

Atkinson Unit

Registered provider name: Devon County Council
The Atkinson Centre, Atkinson Close, Beacon Lane, Exeter EX4 8NA

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this secure children's home

This home is managed by a local authority and is approved by the Secretary of State to restrict children's liberty. The home can accommodate up to eight children aged between 10 and 17 years under Section 25 of the Children Act 1989. Admission of any child 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.

At the time of this inspection, five children were living in the home.

The manager is registered with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 26 to 28 November 2024

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

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

Date of last inspection: 12 September 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
12/09/2023	Full	Outstanding
07/06/2022	Full	Good
09/02/2022	Full	Good
29/06/2021	Interim	Sustained effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are well looked after and cared for and told the inspectors that they have developed trusting relationships with staff who they can share their concerns and worries. Staff have the skills to discuss sensitive issues and have conversations with children to alleviate their worries and enable children to reflect and learn. Staff spend meaningful and purposeful time with children. Interactions between staff and children were observed to be caring and fun.

Children are at the heart of decisions made. There is a strong joined up focus across care, health and education staff to encourage and support children to participate and have their say. This ensures children's voices are heard and they help shape the future of the home. For example, children helped to re-write some policies in a child friendly way so they could more easily be understood.

Children take part in a very high amount, which are trips out in the community, that reflect their individual interests and hobbies. Staff understand the importance of this and how it positively impacts on children's physical and emotional wellbeing. Mobility is also used to aid transitions out of the home to maximum effect and enable children to spend meaningful time with their family in the community.

In some areas the physical environment of the home looks tired and worn. Repairs are needed and doors, skirting boards and walls require painting to bring all areas of the home up to the same standard. Children speak positively about the quality of the food.

Children know how to make complaints. This allows children to freely express their views and concerns about the quality of care that they receive. Staff respond quickly and appropriately to any complaints and children receive a well-thought-out response from managers that fully encompasses the concerns raised.

Feedback from professionals and families is positive, offering praise for the management and staff on how well children are cared for and the range of support they offer. One family member commented that before her child was very unsafe and they worried, now they don't, adding they have never had hope before and now finally they do.

Children's education and learning: good

Since the previous inspection, leaders have made improvements to the curriculum. This means that children engage in a suitably broad series of lessons each week, such as vocational training, creative skills, English, mathematics, and courses to help them manage their emotions and develop their personal skills effectively. Leaders rightly recognise that although they have developed the science curriculum, there is more work to do to ensure that all children gain high levels of theoretical knowledge in this subject.

In most cases, teachers plan courses that are appropriate to children's educational needs. They often contextualise topics to children's interests and career goals, which helps children to engage with their studies well. However, teachers do not ensure that children engage consistently well in mathematics, and English. Staff have not been able to engage all children in the assessment process. This means teachers are unable to understand children's starting points in these subjects. This makes it difficult for teachers to always plan work that meets children's needs.

During lessons, teachers mostly plan activities that are challenging and engaging. Teachers explain topics well to children and make helpful adjustments to support children's special educational needs. Teachers largely provide children with helpful verbal and written feedback on their progress.

In most subjects, children develop a good level of new knowledge and skills. They mostly pass the accredited examinations that they take, such as in functional English. A significant number of children receive awards from the Koestler Arts competition. On vocational courses, children produce clear and well-structured written work. However, their work contains some key spelling errors, such as with basic items of equipment on beauty courses.

Education staff take great care and ensure that they are providing children with a learning environment that is welcoming and supportive. They make considerable efforts to meet children's personal, social, and emotional needs. As a result, most children engage very well with their studies. Children behave well in class, have high attendance rates, and show respect towards teachers and visitors.

Children benefit from helpful careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG). They meet careers specialists to discuss their plans, undertake work experience and attend additional training related to their work and study goals. To support children with their planned next steps, staff organise activities such as visits to the colleges where children plan to study.

Children's health: outstanding

Children benefit from excellent health and well-being services in the home and make good progress with their physical and mental wellbeing. Children have a comprehensive and sensitive assessment covering their healthcare needs when they arrive, this ensures staff know how best to support them. Children also benefit from speech and language and occupational therapy screening to aid their progress.

Dentists and opticians do regular clinics in the home and children are encouraged to have their immunisations. GPs visit the home four times a week which ensures any arising medical issues are promptly dealt with and children are seen after physical restraint or self-harming incidents.

Skilled and knowledgeable health practitioners work flexibly to build supportive relationships with children. They approach children with kindness, compassion, and

respect. Understanding the child's story through careful psychological formulation, underpins the trauma-informed approach and therapeutic parenting model in the home.

Collaborative working with all staff across the home is a significant strength. The effective and timely sharing of health information in regular meetings supports the ongoing review of each child's needs and risks. This enables very high-quality individualised care to be delivered.

