

Aycliffe Secure Services

Registered provider: Durham County Council

Provider address: Aycliffe Secure Centre, Copelaw, Aycliffe, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham DL5 6JB

Assurance inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this secure children's home

This home is operated by a local authority and is approved by the Department for Education to restrict children's liberty.

The home cares for up to 34 children aged between 10 and 17 years across five houses. There were 26 children living in the home at the time of this inspection.

The home provides care for up to eight children placed by the Youth Custody Service and up to 26 children under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 who are placed by local authorities.

The 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 of the home is in the process of registering with Ofsted.

Inspection date: 29 July 2025

Date of last inspection: 28 January 2025

Judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Information about this inspection

At this inspection, the inspectors evaluated:

- the care of children
- the safety of children

- the effectiveness of leaders and managers.

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children, using the social care common inspection framework. This assurance 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'.

Findings from the inspection

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance inspection.

The centre manager and the responsible individual were not available at this inspection. Other leaders and managers from the service led this inspection and demonstrated their focus on children, their comprehensive knowledge base and their leadership skills. This provides assurance that in the absence of senior leaders, contingency planning across the centre remains robust and effective for children.

Most incidents of physical restraint that were viewed on closed-circuit television (CCTV) were consistent with the written records and proportionate to risks for children. Leaders and managers document any lessons learned where appropriate and discuss these with staff. However, one incident viewed did not match the description in the written account of the holds used. Furthermore, management oversight did not recognise that the hold used was inappropriate. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that staff practice is consistently appropriate.

When children's behaviours prevent them from being with their peers, records of these managed away incidents clearly outline the child's presentation and provide evidence that the criteria for the use of this measure of control are met. Logs are kept up to date, detailing the support provided and how staff have attempted to engage the child. There is now clear management oversight, guiding staff in any further action. This reflects improvements in record-keeping.

Single separation logs show that the measures used are proportionate, with management oversight. Records reflect that staff continue to support the child and encourage re-engagement with other children. Once the child is ready, the measure is ended promptly. This confirms that single separation is used only for as long as necessary and ended when the criteria are no longer met.

Children said that they enjoy living in the home and have good relationships with the staff. Children were observed engaging in a variety of activities around the home with their peers and with staff. The atmosphere was calm and relaxed. Children presented as social and confident and are learning valuable social interaction skills that will aid their transition to new placements.

During the holidays, children are kept busy and have individual activity planners to refer to throughout the day. They are offered a range of group-based activities, which help to further develop their social skills, help them to build positive relationships and which support them to manage their own behaviours. All activities are age-appropriate, with little or no refusal from the children.

Leaders and managers take allegations made by children seriously. They work closely with the local authority designated officer, who confirmed that they have a

positive working relationship with senior leaders at the home. Documentation reviewed demonstrates that allegations are dealt with in accordance with local authority policies and procedures.

The requirement that was raised at the full inspection with regard to the monitoring of the service has been met. The recommendations raised at the full inspection will be reviewed at the full inspection. One recommendation was raised at this inspection.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
28/01/2025	Full	Good
11/07/2023	Full	Good
21/09/2022	Full	Good
03/11/2021	Interim	Sustained effectiveness

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that all incidents of restraint are subject to regular scrutiny to ensure that their use is fair and proportionate, and that any unlawful holds by staff are addressed and that relevant action is taken. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.36)
- The registered person should ensure that children are supported to understand how to build friendships with other children in the home. When children need time apart, this should be reviewed regularly, and there should be a clear plan in place to identify children's routine. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 38, paragraph 8.7)
- The registered person should ensure that a child's bedroom is not generally entered without their permission. Usually, rooms should only be searched if the child has been informed or asked for their permission. Immediate searching may be necessary where there are reasonable grounds for believing that there is a risk to the child's or another person's safety or well-being. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 16, paragraph 3.20)
- The registered person should ensure that there are effective, suitable arrangements to manage and administer medication. In particular, that there are enough trained and competent staff to administer medication to children safely. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 35, paragraph 7.15)

Secure children's home details

Unique reference number: SC035648

Provision sub-type: Secure Unit

Registered provider: Durham County Council

Registered provider address: Fostering & Adoption Team, Spectrum 8, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham SR7 7TT

Responsible individual:

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Gemma McDonnell, Social Care Inspector
Jo Birtwhistle, Social Care Inspector

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