

SC035409

Registered provider: Northumberland County Council

Interim inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

A local authority manages this secure children's home. It is approved by the Department for Education to restrict young people's liberty. The children's home can accommodate up to 12 young people who are aged between 10 and 17 years. It provides for young people accommodated under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 who are placed by local authorities. Admission of any young person under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 who is under 13 years of age requires the approval of the Secretary of State. Education is provided on site in dedicated facilities.

Inspection date: 13 February 2018

Judgement at last inspection: good

Date of last inspection: 19 September 2017

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

This inspection

The effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection

This home was judged good at the last full inspection.
At the interim inspection, Ofsted judges that it has improved effectiveness.

The one requirement and four recommendations raised at the last full inspection have been met. This demonstrates the home's capacity to improve and its commitment to continually improving care and outcomes for the young people. No breaches of

regulation were identified at this inspection.

A much-improved process now ensures that the young people's risk assessments are swiftly updated and all staff members know immediately of any changes. This increased knowledge enables the staff team to manage the young people's risks safely, enhancing their sense of belonging and well-being. An independent reviewing officer reported, 'It is my opinion that [Name] is safeguarded while in this placement and she is benefiting.'

Improved recording on the young people's records is clear and objective. Managers remind the staff team about the importance of recording information on individual young people in a non-stigmatising way. All records examined were accurate and informative and appropriately reflective without judgement or personal opinion.

The young people are encouraged to read and comment upon their records. This ensures that they understand what is written about them now and that the records will be helpful if they wish to access them in the future. An independent reviewing officer said, '[Name] is a young person who finds it difficult to engage. However, the staff team has got it just right and this was reflected in the review as they had been able to gather his views.'

Appropriate action has also been taken to ensure that a contingency is in place should the electronic case planning and recording system fail, which was the case during the last inspection. The steps taken now ensure that documents can still be accessed and worked upon and then uploaded once the system is fully operational again.

The dedicated management and staff team proactively chase placing authorities to ensure that the young people have suitable future provision to move on to from the home. Resettlement work begins early, with the staff team engaging with a range of professionals to ensure as smooth a transition as possible to the next placement. A resettlement agreement or contract is produced during the initial phase of the placement, with all parties, including young people, signing up to a well-planned and prepared process for discharge. When partnerships have been less effective, action is taken to address any delay or concerns. If planning is not taking place within reasonable timescales, the home's managers will escalate concerns to senior managers within the local authority. An example of this was shared with inspectors during the inspection. An email was sent to a director of children's services because of delays in identifying an appropriate placement for a young person whose secure order was shortly to end. As a result, young people can be carefully prepared for transition, enhancing their opportunities for success.

Ofsted are now notified appropriately of all significant events. This provides the regulator with the opportunity to have an overview of all concerns. There has been one safeguarding incident involving a staff member since the last inspection. This was historical and did not involve any of the young people in the home. Detailed disciplinary procedures were swiftly and effectively applied to resolve the matter and protect the young people.

The young people are thriving as a result of the excellent attention to ensuring that their unique and diverse needs are met. The management and staff team actively promote a sense of warmth and caring, which inspires the young people to accept their tailored care. One young person has had to deal with a significant loss during her placement in the home. This young person was grateful for the support from staff and said, 'I can't thank them enough for what they have done for me.' The same young person explained how the other young people were also very supportive. When asked why she thought this was, she said, 'It is like a big family here.' The management and staff team consistently encourage the young people to consider others, to be caring, well-mannered and courteous in their interactions and to support each other. This attitude of respect and consideration for others is an underpinning and well-embedded principle of the care ethos at this home.

The staff team understands the importance of establishing meaningful relationships with the young people immediately they are placed. Initial risk assessments identify any immediate concerns so that the young people are able to start engaging with care immediately. A group of residential staff is allocated to each young person shortly after admission. It is referred to as the key team. It quickly works out, with the young person and placing agency, what the areas of need and focus are during their stay in the secure setting. The referral information is used to inform the initial care and interventions plans. Each plan seen was individualised with specific targets for each young person. Consequently, the young people feel safe and start to respond to the nurturing care they receive. An independent reviewing officer reported, '[Name] is a complex young person. However, she has settled well. This is a reflection on the staff and how they understand her and have encouraged her to engage. I am very impressed.'

