

1244493

Registered provider: Stepping Stones Children's Homes Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This service is run by a private company. The home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four young people who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Inspection dates: 19 to 20 July 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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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	good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: Not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: Not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- The management team has high expectations for what young people can achieve and ensure high standards of care.
- The staff team works collaboratively to provide consistency and stability.
- Young people receive good help and support to manage their behaviours. They are responding to clear boundaries and expectations of behaviour.
- Young people have good relationships with staff.
- Staff know the young people well, listen to them and promote their welfare.
- The managers and staff have established effective working relationships with partner agencies and families.

The children's home's areas for development:

- There are some shortfalls in recruitment processes.
- Young people's placement plans are in place; however, education and healthcare plans do not provide sufficient detail.
- Young people have access to an independent person after being missing, but the home does not maintain records of these visits.

Recent inspection history

This is the home's first full inspection since registration in February 2017.

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, 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
The registered person must ensure full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32(3)(d))	31/08/2017

Recommendations

- Regulations 35-39 detail the records that must be kept in children's homes. All children's case records (regulation 36) must be kept up to date and stored securely whilst they remain in the home; specifically, young people's education and healthcare plans. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.6)
- When a child returns to the home after being missing from care or away from the home without permission, the responsible local authority must provide an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. Homes should take account of information provided by such interviews when assessing risks and putting arrangements in place to protect each child. ('Guide to the children's home regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Young people benefit from good-quality care. The staff place the well-being of the young people at the centre of their practice. Consequently, young people are making excellent progress from their initial starting points. A placing social worker said, 'He's only been there five/six weeks, he has some very concerning behaviours, but they have completely turned him around... I didn't think they could turn this kid around as quickly as they have.' A young person said, 'Staff treat me with respect... they have shown me a whole different way of life... staff are helping me to better myself.'

Staff have a good understanding of each young person's needs and the progress they are making. Staff work in a coordinated way with young people, their families and professionals to ensure that they receive the right help and support. Young people's views and opinions are central to the running of the home, which makes them feel

valued. Planned key-work sessions enable young people to reflect on their experiences and support them to get back on track. As a result, young people are becoming increasingly safer as staff help them to reduce difficult and risk-taking behaviours, including going missing, substance misuse and offending behaviour.

The majority of the staff team are experienced residential childcare workers and are highly skilled in building constructive, warm relationships with the young people. Staff listen to the young people, invest time in them and promote their welfare. This means that young people are developing a sense of permanence and belonging. A parent said, 'They are focusing him in the right direction... this is a lad with some prospects now.' Young people recognise the progress they have made since coming to live at the home. A young person said, 'My relationship with my mum is better. I'm looking to the future. I've changed my friends. I used to take drugs but I don't even smoke any more.' Young people's self-esteem and feelings of self-worth are improving.

Educational attendance has significantly improved for most young people from their starting point of placement. Staff work in partnership with the virtual head and other education professionals to support young people's participation and engagement. A young person who is new to the home is currently without a school placement, but funding for an external tutor has been agreed in the interim. This means that the young person will be prepared for their reintegration once a placement has been identified. A young person recently received an award from school in recognition of his excellent progress in English. However, clear targets and plans are not in place, such as personal educational plans (PEPs) and up-to-date education, health and care plans (EHCP). This impacts on the staff's ability to measure academic progress and ensure that young people are achieving their full potential.

Staff actively promote young people's good health. Staff ensure that young people receive effective advice and support appropriate to their needs. For example, they encourage individual young people to engage with their drugs and alcohol workers. Consequently, some young people have stopped using illicit drugs altogether, while others have significantly reduced their intake. This means that their emotional health and well-being is improving. A placing social worker commented, 'They [staff] have broken the pattern of behaviour he was in.'

Young people enjoy a range of activities. These include going to the cinema, playing pool and shopping, while some young people prefer to spend time with their friends. Recently, the young people and staff went for a meal together to celebrate a young person's birthday. Young people are also supported to engage in faith-based activities if they wish to do so. The staff are making plans to take the young people away on holiday during the summer holidays. This enhances the range of experiences for young people, and helps to improve their social skills and self-confidence.

