

Lincolnshire Secure Unit

Registered provider: Lincolnshire County Council

Lincolnshire Secure Unit, Rookery Avenue, Sleaford, Lincolnshire NG34 7TY

Full 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 Secretary of State to restrict children's liberty. It provides care for up to 12 children aged between 10 and 17 years. At the time of this inspection, the home was providing care for 11 children.

The home provides care for up to 11 children placed by the youth custody service and one child placed under section 25 of the Children Act 1989. Admission of any child who is under 13 years old placed by local authorities under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 requires the approval of the Secretary of State.

The commissioning of health services at 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 in 2008.

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 September 2025

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

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: 5 November 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
05/11/2024	Full	Outstanding
12/12/2023	Full	Good
10/01/2023	Full	Good
16/11/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make exceptional progress, and during the inspection, they were positive about the brilliant support they receive from staff. Relationships between children, staff and managers are strong and built on mutual trust and respect. There is a stable and consistent staff team, which enables children to feel safe and secure. Each child can identify trusted adults they can speak to about any concerns, reflecting the effectiveness of the supportive and emotionally attuned environment.

Professionals are extremely positive about the care children receive. One professional said, 'It's been a pleasure working alongside the staff team.' Another spoke about how nurturing staff are and said, 'You get the impression that they all care and it's not just a job.' Parents are highly complimentary and feel that staff know their children well and that there is effective communication so that they feel informed about their children's progress and care.

Intervention and key-work sessions are meticulously planned and highly responsive to the individual needs of each child. Staff demonstrate exceptional dedication and tenacity, resulting in children making sustained and meaningful progress across a broad range of areas. This includes offence-related work as well as the development of vital life skills, such as emotional resilience, self-confidence and independence. The intervention team skilfully uses a wide array of resources, including input from external professionals with lived experience, to enrich children's learning and deepen their understanding. Children consistently engage with enthusiasm and look forward to their sessions, which they describe as very supportive and helpful.

Reflective journeys are completed when children are about to leave the home. These are child-focused meetings where progress and development are shared and celebrated. This enables the children to understand their journey and share their successes as a positive ending to their time at the home.

Staff provide regular opportunities for children to share their thoughts, feelings and views. This ensures that, for example, activities provided are of interest to the children. Children have enjoyed a range of activities as part of the enrichment offer during school holidays, including DJ workshops, zoo visits and an ice-cream van. Some children have developed an interest in gardening, and they are very proud of their efforts in making the garden look nice.

Staff support children to understand and develop their identity. Regular cooking sessions take place, and children have made meals of their choice and in line with their culture and preferences. For one child who speaks English as an additional language, staff have purchased DVDs and books in their first language and liaise with the child's family to request items to support the child. Children receive visits from

religious leaders where they request this. They are asked about their views about specific skin and haircare needs, and these needs are met.

Children's education and learning: good

Staff know the children well and celebrate with them the small incremental improvements that they make. Children benefit from a welcoming and calm learning environment, and staff spend time developing purposeful relationships with children that support them to have a positive attitude to learning.

Staff assess children's needs on arrival to the home and use the information to identify what children already know and can do. They then plan an appropriate curriculum for each child that meets their needs, including the targets set in their education, health and care plans. In lessons, staff differentiate work, setting an accessible level to ensure each child can make progress in line with their needs. This progress is discussed daily with staff to ensure that children benefit.

Children's attendance and engagement in education are promoted. When children struggle to access a full timetable, suitable arrangements are put in place to support their attendance. For most children, their engagement in learning is positive and much better than in previous education settings. Children are happy to talk about their learning and newly acquired knowledge.

Children receive a varied programme of enrichment activities and a well-resourced and factually relevant programme of personal, social, health and economic education. The subjects are delivered by a combination of education staff, healthcare staff and a guest speaker covering a broad range of relevant topics. This has helped children develop the skills, knowledge and attributes needed to lead healthy, safe and successful lives, both now and in the future.

Leaders support staff well, enabling staff to develop their teaching practice. Staff have the opportunity to progress their careers by engaging in further learning, such as Level 6 Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance teaching and special educational needs qualifications. However, they do not always hold the necessary qualification for the subject they teach, for example in higher levels of learning, particularly around English and mathematics.

Children's health: outstanding

When children arrive at the home, health staff carry out assessments of children's health that are sensitive and respectful, including completing the statutory Comprehensive Health Assessment Tool. Health professionals take the time to understand each child's preferences and emotional readiness to ensure that assessments are paced appropriately, and they then build trust with the children. They empower children to take an active and confident role in their own health journey.

Children receive trauma-informed care that is shaped through close collaboration between health, education and care professionals. There is a shared understanding of each child's emotional well-being, physical health and personal history, enabling staff to deliver highly personalised and compassionate support from the very beginning and throughout a child's stay.

Children have access to a wide range of health interventions, including immunisations, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and support around sleep, nutrition and substance misuse. Staff use familiar routines and therapeutic techniques to reduce anxiety and promote emotional safety during medical procedures. Children have consistently benefited from these interventions and approaches, with significant improvements in their physical and emotional well-being. The continuity and quality of care provided helps children to feel safe, understood and empowered throughout their health journey.

Children are given clear, age-appropriate explanations about their medicines, helping them feel informed and reassured. Medicines are administered safely and consistently by trained staff, supported by regular audit systems. This approach promotes children's well-being at every stage of their care and ensures they get the medicine they need, when they need it, to help keep them healthy.

