

1244493

Registered provider: Stepping Stones Children's Homes Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is operated by a private organisation and is registered to provide care for up to four children. The provider states in its statement of purpose that high-quality therapeutic support is provided for children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

The home is managed by a qualified and experienced manager.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

We last visited this setting on 7 October 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 March 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The 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: 27 November 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
27/11/2019	Full	Good
31/07/2018	Full	Good
20/02/2018	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
19/07/2017	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children receive exceptionally well-planned care. In partnership with external agencies, children's individual needs are identified, assessed and consistently reviewed. As a result, children thrive and make remarkable progress.

Children form extremely trusting relationships and strong bonds with the staff team. Because of this, the children engage very well with staff and the professionals undertaking work with them. The impact of this work is evident in the exceptional progress children make in this home. However, this work could be further enhanced by encouraging children to review and comment on this work. This is intended to enable children to feel a sense of control about their lives and the progress they make.

This home promotes positive family values in a supportive, safe and happy environment. The children share their home with two cats and one dog, who are very much a part of the family created in this home. One child said, 'I love our pets. They sit on my knee, and I stroke them. I have never lived anywhere with pets before. I like it.'

Since the home registered in 2018, it has accommodated seven children. This low number of placements is because children are extremely well matched and remain in placement until they are ready to live independently.

The registered manager and staff have a proven track record of advocating well for children with a plan of independence. As a result, independent accommodation for children is suitably sourced, supported and based close to familiar links. This is because the registered manager is passionate about making sure that when children leave the home, they succeed in their steps towards adulthood. The registered manager said, 'We have formed trusting bonds with children. It is our duty to make sure transitions are positive and children never feel alone.' One child said: 'I love it here. The staff are really special to me. I am moving to adult services and have just had my first overnight stay. It was great. I hope the new staff will become special to me too.'

Children come to this home with a history of educational disruption. Some children have not attended school for an extended period and have successfully restarted their educational journey. The staff team works in close partnership with established education providers to develop detailed individual support packages. This level of support enables children to re-establish themselves in the educational environment. As a result, children's educational attendance and attainment have excelled.

A headteacher said: 'The children make excellent progress in school. One child was predicted to reach a level 2 in English and Maths. As a result of the partnerships

between the home and school, the child has exceeded our expectations and has already gained a level 4.' In addition, another teacher said: 'One child had no English language or writing skills when he came to our school. He has been with us for 18 months and is now fluent in both areas. The home provides absolutely amazing support.'

Family contact is extremely well supported. The staff team works directly with the children and their families to help to build positive relationships and acceptable boundaries. This has proved to be successful. Children who previously did not have contact with their families now enjoy regular supported contact, including weekend stays. Furthermore, when difficulties arise, the staff take prompt action to address these concerns and help the child and their family to move forward positively.

Children's health and well-being are prioritised in this home. From the point of admission, staff take prompt action to escalate any previously unmet health concerns. This ensures that children's health is assessed and monitored in accordance with their needs. Likewise, when a child is diagnosed with a specific health condition, prompt action is taken to ensure that staff are provided with suitable training to manage this condition.

Children are encouraged and supported to take part in community activities. Some children enjoy boxing and trampolining, while others enjoy mountain biking and climbing. This has provided excellent opportunities for children to make positive and safe friendships within the community. One child said, 'We get to do lots of things here. I love [name of trampoline park]. The staff take me and join in with me. It is funny.'

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

Risk management plans are thorough and include critical information regarding each child's lived experiences. Strategies to manage incidents of disruption are developed in partnership with external support agencies and consider each child's emotional intelligence. This means that children's behaviours are managed in a way that helps them to understand their own triggers and build positive and proactive coping mechanisms.

The staff are trained in the use of de-escalation and physical intervention strategies. Behaviour management strategies make good use of the positive and trusting relationships the children have developed with the staff team. As a result, there have been no occasions where a physical intervention has been required since the last assurance visit in October 2020.

Children feel safe in this home. Therefore, it is rare for a child to be absent or missing from the home. In the past 18 months, there has been only one brief incident. A child said, 'If I have a problem, the staff help me to sort it out. I can talk to any member of staff, and they will help me because they care about me.'

Previously identified behaviours that placed children at risk are successfully managed. Consequently, there are minimal safeguarding concerns in this home. However, to ensure that the staff remain vigilant and responsive to risks, the registered manager promotes continued learning through the use of practice scenarios in team discussions. This ensures that a team approach is used to identify potential risks and promotes reflective practice.

The house provides spacious accommodation that is a safe and homely environment for children to thrive and grow. However, when children do not wish to have blinds on their bedroom windows, the registered manager should consider a different solution to obscure the windows to protect the privacy of the child.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The leadership and management of the home are outstanding. Children live in a home that is managed in their best interests. The home meets the aims and objectives of the statement of purpose. Children, social workers and families are clear about the service and support that the home provides.

The team receives a consistent annual training package. Mandatory training is regularly refreshed, and additional training, based on the theoretical framework of attachment, is the foundation for all planned work with the children. Likewise, the team benefits from regular input from external agencies which work in partnership with the home. These sessions enable the staff to continue to provide the high standard of effective care to the children.

The team receives excellent managerial support. The registered manager is the driving force behind the aspirational care provided to the children. One staff member said, 'The registered manager makes sure we are doing the best we can for the children. If there is a problem, he is always there to guide us through it.' The staff receive regular supervision, including group supervision and key-work supervision.

The registered manager and the team demonstrate a strong commitment to delivering excellent child-centred practice that is tailored to the individual and personal needs of children. The effectiveness of this approach is measurable in the excellent progress children make, particularly in education, risk reduction and positive transitions to independent living.

The home employs a strong and committed staff team. All staff have received the children and young people's workforce diploma at level 3. The training at this level ensures that the staff team is suitably qualified in the care and management of children.

Internal monitoring systems provide the home with a clear approach to the overall monitoring of care. Detailed information highlights areas for development. The manager's action plan details the methods used to enhance the service. Likewise, external monitoring takes place in accordance with regulation. The independent visitor's report provides a realistic insight into the progress children make.

The staff are skilled, knowledgeable and exceptional role models for the children in their care. They consistently invest in creating positive experiences and opportunities for the children. This is reflected in the mutual respect generated in this home.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that bedroom windows are obscured to protect children's privacy. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 17, paragraph 3.24)
- The registered person should ensure that children are actively encouraged to read their records and to add further information to them. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.6)

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: 1244493

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Stepping Stones Children's Homes Limited

Responsible individual: Nicola Brown

Registered manager: Ali Sajjad

Inspector

Maria McGranaghan, Social Care Inspector

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