Staff promote, help maintain and facilitate contact for young people in line with their local authority plans. Staff are particularly skilful at helping young people to develop self-awareness and understand the importance of healthy relationships. This has enabled young people to repair and rebuild family relationships. A young person commented,

'They [staff] have helped me, especially with my contact... they are working with my mum as well.' This ensures that important attachments are maintained and young people's sense of identity is promoted.

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

Young people's risks are clearly identified from their initial starting points and effective strategies are in place to protect them from harm. Staff are trained in recognising and responding to any concerns about the welfare of the young people. The care and support that young people receive is helping them to become increasingly safe. Young people say that they feel safe and well cared for.

Young people confirm that bullying is not a feature of the home. The staff work well with the Youth Offending Service (YOS) to help young people understand how their past behaviours can impact on their future prospects. Most young people are engaging well, which has a positive impact on their futures as their risk-taking behaviours reduce. Professionals spoken to confirm that young people are responding well to the structure, boundaries and routines of the home.

When young people go missing, staff are very proactive and go out and look for them. The length of time that young people are missing has significantly reduced from their starting point of placement. The home takes appropriate steps to escalate concerns; professional meetings ensure that information is shared with relevant agencies. Although an independent person is available to young people following any episode of going missing, the home does not maintain records of these visits.

Positive behaviour is consistently promoted. Young people respond well to the incentives in place; this means that the use of sanctions is kept to a minimum. There have been no physical interventions. Staff act as positive role models and use effective de-escalation techniques when supporting young people through difficult periods. A young person said, 'When I am struggling with my behaviour they [staff] give me things to do like taking me out... even when I lose my temper they are alright with me... I have never been restrained here, it's never even come close to it... there is always someone I can talk to.'

Shortfalls in some staff personnel files were identified during this inspection. The files viewed contained appropriate recruitment documents, including proof of identity and Disclosure and Barring Service checks. However, the shortfalls included a missing application form, missing references and unverified references. This means that recruitment processes are not sufficiently robust.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager has a number of years' residential childcare experience and demonstrates a clear commitment to ensuring high standards of care. Parents and professionals confirm the excellent progress that young people are making as a result of their experiences of living in the home. Comments include, 'staff are very welcoming';

'we feel reassured that [X] will get the support needed'; 'impressed with the relationships with staff and young people'; '[Y]'s risks have reduced and his vulnerability has also reduced.'

The home is well resourced, and young people are provided with consistency of care by a staff team that knows them well. Discussions with staff and observations throughout the inspection confirm that staff clearly enjoy their work. They are extremely child-focused and take pride in what young people have achieved in such a short space of time.

Staff confirm that they are well supported by the management team to care appropriately for young people. Regular supervision, team meetings and handovers provide staff with an opportunity to discuss the care and progress of the young people. Training and development opportunities are sound. A number of staff are currently undertaking a management qualification to enhance their skills and knowledge further. The operations manager is currently undertaking a review of the team's training needs; relevant training that has been identified includes attachment, substance misuse and self-harm. This ensures that young people continue to receive the quality of care that reflects their complex needs.

The home is delivering the services outlined in the statement of purpose. The manager and staff work proactively with other agencies to secure improved outcomes for young people. Parents and professionals confirm that there is good communication between them and the home.

The manager has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. Monthly monitoring visits are undertaken by an independent person, they review the home's performance and identify areas for improvement. This is supported by the home's development plan that sets out how the management team plans to drive further improvements in the home. This plan is followed in practice, which improves outcomes for young people.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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 Ltd

Registered provider address: 139–143 Union Street, Oldham OL1 1TE

Responsible individual: Ahtesham-UI Haque

Registered manager: Shahzaad Iqbal

Inspector

Michelle Bacon, social care regulatory inspector

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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: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

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