

SC476602

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 privately operated. It provides care for up to 3 children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

The manager registered with Ofsted in August 2021.

One child has lived at the home since the last inspection. They were not spoken with during the inspection.

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 February 2026

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	requires improvement to be good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 29 October 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Enforcement action since last inspection:

At the full inspection on 29 October 2025, inspectors found the home to be inadequate. Poor leadership and management of the home resulted in shortfalls in safeguarding practice that compromised the wellbeing of children. Ofsted issued compliance notices under Regulation 11 (The positive relationships standard), Regulation 12 (The protection of children standard), and Regulation 13 (The leadership and management standard). Ofsted also raised a further 6 requirements. A restriction of accommodation notice was

also issued to prevent the provider admitting children to the home due to the serious concerns identified.

A monitoring visit was completed on 16 December 2025 to review the actions taken by the provider to meet the steps in the compliance notices. The inspectors found that the steps in the compliance notices had been met. Requirements around fire precautions and privacy and access were also reviewed and were found to be met. The remaining 4 requirements made at the last inspection were not reviewed and were restated.

A second monitoring visit was completed on 20 January 2026. This was to review the progress made since the last visit and assess whether the restriction of accommodation could be lifted. Sufficient progress had been made and the restriction was lifted.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
29/10/2025	Full	Inadequate
12/11/2024	Full	Good
20/10/2023	Full	Good
15/08/2022	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Staff have built a positive and trusting relationship with the child. Staff have taken time to understand the child's individual likes, dislikes and personal preferences. Although the child has some staff that they prefer, they have formed meaningful relationships with the wider team. This has helped the child to feel settled and increasingly secure.

The child has made progress with their education and is attending school for short periods. This is good progress, as they were previously not going to school at all. Staff work closely with education professionals to support the child's continued progress, with the aim of increasing attendance. Staff have developed a carefully planned, gradual reintegration programme that is responsive to the child's needs and reduces the risk of the child becoming overwhelmed.

The child is currently awaiting a specialist assessment of their needs. The manager recognises the importance of this process to ensure that, if required, the child receives an accurate diagnosis and appropriate support. Staff are also sensitive to the child's anxieties about attending dental appointments. They explore the reasons behind these worries and use strategies, including reward systems, to encourage the child to attend, including future check-ups.

Staff celebrate the child's daily achievements through 'magic moments'. This helps the child recognise positive experiences and reflect on what they have done well. Staff actively seek the child's views and support the child to express their feelings, particularly when the child finds this difficult. This approach has improved the child's emotional development, self-worth and confidence.

The child has regular time with their family, which staff support sensitively and effectively. Between visits, staff help the child to make telephone calls so they can stay connected. Staff understand the significance of these relationships and work hard to ensure that they remain positive and meaningful.

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

When the child experiences difficulties or becomes distressed, staff provide appropriate support. This has become more successful as relationships have improved and the child has become more settled. Staff recognise when the child needs space and when they are ready to talk. This sensitive approach has helped the child manage their emotions more effectively, contributing to a reduction in safeguarding risks.

Staff model positive behaviour and talk to the child about expectations and boundaries. A token system reinforces good choices, enabling the child to earn small rewards. This approach has contributed to improvements in the child's engagement with school.

Risks relating to the child going missing from home have reduced. The child can pause, reflect and seek support from staff. This is a significant improvement in helping keep the child safe. However, there has been an increase in incidents of the child going missing from school. The response from staff and school staff has been well coordinated, ensuring that the child has been located safely each time. Staff have been curious about the child's feelings and reasons for leaving school, enabling the manager to share relevant information with education professionals and agree safeguarding strategies.

Staff know the child well and demonstrate a clear understanding of the child's individual needs. However, staff are less confident in how they support the child with aspects of their identity. As the child may require support around this; managers have yet to consider how this will be managed moving forward.

There have been no complaints from the child. However, concerns have been raised about the conduct of a member of staff. The complaints process has not been followed effectively, resulting in delays in addressing issues and in providing feedback to those who raised the concerns.

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

A new responsible individual has recently been appointed. While they have relevant experience and are keen to support improvements, they have only been in post for a short period. As a result, changes in leadership have not been embedded or had a sustained effect on the running of the home.

The staff are led by an experienced registered manager. The manager continues to be registered for two homes and to cover some night shifts. Although monitoring systems are in place, management oversight has not identified some shortfalls. A recent audit by the responsible individual identified gaps that had not been picked up through routine monitoring. These include missing information, incomplete paperwork and an out-of-date locality risk assessment. Staff also could not locate important documents in files. These shortfalls meant that some paper-based records were not accurate, up to date or the right information available to staff.

Staffing sufficiency has been a challenge. The manager has relied heavily on staff working regular overtime to maintain safe staffing levels. Although the provider has recruited additional staff, with one new staff member due to start shortly, the remaining candidates are still going through safer recruitment checks. These staff were not in post at the time of the inspection, meaning staffing pressures persist.

Staff are expected to use therapeutic approaches in their practice. There are examples of this, but it is not applied consistently. There are plans to improve and embed therapeutic models, but this has not yet been achieved.

Case records provide an overview of the child's daily experiences and contain enough information to help the child understand their journey in care. However, language is

variable and inconsistent. Some entries are written using formal professional language that is not child-friendly and does not reflect the therapeutic model staff strive for.

Leaders and managers have not rushed to move any more children in, recognising decisions need to take account of the needs of the child already living in the home. They have taken time to develop the process for new admissions further, working closely with the local authority to ensure that this is successful in the future.

Staff work proactively with multi-agency professionals to support positive outcomes. This includes regular consultation with a psychologist, who helps staff reflect on their practice and consider alternative approaches. This is having a positive effect on staff practice.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person 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 must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
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— that the effectiveness of the home's child protection policies is monitored regularly. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(e)) In particular, the registered person must review the complaints procedure to ensure that it is consistently applied and used effectively.	16 April 2026
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— use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(h))	16 April 2026

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that care meets each child's needs and promotes their welfare, taking into account of the child's gender, religion, ethnicity, cultural background, sexual identity, mental health, any their assessed needs, previous

experiences and any relevant plans. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 14, paragraph 3.2)

- The registered person should ensure that staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs, so they provide care for children consistently in accordance with the provider's chosen model of care. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.11)
- The registered person should ensure that information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to them. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

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: SC476602

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: Mark Wade

Registered manager: Susan Kells

Inspector

Miriam Dolman, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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