

SC035648

Registered provider: Durham County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This secure children's home is operated by a local authority and is approved by the Department for Education to restrict children and young people's liberty. The children's home can accommodate up to 38 children and young people who are aged between 10 and 17 years. It provides for up to eight children and young people placed by the Youth Custody Service, and for 30 children and young people accommodated under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 placed by local authorities.

Admission of any child under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 who is under 13 years of age requires the approval of the Secretary of State. The commissioning of health services in this home is the statutory responsibility of NHS England under the Health and Social Care Act 2012. Education is provided on site in dedicated facilities.

The manager is registered with Ofsted and has managed the home since October 2015. He holds suitable higher-level qualifications for this role.

Inspection dates: 10 to 11 September 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

Health **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

Outcomes in education and related learning activities **outstanding**

The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly

improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 19 February 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
19/02/2019	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
18/09/2018	Full	Good
16/01/2018	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
06/06/2017	Full	Good

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children are provided with nutritious meals suitable for each child's needs. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.8)

In particular, ensure that children are consistently provided with appropriately cooked and well-presented, balanced meals that they enjoy.

- The ethos of the home should support each child to learn. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 29, paragraph 5.18)

In particular, ensure that all teachers consistently provide children with detailed written feedback on their progress.

- Ensure staff are familiar with the home's policies on record keeping and understand the importance of careful and clear recording. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

In particular, ensure that children's records fully detail the rationale for any decisions made.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children enjoy excellent relationships with staff. This is a prominent strength of the home. Care, health and education staff provide children with outstanding support and individualised care. Staff build meaningful relationships with children and use these to encourage them to engage with their bespoke support plans. These help children to make considerable progress in all areas of their lives. For example, some children benefit from reduced custodial sentences as a direct result of the support and intervention programmes provided by the home.

Staff speak fondly of children, who, in turn, respond warmly. One child said, 'I have really been helped; I think I have really grown up.' Staff convey a welcoming and positive energy. They base practice decisions on children's best interests and deliver consistent routines and clear boundaries. Excellent multi-agency working means that staff across the home work together to decide on how best to support children to make good choices. This approach means that, over time, children's unsafe and complex behaviours, such as self-harm, reduce and their self-esteem and confidence grow.

Child-focused multi-agency meetings promote an extremely good understanding of children's needs, and this leads to impactful planning for children. All key staff attend these extremely child-focused meetings. The methodical review and evaluation of children's plans means that staff implement agreed key care objectives. However, for a few children, their records did not include full details of the rationale behind support plan approaches. This does not impact on children's care, as staff are very aware of children's vulnerabilities.

Children learn to make informed choices to help to keep themselves safe, because engagement with staff is good and staff take time to provide impactful individual and group sessions for all children. The work of the specialist intervention team is making a real difference.

Children are empowered and encouraged to have a voice and to influence the development and running of the home. They engage in house meetings and key-work sessions and have visits from independent advocates. It is clear that managers act on children's views, when possible, to continually review and improve the home. For example, following discussions with children clocks were added across the home. This means that children are now better able to plan their time without continued reliance on staff to prompt them.

Children benefit from a stimulating environment and spend their time constructively. Intervention workers organise exciting theme weeks for children and staff to participate in during school holidays. These provide children with consistency and routine while helping to re-establish their hobbies and interests.

Staff support children to learn about healthy eating and to monitor meal portion sizes. However, some food is poorly cooked and food presentation is not always appealing. This does not encourage children to try new foods. Senior managers continue to address this issue with the external contractors responsible for catering services.

Children have developed confidence and resilience and are better able to make positive decisions about keeping themselves safe. This is achieved through being able to spend time in the community, when agreed in their plan. This essential aspect of their care prepares them effectively for leaving the home. Professional partnerships with placing authorities and other agencies are excellent and assist in this preparation.

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

Children's safety is paramount in this home. There is a consistent determination to keep children safe and to help them to thrive. Staff continually promote children's psychological and emotional safety in the same way as they promote children's physical safety. This creates a culture in which each child's well-being is valued.

Staff fully understand children's individual vulnerabilities and risks. Case managers ensure that children's risk assessments and risk management plans incorporate all known and potential risks. They work with children to help them to understand how their emotions and frustrations may increase these risks. This means that children begin to recognise the triggers to behaviours such as self-harm and learn to keep themselves safe.

Partnership working between care, health and education staff is highly effective. This enables children to reflect on all areas of their backgrounds and behaviours. Children consistently develop positive coping strategies because of this approach and they start to flourish. One child said, 'I understand myself so much better now.'

