

SC035409

Registered provider: Northumberland County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this secure 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 home can accommodate up to 15 children aged between 10 and 17 years. It has three designated living areas: Alder, Willow and Hadrian. The home provides care for children accommodated under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 who are 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 registered with Ofsted on 30 January 2012.

There were 13 children living in the home at the time of this inspection.

We last visited this setting on 27 July 2022 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 November 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
Children's education and learning	outstanding
Children's health	outstanding
How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The secure 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: 1 March 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
01/03/2022	Full	Good
21/09/2021	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
26/11/2019	Full	Good
04/07/2019	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are looked after by staff who are genuinely committed to teaching them how to build and maintain positive relationships. This makes children feel safe and secure, which enables them to make exceptional progress.

There is a natural ethos of treating children with dignity and respect. Staff give children freedom and choice, and this is balanced with providing high-quality, nurturing care, which helps to keep children safe. The atmosphere in the home is relaxed and this helps children to feel a sense of belonging and a desire to achieve.

Staff are committed to preparing children to live more independently in the future. Teaching children practical life skills is embedded into day-to-day practice. There is an independence unit, which is currently being put to good use for one child in preparation for leaving the home. One child told inspectors, 'Being at this home has been life-changing and I will be heartbroken to leave.' Staff go to great lengths to make sure children are fully supported when they are ready to leave the home.

Staff understand that teaching children life skills, such as understanding healthy relationships and improving self-esteem, is just as important as more practical skills. Staff use every opportunity to help children to make progress in these areas. Staff speak with pride when they describe the progress children have made. The personalised support children receive gives them the confidence to achieve goals that are important to them.

Working in partnership with people who are important to children is given high priority. The parents of one child who has recently left the home said, 'Staff developed a genuine understanding of him and had a desire to see him thrive.' They went on to say that they will be 'forever grateful' that the staff team was able to help their child to be more open about his decision-making and teach him how to keep himself safe when he goes back to living in the community.

Children's views inform decisions about the day-to-day running of the home. Weekly meetings provide meaningful opportunities for children to express their views, wishes and concerns. In response to a recommendation made at the last inspection, the format of the minutes of children's meetings has been amended and they now include a clear record of managers' responses to children's requests. Children receive timely feedback, and they are empowered to know that they can effect change.

Staff and managers ensure that the environment is maintained to a good standard and is as homely and comfortable for children as it can be. Careful planning by staff and excellent resources allow children to access a wide range of meaningful activities when they come to live at the home.

Positive behaviour is noticed and rewarded. Children respond extremely well to the incentive scheme and strive to achieve the highest level. However, some of the written feedback children receive about their progress is not as positive as it could be and may be too complicated for children to understand. This undermines the excellent face-to-face work with children which is carried out in practice.

Children's education and learning: outstanding

Education, care and healthcare staff work together closely and highly effectively to ensure that children are well supported in their learning. They skilfully develop behaviour management plans for the children that result in consistent strategies and high expectations for children's behaviour. As a result, attendance at lessons is high, and children are respectful and demonstrate exemplary behaviour.

Staff swiftly and adeptly identify children's starting points when they arrive at the home. This results in personalised and ambitious learning programmes for each child. Staff pay close attention to children's needs, preferences and any identified learning difficulties or disabilities when planning individualised learning programmes.

Staff plan stimulating and innovative learning activities that meet children's individual needs. Children are enthusiastic and motivated to learn. For example, vocal coaching from well-qualified and experienced teachers supports children in developing their singing skills. They then progress to recording their own music tracks in the recording studio. Children discuss their uniqueness in personal, social and health education, as they learn about tolerance and respect for others.

Children make excellent progress in their learning because teaching staff, supported by care staff, have very high expectations for what children can do and learn. Staff encourage children to do the very best that they can and regularly check and consolidate children's knowledge and skills. As a result, children make rapid and sustained progress. For example, children achieve qualifications in subjects such as English, mathematics, information and communication technology, and personal life skills.