Strong and consistent health leadership has created a culture of learning, improvement, and innovation. All staff are offered sensory and stress profiling by the Occupational Therapist. This supports staff to understand their own emotional state, and how they can regulate themselves to be in the best possible place to support the children in their care.

The health team use a range of data to understand how children's experiences can affect their behaviours and how each individual child needs staff to respond. For example, for one child who was struggling with their sleep, staff used data analysis which included the child's food intake, staffing rotas, incidents, and sleep patterns. The detailed analysis helped inform an action plan and sleep passport, which positively improved the child's sleep.

Children with neurodiverse needs, including those with a diagnosis of autism or ADHD are well understood. Staff have completed mandatory training on learning disability and autism, and adjustments are made to support children appropriately. For example, visual symbols and talking mats are being used to support a child's autistic needs.

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

Children feel safe and protected. Staff work in line with each child's individualised comprehensive support plans. This ensures strategies to reassure children are bespoke to each child. For example, a 'worry monster' is used when a child begins to struggle with their emotions, this personalised approach means that children receive the right support that they need when they need it and supports positive outcomes.

Safeguarding issues are reported swiftly and dealt with robustly, including referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer as required. The quality assurance and safeguarding manager ensures a solid and effective review of each referral. As a result, concerns or safeguarding issues are followed through swiftly and when necessary, changes are made to practice helping safeguard children and protect them from future harm.

Single separation is used appropriately. Managing away has on occasions, not been used in line with regulations. Children have been managed away for prolonged periods of time and management oversight was lacking. However, the management team have recognised this failing and took action in mid-October, which included carrying out further training with staff and checking their understanding.

Physical restraint is used proportionally and as a last resort to keep children safe. Monitoring ensures practice is appropriate and that learning from incidents is identified. When gaps in practice are discovered, action is promptly taken to rectify any deficiencies. This ensures staff practice is improved to better support future interventions.

Safer recruitment practice is followed for all newly recruited staff. Appropriate and robust checks are in place to enable managers to determine the suitability of staff to work with vulnerable children.

Staff have an in-depth understanding of each child's unique vulnerabilities and know the risks children could be exposed to and what impact this could have on them. Risk is managed dynamically, thoroughly recorded and regularly reviewed. This ensures that information is up to date and clearly sets out exactly what action staff need to take to address the current risks and help keep the child safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager leads by example. A stable and consistent management team lead a culture and ethos of a collaborative trauma informed approach which underpins staff practice. This in turn helps children to achieve their aspirations.

Staff stated that they enjoy working at the home. They spoke with enthusiasm about the children they support and how they help each child to experience positive outcomes. Staff have regular access to a highly skilled therapeutic team that support their emotional wellbeing and their learning and development.

There is a strong focus on staff development and increasing staff's knowledge and understanding across all aspects of working in the home. Leaders and managers empower staff to develop confidence in themselves, increase their skills and recognise their unique talents. This supports staff to take control of their own development and progress.

There is internal and external monitoring of the service. Most areas are monitored closely, while other areas, such as weaknesses in managing away, children's searches and supervision records have not been identified through the monitoring. As a result, we could not be assured that prompt action had been taken to rectify any gaps and identify where changes to staff practice may be required to help better support children.

There is good collaborative working between the home and partner agencies. Leaders and managers confidently challenge services when appropriate to ensure that the best possible outcomes for children are achieved.

Leaders and managers know their strengths and weaknesses and use learning from significant events to inform staff practice and improve children's experiences. The child's voice is heard and acted on, and professionals' advice is sought to ensure that children receive good quality care.

What does the secure children’s home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

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

Requirement	Due date
<p>The leadership and management standard is that the registered person, enables inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children’s home that—</p> <p>use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(h))</p> <p>This relates to managers ensuring records are effectively quality assured, any deficiencies are identified and rectified. Specifically in relation to children’s searches, managing away and supervision records.</p>	<p>28 February 2025</p>

Recommendation

- The ethos of the home should support each child to learn. Specifically, leaders should ensure that across all courses (particularly in mathematics, science and English), children develop high levels of new knowledge and skills, and, where appropriate, gain accredited qualifications. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 29, paragraph 5.18)
- Staff should provide a nurturing environment that is welcoming. Specifically, leaders should ensure the decoration of the home is maintained to a high standard, and a well-maintained environment throughout. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 15, paragraph 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’.

Secure children's home details

Unique reference number: SC046276

Provision sub-type: Secure unit

Registered provider: Devon County Council

Registered provider address: County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon EX2 4QD

Responsible individual: Steve Liddicott

Registered manager: Helen Bowkett

Inspectors

Gary Turney, Social Care Inspector
Thirza Smith, Social Care Inspector
Saul Pope, HMI Further Education and Skills
Gerry Bates, Inspector, Care Quality Commission
Shaun Common, Quality Assurance Manager

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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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