home. They are well supported by staff in their daily lives. Some children have successfully moved on to college or high school, settling into their new routines. When there are issues with attendance, staff are supportive in helping children overcome their barriers.

Staff assist all the children in participating in activities they enjoy and visiting their friends and family when they wish.

Since the last inspection, there have been a couple of behavioural incidents. The child involved has been well supported in understanding the consequences of their behaviour and how it affects others. Other professionals have also been having conversations with the child to offer their support. The manager's oversight of the situation has identified some small areas for staff development, and plans are in place to support staff's practice.

A plan of home improvements was identified following the last inspection. Some of the tasks have been completed. However, there is significant work in the kitchen still to be done, to create a space for the children that is refreshed and welcoming.

The safeguarding policy has been reviewed and is up to date and more accessible for staff. They can access it any time, even when out of the home. This will help the newer members of staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities while they develop and embed their safeguarding practice.

There have been improvements in the team of staff and how they feel. Team morale has improved, and staff say they feel more appreciated. The management and leadership team achieved this through small incentives, recognising various achievements during the month.

The responsible individual has been in the home more often. He has been supporting staff by helping with the care of the children when needed. This has helped the responsible individual to have a better understanding about day-to-day practice. Furthermore, a consultant is working with the provider to help make improvements. They have helped to progress some change, such as rewriting policies and creating an audit checklist. However, change is slow, and the more in-depth issues remain unaddressed, meaning the provider's infrastructure remains weak.

Concerns remain that the manager still does not have time dedicated to her managerial role, and she continues to be overstretched. She continues to cover the

rota to help with consistency for the children when there are staff shortages, as well as manage a second home. This is a serious vulnerability that the provider has not addressed, and it puts at risk the continued management of this home and the quality and continuity of the children's care.

The provider has an idea about how they wish to proceed to rectify the managerial concerns. However, progress is very slow. There is no formal plan to demonstrate how the concerns are going to be addressed. Therefore, timescales for change are unclear, and the manager remains concerned about the plan.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
10/06/2025	Full	Requires improvement to be good
17/06/2024	Full	Good
05/03/2024	Full	Requires improvement to be good
14/02/2023	Full	Good

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.	30 November 2025
In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff—	30 November 2025

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))	
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))	30 November 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))	30 November 2025

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

Inspector

Miriam Dolman, Social Care Inspector

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