Education staff provide children with consistent and detailed feedback on their written and practical work. Children know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. Children act on feedback and are rightly very proud of the high-quality work they produce.

Education managers and staff carefully plan the curriculum so that children study a wide range of subjects to support their personal development and career aspirations. Topics include not just violence, but also areas such as finance, travel and tourism, and health and social care.

Education staff work collaboratively with independent and impartial careers advice and guidance practitioners. This provides children with the information they need to help them to make informed decisions about their planned next steps, for example

progression to apprenticeships or vocational programmes at further education colleges.

Education and care staff work together exceptionally well to ensure that children are supported to access a wide range of well-planned enrichment activities that develop their personal and social skills. These include cooking for peers and staff, badminton tournaments, beauty sessions and team-building games. Children participate frequently and enthusiastically in these activities.

Children's health: outstanding

Children are supported by a highly motivated and passionate healthcare team that works collaboratively with the aim of securing the very best possible health outcomes for each child during their stay and beyond. The team is well led and has worked both creatively and flexibly to ensure that children are enabled to access support from the full range of specialities.

The involvement of all agencies in the recruitment process has reaped success, with the imminent start of an occupational therapist and a clinical lead psychologist. A nurse specialising in neurodivergence has further enriched the skill set in the team. Recruitment for a physical health nurse continues, and the increase in hours of the physical health nurse lead means that children receive a responsive service.

The healthcare team provides an excellent level of support, ensuring that the physical, mental and emotional needs of all children are met. Individually tailored interventions make full use of the team's skills and resources to continually explore the best possible opportunities for engagement with the children.

Assessments using the Comprehensive Health Assessment Tool are undertaken at the earliest opportunity and, where possible, within the expected timescales. This ensures that children's health and well-being needs are identified in a timely manner. Subsequent care plans are developed, and appropriate referrals made to help ensure that all health needs are met.

Children have good access to an age-appropriate range of primary care interventions. This includes access to the dental service, substance misuse programmes, immunisations and vaccinations, and an optician. There are good links with community services that support professionals with understanding the specific needs of the children.

Nurses are informed about significant incidents involving children in a timely way. This includes when children are subject to physical restraint. This ensures best health outcomes.

The 'Secure Stairs' framework is well embedded and embraced by staff across the home. It is providing a fully integrated approach to improving the quality of care and outcomes for every child.

Transitional planning is excellent, with the health team working collaboratively with staff across the centre to ensure continuity in care for each child. While the late identification of placements can hinder forward planning, the health team facilitates meetings with new providers following a child leaving the centre when it has not been possible to do so prior to their move. Transitional planning encourages full participation, an example being one child presenting their own information to the receiving community team, which included a family systemic practitioner.

Reflective practice is viewed positively by residential staff. This supports their emotional resilience and ability to respond to ever changing situations during their work with the children. An integrated approach is taken in enabling staff to attend trauma-informed training to promote shared learning and collaboration.

Sound governance arrangements ensure compliance with managerial and clinical supervision and mandatory training. There is good investment in the provision of additional specialist training. This enables staff to keep up to date with new initiatives and provides increased knowledge and resources in support of the children's needs.

Care staff receive training in medication administration and are assessed to ensure that they remain competent in their role. The recording of medication administration has recently moved to an electronic patient record system.

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

The dedication and professional practice of all staff uphold the continued improvement of children's safety, in a nurturing and child-focused way. Children are protected from harm, and they said that they feel safe. The children are settled in their surroundings. This is evident in the calm atmosphere around the home and in the low number of significant incidents.

Staff work diligently and with genuine warmth to build those important trusting relationships with children. The children can identify those 'go to' adults they can talk to about the things that worry them most and cause them anxiety. This is because staff understand the effects of past trauma and the impact of this on children's emotional well-being and mental health.

Children are supported to understand why staff are concerned about risks to their safety. Individual and group work in areas such as knife crime, county lines and child sexual exploitation helps children to recognise and understand danger and risks to their safety and consequences. In turn, this helps children to keep safe in the community and make more informed choices.