The use of single separation and physical restraint is proportionate. The scrutiny of these incidents is excellent. The evident progressive ethos supports staff to 'self-report' if they feel that they have not reached the standards expected. Rigorous management oversight facilitates staff reflection and provides a chance to improve practice. As a result, staff understand the impact that these measures of control have on children. They use this knowledge to continually seek alternative approaches to manage children's challenging behaviours.

Senior managers review all incidents of physical restraint in collaboration with the health team, including the use of closed-circuit television (CCTV). The consistent and meticulous monitoring of practice in this way ensures that managers are able to identify any patterns, trends or themes and to support improved practice through learning.

Clear expectations, routines and boundaries help children to feel safe. Staff use a balance of incentives and rewards to encourage children's progress and celebrate their successes. This builds their confidence and self-esteem.

Children seek the reassurance of staff and enjoy spending time in their company. Staff support and supervise children with skill. They carefully manage group dynamics. This means that staff are able to quickly identify and address potential flash points and areas of tension. Consequently, incidents of bullying are rare and staff quickly address the issues, giving support to both the victim and perpetrator to prevent further occurrences.

Staff know what to do and whom to talk to if they have concerns about a child's safety or well-being. This ensures swift sharing of information with appropriate agencies, including the designated officer for the local authority and the multi-agency safeguarding hub, in line with the comprehensive safeguarding and whistleblowing procedures. In turn, any concerns or allegations are quickly addressed and managers take prompt and effective action to safeguard children.

The diligent and conscientious approach to keeping children safe is an embedded feature of practice in the home. Consequently, there is no complacency. Staff's awareness of risks and individual children's vulnerabilities is consistently very high.

Health services: outstanding

Children benefit from the exceptional mix of expertise and experience in the multidisciplinary healthcare team. This flexible and pre-emptive service ensures that children make excellent progress in this area of their development. Health teams work collectively to ensure that they continually support the physical, mental and emotional well-being of children.

The Children's Health Assessment Tool (CHAT) process is very comprehensive. Healthcare professionals competently used this tool to quickly identify children's health needs. This prompt action means that children do not experience any delays in accessing the health services that they need.

Staff understand and passionately embrace the ethos of 'secure stairs', the integrated framework that addresses the health needs of children across the secure estate. This means that children benefit from an impressive, centre-wide approach to implementing this framework. This creates a nurturing environment that supports children to feel safe and improve their emotional health and self-esteem.

Children's health benefits from a range of primary healthcare services. Health professionals and other staff at the centre encourage and support children to have the immunisations appropriate for their age and to ensure that these are routinely available when the children are ready. Children can easily access other visiting health professionals, such as opticians, physiotherapists and podiatrists, alongside external secondary appointments, when needed.

Children have positive experiences with healthcare professionals, which sees them benefit from improved mental, emotional and psychological health and helps them to successfully move forward in their lives. The inspirational mental health team

enthusiastically engages with children. It provides a range of services, such as cognitive analytic therapy (CAT), that reflect children's individual health needs.

A speech and language therapist notably helps to improve communication across the home with regard to both the written word and spoken language. This has a significantly positive impact on outcomes for children. The therapist consistently supports colleagues during consultations with children. This helps children to understand the rationale for decisions about their care and empowers them to clearly express their views and wishes.

All staff take responsibility for promoting children's health. This collaborative approach means that children's health and well-being plans are well thought out and tailored to meet children's individual needs. Children consistently praise the healthcare services that they receive and recognise how these support their progress.

Health staff are exceptionally well supported in their role and passionate about providing outstanding outcomes for children. They receive regular managerial and clinical supervision and have good access to training that aids their personal development.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

All staff want the very best outcomes for children, and the children thrive in this environment. The registered manager and the senior leadership team members are committed and motivational practitioners. They continually focus on enabling children to make good progress in a safe and secure environment. There is an established culture of aspiration and achievement that managers and staff, across the home, embrace.

Senior managers are fully aware of children's progress. Internal partnership working between social care, education and health services is exceptionally strong. This means that they work together to introduce new initiatives that reflect children's changing needs.

Children benefit from high-quality integrated care and sentence planning through highly effective partnerships with external professionals, such as the youth custody service and local authorities.

Practice rapidly evolves to reflect children's changing needs and behaviours through effective management. For example, a thematic assessment of the use of physical restraint identified potential antecedents. This meant that managers were able to introduce strategies, such as increased staffing levels at certain times, to help to manage children's anxieties. This approach has reduced the frequency of physical restraint and created a stable and nurturing environment that supports children's individual and collective development. The registered manager and senior leadership team continue to review and revise their internal monitoring systems. The focus on analysing qualitative and quantitative data and information means that managers quickly identify patterns and trends across the home.