Children preparing to move on from the home have in place exceptionally well-coordinated discharge plans, demonstrating a consistently high level of professional staff practice. Children's health needs are reviewed well in advance of them moving on, and staff work proactively with placement providers and community services to ensure continuity and stability for the children. Every aspect of the child's healthcare is clearly mapped out, ensuring that all health needs are identified and planned for as they move into the next placement.

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

Staff devise and implement risk management strategies that help to keep children and others safe from harm. Risk management plans are detailed, individualised and clearly focused on identifying the primary risks to each child's safety and well-being and the actions required to minimise those risks. They are regularly reviewed and updated following 'Myself' meetings, planning review sessions and in response to any new incidents. The process is underpinned by a strong culture of reflective practice and accountability.

There is a reflective and restorative approach that promotes emotional growth and strengthens relationships with children. A particularly commendable initiative involved three children producing a video about their experiences and feelings around consequences, which was shared with staff during an away day. This has helped staff to view the use of consequences from a child's perspective. This powerful child-led contribution has helped staff's understanding and reinforced the importance of listening to the child's voice in shaping practice.

Safeguarding matters are managed very effectively. There is exemplary oversight of practices, including ensuring that records are meticulously maintained and regularly reviewed. The system for monitoring safeguarding concerns, with clear lines of accountability and timely follow-up actions, means children's safety is prioritised and swift actions taken where required to help keep children safe. The Minimising and Managing Physical Restraint (MMPR) coordinators and the quality assurance lead routinely audit safeguarding records to ensure accuracy and completeness and reflect the decisive actions taken to help safeguard children.

Restrictive measures, such as physical restraint and single separation (where children are locked into an area alone due to serious risk to themselves or others), are used proportionately and only when necessary to ensure the safety of children and staff. Records demonstrate that staff actions are justified alongside clearly defined goals to support the child. The low number of incidents reflects a culture of restraint and restriction minimisation and a commitment to trauma-informed care. Post-incident reviews are thorough, with lessons learned shared with staff to promote reflective practice and ensure continuous improvement. Additional training is sourced when required to address any identified gaps. Oversight by the MMPR team, alongside the quality assurance lead, provides an additional layer of scrutiny, ensuring that practice remains high quality and any learning is identified and acted on.

Supporting Adolescents with Self-Harm plans are detailed and implemented by staff to help keep children safe. The plans demonstrate a clear rationale for their purpose. They are subject to regular review, with daily records providing comprehensive and transparent accounts for each intervention. Staff consistently record the reasons for maintaining or ending a plan, ensuring that decisions are collaborative with relevant professionals' input, informed, child-centred and aligned with the child's evolving needs. This reflective practice supports a dynamic safeguarding approach. Leaders and managers maintain strong oversight of practices, promoting accountability and continuous improvement in children's care.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders are highly effective in how they have developed, implemented and continually reviewed systems to ensure the highest standard of care and that practice is delivered to children. The senior leadership team has well-defined roles and responsibilities, and this ensures the smooth running of the service. The manager is visible to staff and children and fosters a culture of openness and transparency. Leaders provide excellent support and development for staff, and this contributes to a stable, motivated workforce and enhances the quality of care provided to children.

Research-informed practice and continuous learning are well established across the service and are instrumental in developing staff practice. Regular team reflection sessions provide opportunities to explore a broad range of topics, fostering professional growth and reinforcing a consistent approach to service delivery.

The needs, risks and vulnerabilities of the children are well known across the service, and managers drive and oversee highly effective care planning and coordinated working practices. This shared understanding of children's needs ensures that interventions are tailored and responsive to each child. As a result, there is a shift towards more therapeutic, child-centred approaches.

Staff are very well supported and guided. They receive regular supervision and an annual appraisal for their practice. Consistency among supervisors is evident, and reflective discussions with staff support their well-being, emotional resilience and day-to-day practice. In turn, staff provide a caring and nurturing atmosphere for children that is embedded in practice with meaningful relationships with the children.

Leaders ensure that there are safe and effective strategies in place to mitigate any risks to children alongside supporting staff to understand and reflect on how their behaviour impacts on others. Where it is identified that change or learning has not occurred, decisive action is taken in line with established procedures. This ensures that children remain protected, and their welfare is prioritised at all times.

Children's complaints, regardless of the nature or severity, are followed up through dialogue, consultation and work with the child. Investigations take place, and the designated manager is proactive in doing focused work and research to provide an informed response and an outcome to children. This enables children to understand what has been done to address their concerns and gives them confidence that they are heard and taken seriously.

Children are given opportunities to be involved and participate in key issues that impact on their daily lives. This has included a review of the bullying policy and how consequences are applied. This empowers children and gives them a voice in how they want their care to be delivered. Some children say they have been on a journey of self-discovery, and for the first time, they can be proud of their achievements.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that the ethos of the home supports each child to learn. In particular, staff should hold a qualification at least one level above in the subjects they teach, which should be a priority for externally validated courses. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 29, paragraph 5.18)

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: SC042921

Provision sub-type: Secure Unit

Registered provider: Lincolnshire County Council

Registered provider address: County Offices, Newland, Lincoln LN1 1YL

Responsible individual: Tara Jones

Registered manager: David Clarke

Inspectors

Cath Sikakana, Social Care Inspector

Shaun Common, His Majesty's Inspector, Quality Assurance Manager

Leanne Lyon, Social Care Inspector

Gary Turney, Social Care Inspector

Hayley Lomas, His Majesty's Inspector, Further Education and Skills

Thomas Davis, Health and Justice Inspector, Care Quality Commission

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