Children engage exceptionally well in their individual programme sessions. Bespoke planning and creative approaches help children unpick why they become dysregulated. Equally, there are highly effective safety measures and support for children who self-harm. Children feel able to inform staff on ways that will help them

to de-escalate and prevent them from going into crisis. This makes a significant difference to children and empowers them to influence how they are supported and cared for.

The use of consequences for unwanted behaviour is low because staff carry out meaningful, reflective and restorative work with children. Staff listen to children and the use of positive incentives and reparation supports the children to learn and develop.

The use of physical restraint and single separation to manage behaviour is significantly low. When such measures are used, the oversight and review of these incidents are robust and timely. They end at the earliest opportunity and children are supported to rejoin the group.

Children's individual risk assessments are clear and well documented. They include all specific information on the risks and vulnerabilities for each child. This provides staff with clear guidance and strategies to use to keep children safe.

There are well-established and thorough security and maintenance checks of the building to ensure that the environment is safe for children to live in.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers across the service work collaboratively to provide a coordinated and well-managed approach to the care, education and health needs of the children. Children's diverse and complex needs are well known and understood and this runs through every layer of the workforce. It enables staff to confidently, consistently and safely support the children to make positive changes in all aspects of their lives.

Managers and staff in all disciplines have worked hard to embed a culture of support, openness and valued opinions. Providing children with consistency of care is a priority and this spans across all disciplines and is based on a strength-based model of trauma-informed care. The effectiveness of this approach incorporates the voice of the child, which helps children to form positive and meaningful attachments with staff.

Leaders and managers are highly motivated, and their enthusiasm has contributed to a constant strive for improvement. The delivery of high-quality care is guided by ensuring that all staff have the knowledge, skills and experience to confidently do their work. Staff are well supported in their professional development through training, supervision and appraisal.

There is a calm and relaxed atmosphere in the home. Staff and managers at all levels have a visual presence. They engage regularly with children in activities that promote much joviality, fun and laughter. Relationships with the children are informal and there is a culture in the home of mutual respect.

Feedback from staff is exceptionally positive. Staff said that they feel valued and they expressed high levels of job satisfaction. Equally, children said that they feel listened to and that they have a say in what they want to do. Children participate in staff interviews and their views are taken into consideration.

Communication strategies and information sharing, both in the home and with placing authorities, social workers and independent reviewing officers, are consistently good. Inspectors were impressed with the professional challenge that takes place when arrangements for children moving on lack a sense of urgency, leaving children anxious and worried about their futures. Staff and managers go above and beyond to support children with their transitions and give them the send-off they so rightly deserve.

Children are very much involved in all aspects of their care and there is a centre-wide, child-focused approach on care planning and formulation. Meetings in the home are well structured and children are supported and encouraged to attend all meetings about them. This helps children to take ownership and participate in decisions about the help and support that they need.

Quality assurance and auditing processes are wide-ranging and undertaken at all levels. The oversight and scrutiny of the home are thorough, and any deficits or shortfalls are immediately addressed. Independent scrutiny of all physical interventions ensures the use of proportionality and due diligence when restraining a child. When restraint is used, this is reflected on.

Leaders ensure that significant events relating to the welfare and safety of the children are reported to relevant professionals and organisations, such as the local authority designated safeguarding officer and the police. Managers act without delay to address any deficits in staff practice or in respect of conduct issues.

Significant effort has been put into developing a skilled and effective staff team. This starts at the recruitment stage and creative approaches have been used to attract individuals with a range of skills and experience. This includes attending a job fair and the implementation of a market supplement. The recruitment process is robust, and individuals are appropriately vetted to ensure that they are safe to work with children.

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

Recommendation

- The registered manager should ensure that staff understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Staff should record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('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'.

Secure children's home details

Unique reference number: SC035409

Provision sub-type: Secure unit

Registered provider: Northumberland County Council

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

Responsible individual: Adam Hall

Registered manager: Julie Tinkler

Inspectors

Cath Sikakana, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Helen Simmons, Social Care Inspector

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