

# 1214396

Registered provider: River Valley Care Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this children's home

This privately owned home provides care for up to two children with social and emotional difficulties.

The registered manager left their post in May 2025. A new manager is in post and has applied to register with Ofsted.

### Inspection dates: 1 and 2 September 2025

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,** taking into account

**requires improvement to be good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

**Date of last inspection:** 22 July 2024

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Recent inspection history

| Inspection date | Inspection type | Inspection judgement            |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| 22/07/2024      | Full            | Good                            |
| 05/12/2023      | Full            | Requires improvement to be good |
| 21/02/2023      | Full            | Good                            |
| 26/10/2021      | Full            | Good                            |

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good**

At the time of the inspection, one child was living at the home and was spoken to by the inspector. The inspector also spoke with a child who had previously lived at the home for several years and moved earlier in the year. Since the last inspection, two children have moved into the home and three have moved out.

Children's experiences of living in the home have varied. While some children have had positive experiences and made good progress, one child experienced a less positive time living in the home. This was partly due to shortcomings in staff's responses to a challenging situation. Leaders have reflected on this and have taken steps to learn from the experience.

Moves to the home are well planned and children are given opportunities to visit and meet staff before moving in.

Children's experiences of moving on from the home have been mixed. One child received outreach support from staff, which helped them develop independence and successfully secure an apprenticeship. In contrast, another child was not fully informed about the reasons for their move or where they were moving to. This did not reflect thoughtful or well-planned care.

Children are positive about the home. One child described it as feeling like 'home', expressed feeling safe and highlighted strong relationships with staff. On occasion, staff bring their pet dogs into the home, allowing children the positive experience of having pets in their home. However, managers have not followed internal policies and ensured that risk assessments have been completed in relation to this.

Staff actively listen to children and seek their views on day-to-day matters. However, children are not consistently involved in decisions regarding their care plans, targets or risk assessments.

Staff prioritise children's education. Children attend school and are supported through exams and to access alternative education provisions where appropriate.

Staff help children create lasting memories. One child spoke enthusiastically about a flying experience and a recent holiday. Children are encouraged to maintain relationships with friends and siblings, who are welcomed into the home. This includes having siblings stay overnight.

Staff help children to develop an understanding of healthy relationships and essential life skills, such as cooking and cleaning. When specialist support is required, staff

liaise with external professionals who provide targeted interventions, including sessions to help children cope with bereavement and loss.

**How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

Staff know the children well and have helped children to understand risks. Staff help children gain the skills and knowledge they need to keep themselves safe. For most children, there are few incidents. However, staff do not consistently demonstrate the necessary skills and confidence needed when responding to children's risky behaviours.

On occasion, staff have lacked the confidence needed to manage incidents effectively and have had to seek guidance from on-call managers regarding appropriate actions. In some instances, children were left for a period of time to self-regulate, which resulted in damage being caused to the home. Additionally, staff permitted a child to use a bicycle with defective brakes, placing the child at unnecessary risk. Although no harm occurred, these decisions compromised children's safety and exposed them to potential harm.

Staff's skills in report writing are insufficient. Incident records lack detail regarding the de-escalation strategies used and do not clearly document how children were kept safe during incidents. Furthermore, staff are not always provided with debriefs following incidents. This lack of reflective practice and incomplete documentation hinder managerial oversight and limits opportunities for learning and improvement.

When children engage in unsafe online behaviours, staff do not undertake targeted work to help them understand the risks. Instead, staff have relied on restricting access to the home's Wi-Fi. This approach does not support children in developing the knowledge and awareness needed to navigate online environments safely.

Leaders have not ensured that all staff have been recruited in line with safer recruitment practices. Employment history gaps have not been explored, and records do not reflect discussions held with referees. In one case, a reference was provided by a family member rather than a professional contact. Interview records also fail to demonstrate how leaders assessed candidates' suitability for the role.