The review of the quality of care centres on consultation with children, their families, partner agencies and staff. This is a strength of the innovative monitoring systems in use across the home. These systems include information-gathering tools designed by speech and language specialists that filter protected characteristics, such as race and religion, and evaluate how well the service meets these. Furthermore, the continual assessment of staff practice ensures that managers quickly address any shortfalls to deliver high-quality care and support.

The majority of staff hold suitable and relevant qualifications for their roles, and others are working to achieve these. As a result, staff have the wide range of skills that they need to work with and to support children. The senior leadership team ensures that staff training programmes balance mandatory courses with stimulating and progressive learning sessions. These help staff to understand the impact that children's often-traumatic backgrounds have had on their social and emotional development.

Staff take responsibility for their own learning and development. They benefit from easy access to peer mentoring and coaching sessions that allow them to advance their careers. Furthermore, staff can access counselling sessions that help them to build the emotional resilience that they need to work in an often-challenging environment and to meet children's complex needs.

Staff receive regular and high-quality formal supervision and appraisal. These encourage staff to reflect on their practice and consider how their actions may impact on children's progress. Managers continually review these sessions to ensure quality and to focus on improving children's lives.

Children make exceptional progress in all areas of their lives, including their social and emotional well-being, taking account of their starting points. This is because managers and staff at all levels embrace collaborative practice. This celebrates children's differences, delivers tailored care and support and provides children with positive experiences.

Outcomes in education and related learning activities: outstanding

Children benefit hugely from their time in education. They become independent learners, grow in self-esteem and make exceptional progress academically. There are clear improvements in achievement rates in English and mathematics, and most children achieve an accredited award in vocational areas. Staff encourage children in the habit of enjoying learning. This means that attendance is excellent, for most children.

Teaching is exceptionally well planned, effective and energetic. Teachers and support staff develop trusting relationships with children. As a result, children, often with a poor history of education, achieve more than they thought possible. Teachers' verbal feedback to children is meaningful, although written feedback is not consistently detailed. Managers are now aware of these occasional weaknesses. They plan to address these through training, formal supervision and performance reviews.

Managers ensure that the curriculum is well tailored to meet children's individual needs, and continually review it. Its design and implementation provide sufficient options for all children to achieve highly in at least some areas, such as cookery, mathematics or physical education. Learning resources are good. Managers are reviewing the options for the introduction of new digital learning resources. This is taking longer than envisaged, but there is a determination to invest in technology which is current and best suited to the needs of children.

Teachers set meaningful individual targets for children and track their progress well. Targets are appropriate and relate to children's studies, behaviours and attitudes. This means that children know how well they are progressing and enthusiastically celebrate their successes. Education staff use the detailed assessments undertaken on entry and at subject level to ensure that lessons reflect children's learning stage. Support for children with special educational needs is unobtrusive and effective. This inclusive approach helps all children to engage in education.

The consistent approach to managing children's often-challenging behaviours helps children to learn from these incidents. Experienced staff quickly intervene to calm situations. Consequently, the frequency of these incidents continues to reduce.

The headteacher, supported by her managers, has worked patiently to continually improve all aspects of children's experiences in education. The inspirational and innovative leadership team uses data exceptionally well to identify underperformance or areas for development. The school plan has clear and measurable areas for improvement.

A local authority school leadership advisor and a new governing body provide strong external scrutiny. This ensures that the headteacher is professionally challenged and supported. The headteacher manages staff performance well and takes appropriate measures where underperformance occurs. Education managers work effectively with other centre managers to ensure that there is a coordinated, centre-wide response to the needs of children. Consequently, positive outcomes and achievements for children remain the focus of the service.

A recent review of careers education has led to the reintroduction of a specialist careers advisor. Individual interviews lead to a good, simple report which contains bespoke advice and information linked to a child's local college or training provider. Staff apprenticeship ambassadors promote employment-based learning to children in preparation for when they leave the centre. This helps children to better understand their future learning options.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC035648

Provision sub-type: Secure unit

Registered provider address: County Hall, Durham DH1 5UL

Responsible individual: Martyn Stenton

Registered manager: Selwyn Morgans

Inspector(s)

Jo Stephenson, lead social care inspector

Natalie Burton, social care inspector

Paul Taylor, social care inspector

Barnaby Dowell, social care inspector

Tony Gallagher, HMI further education and skills

Gary Turney, health and justice inspector, Care Quality Commission (CQC)

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