

SC405285

Registered provider: North East Autism Society

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 company. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four children with learning disabilities. Children who live in this home may also attend the provider's independent school.

The manager registered with Ofsted in January 2010 and is suitably qualified.

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.

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 May 2021

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	requires improvement to be good
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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: 24 September 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
24/09/2019	Full	Good
02/10/2018	Full	Outstanding
19/06/2017	Full	Outstanding
07/03/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

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

Three children reside in this home. However, their experiences of living in the home are mixed.

Children receive a warm welcome when they move into the home. The staff support the children and their families to prepare for the move by providing them with information about the home. For example, children receive a 'social story' that provides pictures and symbols detailing where they are going and how the staff will help them. This helps to reduce children's anxieties around moving into the home and provides them with support to settle.

When a child moves out of the home, the staff work in collaboration with other professionals and the child's family to help the transition run smoothly. This includes transporting the child to their new home, irrespective of the distance away. The staff keep in touch with the new carers and continue to share information, which helps the new carers to understand the child's needs.

Children's care plans are not thorough, and some do not reflect children's individual needs or any targets. Therefore, the staff do not have clear plans to follow. This means that children's care lacks focus, which impacts on their daily experiences and the progress that they make.

Children receive support from staff to develop their communication skills and express their feelings. The staff confidently engage the children by using words, pictures and gestures which the children understand and can respond to. This empowers children to engage with the adults who care for them, which raises children's self-esteem.

Children are making progress at school. One child has started to attend school after a long period of absence. A teacher described another child's progress as a 'real success story'. Children receive encouragement from staff to prepare for the school day, starting with the morning routine. The inspector saw one child skip down the path with excitement for school. This helps children to value education, which promotes their development.

Children are encouraged to be healthy. With the support of staff, children attend appointments that monitor their health, for example visits to the doctors and opticians. However, some children's diets are not varied and do not routinely include fruit and vegetables. Staff do not persist or use creative ways to introduce new foods. The manager acknowledges this is a concern; however, she has failed to address it.

The home environment is organised and there are clear strategies in place to manage the risks of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the living areas and kitchen look tired and dull. For example, notice boards are blank, and damaged radiator covers have not been repaired. In addition, some possessions belonging to children are not easily accessible and some of their toys are kept in a locked room. This prevents children from making choices about how they spend their time.

Children's bedrooms are child friendly and personalised with pictures, furniture and their favourite characters. When children move bedrooms, the staff use their knowledge of the child to plan the move and help the child to adjust to the new surroundings. For example, a bird feeder has been placed outside a child's window, so he can enjoy watching the birds each day. This means the children are comfortable and enjoy their bedrooms.

The staff have a close working relationship with the children's families and, where appropriate, include them in decision-making. Parents receive weekly feedback about their child's progress, which often includes photos and videos. Parents are complimentary about the communication from staff and are confident that they can ask staff questions and discuss any worries. This means the staff proactively involve others in the children's lives.

Children are supported to follow their religion and family traditions. For one child, staff support them to pray, using pictures and symbols which the child can follow. This practice promotes inclusion. It helps children to follow their beliefs and embrace important aspects of their identity.

The manager and staff have effective working relationships with other professionals in each child's network. However, when there are disagreements among professionals regarding what is best for a child, the manager does not involve an advocate for the child. This means that children's access to independent support and oversight is not available to them.

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

Children's risk assessments are not detailed enough. They do not include all potential risks to children or show staff how to manage the risks. In one example, a child's risk assessment failed to identify several serious risks, which could affect the child and other children living in the home. This means that risks to children may increase.

Staff do not follow safeguarding procedures. On one occasion, a staff member noticed a bruise on a child. They did not inform the manager or complete all the relevant documentation to report the incident. The manager's review of records from that day were not thorough. Therefore, the incident was missed. This practice places children at increased risk.

Due to the national restrictions in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic, children are not able to access activities in their community that they usually enjoy. The staff have not ensured that the children have a range of alternative activities at home. Therefore, children spend long periods watching television or using their electronic devices. This means they have fewer opportunities to develop their skills and explore their interests.

Children receive support from staff to keep in touch with people who are important to them. Each child has a family plan. However, plans do not have the details of the frequency and expectations of family time, including when children must not be left unsupervised with their family. This means that staff do not have all the information necessary to support children's family time. This increases risk for some children.

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

The manager has been in post for over 11 years and has been part of the developments in the home. She is reflective and acknowledges that, more recently, there have been shortfalls in the quality of care that children receive. She is committed, with the support of the staff team, to address the shortfalls and make improvements that benefit the children.

An outbreak of COVID-19 in the home has caused significant disruption to management oversight. This has affected various aspects such as staff morale, the frequency staff supervisions and the quality of management checks.

Staffing pressures have undermined the consistency of care provided to the children. Agency staff are used on a regular basis and, sometimes, the registered manager and deputy also cover shifts. The manager is trying to recruit new staff and understands the impact that staff shortages has on the team and the care provided to children.

Staff training takes place regularly and attendance is monitored by senior leaders in the organisation. All staff have received the home's mandatory training, including in the use of restraint and administration of medication. However, when new children moved into the home, the manager did not review staff training needs. This means there are potential gaps in staff knowledge, which impacts on them having the right skills to meet the children's individual needs.

The manager carries out audits to check the quality of care that children receive. However, these audits are not thorough, which means that information is missed and errors go unnoticed. This means the manager does not identify poor practice, and opportunities to improve are missed.

The quality of some record-keeping is poor. Some documents are not completed, and others are not signed or dated. The inspector found some documents had been destroyed despite them containing information about the children's day-to-day care. This impacts on transparency and the quality of care reviews.

New staff receive an induction which helps them to prepare for working with the children. Staff speak positively about the induction process, including online learning and shadowing experiences. One member of staff said they receive lots of information about the children and can access their files at any time. This helps staff to understand the children's needs and how to meet them.

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 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 staff— provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background; provide to children personal items that are appropriate for their age and understanding; ensure that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed and furnished so as to— meet the needs of each child; enable each child to participate in the daily life of the home. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(iv)(viii)(c)(i)(ii))	25 September 2021
The health and well-being standard is that— children are helped to lead healthy lifestyles. (Regulation 10 (1)(c)) This relates to ensuring that children have a balanced diet.	25 September 2021

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— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(vi)(vii)) This relates to ensuring that risk assessments and family time plans are detailed and include strategies for staff to reduce risks to children.	25 June 2021
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 have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to 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;	25 September 2021

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)(c)(e)(f)(h))	
The registered person must maintain records (“case records”) for each child which— include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child; are kept up to date; and are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b)(c)) This also relates to ensuring that records are legible and are retained for the appropriate period.	25 September 2021

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that all children have access to appropriate advocacy support. (‘Guide to the children’s home regulations including the quality standards’, page 23, paragraph 4.16)

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: SC405285

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: North East Autism Society

Registered provider address: 15 Lumley Court, Drum Industrial Estate, Chester Le Street, County Durham DH2 1AN

Responsible individual: Brian Stoker

Registered manager: Julie Dunlop

Inspector

Catherine Heron, Social Care Inspector

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