**The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good**

Since the last inspection, there have been periods when the home was without a manager. During these times, the responsible individual took on the day-to-day leadership responsibilities. He demonstrated resilience and a strong commitment to the children, making considerable efforts to minimise any disruption to their care.

A new manager is now in post. He has previously managed the home and is familiar with both the home and the staff team. He has worked flexibly to meet the needs of the children and provide support to staff.

The effectiveness of managerial oversight has been limited. Monitoring tools are inconsistently completed, with repeated actions lacking evidence of follow-up or evaluation. These tools have not identified the shortfalls highlighted during this inspection.

A hallway surveillance sensor is used to alert staff at night when children leave their rooms. Managers have not reviewed this practice to see if it is still needed or consulted with the child in relation to its use. This fails to ensure that this remains a proportionate measure and does not promote trust and independence, particularly given the child's age.

Staff report feeling supported by the new manager and are positive about the initial changes he has implemented. However, while staff receive supervision, the workforce development plan does not clearly outline its frequency. This is a missed opportunity to establish clear expectations for both staff and managers.

All staff have access to a range of training. However, leaders have not ensured that staff receive specific learning opportunities related to online safety and managing sexualised behaviours, despite these being relevant risks for children. Additionally, not all new staff have received a formal induction into their roles.

Despite the shortfalls identified, feedback from professionals is positive. They highlight strong relationships between staff and children and good communication skills. One child's social worker expressed they were happy with the care provided and praised the staff's teamwork.

## What does the 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 protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that staff—</p> <p>have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm;</p> <p>understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; and</p> <p>that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(iii)(v)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that staff have the skills to respond to children's behaviours effectively, that consequences provide a learning opportunity for children and that policies relating to staff's pets in the home are followed.</p> | 31 October 2025 |
| <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>helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and</p> <p>promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; and</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 31 October 2025 |

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| <p>understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home; and</p> <p>use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c)(d)(f)(h))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that staff are provided with sufficient training and have the skills to meet children's needs, that there are effective systems to evaluate the quality of care and that monitoring systems are effective in identifying where practice should improve. Furthermore, managers should ensure that staff understand their responsibilities with record-keeping.</p> |                        |
| <p>The care planning standard is that children—</p> <p>receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered to ensure—</p> <p>that arrangements are in place to—</p> <p>ensure the effective induction of each child into the home; and</p> <p>manage and review the placement of each child in the home. (Regulation 14 (1)(a) (2)(b)(i)(ii))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that managers demonstrate child-centred planning when children move out of the home and that children's plans reflect their journeys, the aims of their placement and their views.</p>                                                                                                                                       | <p>31 October 2025</p> |
| <p>The registered person may only use devices for the monitoring or surveillance of children if—</p> <p>the monitoring or surveillance is for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child concerned, or other children. (Regulation 24 (1)(a))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that motion sensors are only used as set out in a child's agreed risk assessment and that children's wishes are considered in relation to their use.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p>31 October 2025</p> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <p>The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety.</p> <p>The registered person may only—</p> <p>employ an individual to work at the children's home;</p> <p>if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3).</p> <p>The requirements are that—</p> <p>full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1) (2)(a) (3)(d))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that all gaps in employment are checked and information about the worker is clear and consistent.</p> | <p>31 October 2025</p> |
| <p>The registered person must—</p> <p>ensure that each employee completes an appropriate induction. (Regulation 33 (1)(a))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that all employees receive an induction into the home.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>31 October 2025</p> |

## Recommendation

- The registered person should have a workforce plan that can fulfil the workforce-related requirements of regulation 16, schedule 1 (paragraph 20). The plan should detail the timescales for supervision of practice and staff appraisals. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.8)

## 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:** 1214396

**Provision sub-type:** Children's home

**Registered provider:** River Valley Care Limited

**Registered provider address:** The Stables, Chestnut Farm, Cuxham, Watlington, Oxfordshire OX49 5ND

**Responsible individual:** Quentin Carson

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

## Inspectors

Debbie Bond, Social Care Inspector  
Sophie Hills, Social Care Inspector

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