The young people continue to make good progress during their placement at the home. They know who their team of key staff is and they know the focus of work to help prevent further episodes in secure care. Young people confirm that they are helped to understand what has brought them to a secure setting and encouraged to address these issues. One young person said, 'I cannot fault what staff have done to help me deal with my situation.'

The staff team clearly advocates on behalf of the young people and ensures that placing agencies are aware of their assessed needs. The staff team develops a good understanding of each young person. This is particularly the case with the young people who have been placed with them for some time. The skilled and caring staff team works very hard to support the young people on transition to their new placements. This includes welcoming the care staff from other homes to ensure that they understand the behaviour management and care processes the young person responds to. For a young person who was shortly to move on, managers worked with the authority to identify an appropriate placement that would meet this young person's needs beyond their 18th birthday. They have been successful in this respect. This reflects a skilled professional group of staff who understand the needs of the young people and are prepared to argue on their behalf to ensure that their needs are appropriately met.

The staff team works well with the young people to help them develop independence

and self-care skills as part of their individual 'Life-skills programmes'. As part of their growth of independence skills and preparation for discharge and resettlement, the young people have regular opportunities for planned trips into the local community. Each young person has an individualised mobility programme, which includes leisure and educational visits that are specific to them.

Visits to future placements are also planned and organised by the staff team. The management team stresses with placing agencies the importance of prior visits to future placements. The staff team will also transport the young person to the new home themselves, rather than sending them by escorts, and stay over locally so that they can support the young person over their first night out of the secure setting. This exceptional practice provides the young people with a solid foundation on which to build their next care experiences, and enhances future life opportunities.

The young people feel safe and are developing self-protection skills as they respond to the nurturing care they receive. Extensive behaviour management plans empower the young people to learn more appropriate ways of coping with frustration and how to express themselves in a positive manner. The consistent use of reflective practice, including appropriate sanctions, enables the young people to understand the impact that their behaviour can have on others. This excellent work is not only used for incidents within the home but for past life events. As a result, the young people are learning empathy and more appropriate coping mechanisms, which will benefit them in their future adult lives. A young person reported, 'I've learned to be a positive member for the group and not jump on the bandwagon.'

There are occasions when physical interventions are necessary to prevent serious violence and protect the young people from self-harming behaviours. The well-trained staff team uses debriefing sessions afterwards to ensure that any lessons learned from incidents can be applied to prevent recurrence. The management team and independent visitors monitor all restraints, including through the use of closed circuit television. This provides further opportunities to develop alternative approaches with the young people and protect them. A young person wrote, 'Thanks to [staff name]. She helped me calm down.'

As a result of the appropriate security measures in place there have not been any missing episodes from the home. However, there has been one incident when a young person absconded from escorts at a court appearance prior to admission. Detailed records are kept following any incidents. The proactive deputy manager comprehensively audits these. This ensures that all relevant information is recorded, the staff team has acted appropriately and the young people are safeguarded.

The promotion of equality and diversity is a major strength. The young people are provided with opportunities to learn about, and celebrate, each other's culture and religion. The young people who may be exploring their sexuality receive additional support from the staff team, as well as external agencies, to do so safely. As a result, the young people feel valued and take pride in who they are as individuals, significantly improving their feelings of self-esteem and self-confidence.

Recent recruitment of staff has been a success. This means that the home now has a full complement of staff, so they have the time and space to complete their flexitime and extra training. This boosts staff morale and enthusiasm, which in turn benefits the young people, as they are cared for by a skilled and motivated staff team. The manager said, 'The new staff are motivating the more experienced and the experienced ones are enjoying mentoring the new.'

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
19/09/2017	Full	Good
06/12/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
12/07/2016	Full	Good
17/11/2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness

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 differences 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.

This inspection focused on the effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection.

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: SC035409

Provision sub-type: secure unit

Registered provider address: Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 2EF

Responsible individual: Daljit Lally

Registered manager: Julie Tinkler

Inspectors

Ann-Marie Born, social care inspector
Linda Christie, social care HMI

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