

SC059203

Registered provider: Northumberland County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is run by a local authority and provides short breaks for up to six children who may have learning disabilities. The manager has been in post since 2011.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 10 to 13 December 2021

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	good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 14 February 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/02/2020	Full	Outstanding
07/03/2019	Full	Outstanding
12/03/2018	Full	Outstanding
24/03/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive and enjoy well-organised packages of support that meet their individual care needs. The manager and her staff work in partnership with a range of professionals, parents and carers. This sharing of information helps children to make progress and have positive experiences during their short break stays.

A parent commented on the care provided to her child as: 'The service is a godsend and support is amazing. He has his own personal targets that he works towards, which means that he has an input into his own care.'

Children are welcomed into the home by an enthusiastic, warm and nurturing staff team. The children are supported in planning their own stays through a range of communication aids that support their understanding and decision-making. Children's short-break care plans are of a high quality. Staff use a pictorial format to assist children to understand and recognise their individual needs and personal care planning. This helps children to develop their confidence and self-esteem each time they come to stay.

During COVID-19 restrictions, the children enjoyed a range of activities to promote their individual interests. The outdoors has been explored through walks and visits to local nature reserves. Indoor activities, such as cooking, baking and card games, have been particularly enjoyed by the group that were present during this visit. These enable children to play together and enjoy time with their peers and explore personal interests, building their self-esteem and confidence.

The medical needs of the children are met by a well-trained and competent staff team. The preparation and administration of medication were observed during the visit. Staff were methodical in their implementation of the task at hand. Clear communication was observed between those present, and careful support for the children took place.

The home is going through a period of refurbishment and structural changes. The short-break service and the residential school occupy the living quarters at separate times. However, the changes implemented should consider the needs of the children, to avoid confusion and clearly identify the purpose of each room. For example, the dining area should be for that purpose only and not used as an activity-based room. This would support the health and safety of the children and help them to make sense of their environment.

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

Children's behaviours are explored and reviewed before and after each sleepover at the home. This is done through effective communication and sharing of information

between professionals, parents and carers. This coordinated and proactive approach assists with the planning and assessment of risk. As a result, children are supported on an individual basis to become increasingly safe.

Staff know the children well and are skilled in developing trusting and supportive relationships with them. The supervision of children is well-planned. When children need support to assist them with regulating their anxiety and behaviour, staff use their knowledge and training to quickly respond. As a result, children rarely require anything more than staff using de-escalation techniques to help them settle.

High staffing levels support safe care for children in the home and in the community. Staff are observant and vigilant in their safe care practice. They respond in accordance with any child protection concerns. For example, any unexplained marks on children's bodies are reported in line with safeguarding procedures. As such, body maps are completed and shared with safeguarding agencies when required. However, during the inspection an isolated record was not dated and was placed in the wrong child's file. This was an administration error that was immediately addressed.

Staff ensure parents and carers receive a comprehensive summary breakdown of their child's short-break stay. This details every aspect of their child's care including behaviours seen and managed safely. This promotes safe care. A parent commented on the care for her child as, 'I have no concerns. He is completely safe while he is here with staff who are amazing. After his weekend we receive a breakdown of his whole weekend which we like.'

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The leaders and managers show a commitment to children and their families that is replicated by staff and is embedded in the culture of the home. This nurturing and positive environment provides children with the ideal platform in which to progress and enjoy their short breaks.

Children's progress is linked to their individual targets that involve their parents, carers and professionals. The manager is central to that process and her team monitor and review after each visit, ensuring information is shared with relevant others. This supports the leaders and managers in knowing the progress children are making, while the children develop confidence and self-esteem.

The home closed for a short period of time during the COVID-19 pandemic. The manager and her staff ensured communication was maintained with all families and their children, offering advice and support. Once the home reopened, children were reintroduced slowly, to rebuild relationships with staff and to get them back into group living. This detailed and careful approach enabled children to resume their short-break stays as soon as possible. As a result, children are settled and reintegrated back into the home.

Staff are dedicated and committed to the service. They enjoy coming to work and morale is high. Feedback continues to be extremely positive with staff commenting:

- 'I feel that I am supported in my role at the home and that I am a valued member of the team. I am listened to and offered plenty of opportunities to develop my practice.'
- 'We have some fantastic children come to our service and I have seen them grow and develop, each in their own way and at their own pace. The staff team is the very best I have ever worked together with.'
- Our home is a happy, relaxed environment to work in, and I am lucky to work with a great staff team who are dedicated, supportive and caring. We all work together.'

The staff attend team meetings and records show a comprehensive overview of the service. The training provided to staff is relevant to meeting the complex needs of the children. Staff receive regular supervision. However, the recording does not demonstrate a thorough overview of the agenda. It is therefore difficult to assess and evaluate the impact of these sessions on staff practice.

The manager and leaders have effective internal and external monitoring processes in place. This supports the manager's evaluation of the home and completion of her regulatory six-month report.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the home is a nurturing and homely environment. Any changes to the shared accommodation should be in the best interests of the children. Homes should seek as far as possible to maintain a domestic rather than 'institutional' impression. Individual rooms should support children with learning disabilities to clearly identify each room's purpose and comply with relevant health and safety legislations (alarms, food hygiene etc.). ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- The registered person should ensure that records of staff supervision document and reflect the quality and content of discussion that has taken place. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.3)
- The registered person should ensure that children's case records are dated where required, and staff should ensure that they carefully keep individual children's records in the correct files. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)

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: SC059203

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Northumberland County Council

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

Responsible individual: Adam Hall

Registered manager: Susan Ghulam

Inspector

Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector

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