

2525774

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 owned by a private company. It provides care for up to four children who may have social and emotional difficulties.

At the time of this inspection, three children were living in the home.

There has been no registered manager since June 2025.

Inspection dates: 6 and 7 August 2025

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: 20 November 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
20/11/2024	Full	Good
06/03/2024	Full	Good
01/02/2023	Full	Good
16/03/2022	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Since the last inspection, one child has moved out of the home in an emergency. The children currently living at the home are making good progress and have built strong relationships with the staff team. One child said, 'It's a good environment, good vibes and good staff.'

The home is a terraced house situated close to a large park. The children's bedrooms are personalised and clean, and there are photos of the children in communal areas. The children also have pet fish and a cat. There have been some improvements made to the home since the last inspection, including new bathrooms. However, further work is required to ensure that the decor is of high standard.

All children are enrolled in appropriate educational provisions. One child regularly returns home with achievement certificates and is making progress. For others, engaging with and maintaining education has been more challenging. However, they have still made progress due to the support and dedication of the staff team, which advocates on behalf of the children, provides learning support in the home and works closely with external professionals.

Children's views, wishes and feelings are important to the staff. One child's grandparent said, 'It's important to [name of child] that they have a voice, and they do, they listen to him.' Children's records capture their contribution to their care well, and children attend or contribute to important reviews.

Staff are committed to working collaboratively with the children's families. The children value these efforts to involve their families in their lives, which in turn helps to strengthen their relationships. All children are going on summer holidays with their families, independently arranged and funded by the provider. In addition to these breaks, the children also take part in a variety of enjoyable activities, such as ice skating, visiting arcades and exploring climbing centres.

The children are supported to attend all routine medical appointments, and timely referrals are made to specialist services when required. This proactive approach ensures that each child receives the appropriate support exactly when it is needed.

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

Incidents involving the children are infrequent and have reduced over time. This reflects the staff's understanding of the children and their ability to de-escalate situations effectively. More importantly, it highlights the significant progress the children have made in regulating their emotions, which is recognised by professionals, family members and staff as an achievement. One child's grandparent

shared, 'They've completely turned themselves around, settled down, grown up and are much happier. They're no longer sad and have the sparkle back in their eyes.'

Occurrences of children leaving the home and not returning on time are rare, and for one child, these incidents have significantly decreased. However, there is concern regarding one child who has been missing for an extended period and remains unlocated. Staff have worked closely with external professionals. Incident records are detailed. However, there have been missed opportunities for improvement. Specifically, the manager has not consistently identified gaps in staff practice, such as the delay in actively searching for the child early in the missing episode.

The responsible individual follows safer recruitment processes that reduce the risk of unsuitable people working with the children. In addition, the children have been involved in the interviews for a new manager.

The staff team has a good understanding of safeguarding procedures and follows these appropriately when a concern arises. Children are aware that they can access advocacy if required. Since the last inspection, there has been one physical intervention. This was necessary and proportionate.

Rewards are continually and consistently used to support children with positive behaviour. Negative consequences are rarely used. However, when they are, leaders will review these for effectiveness.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager left the home in June. In the interim, the responsible individual, who previously held the manager role, has taken on responsibility for the day-to-day running of the home until a new manager is appointed. They are a strong and respected leader, valued by both the children and staff. Staff report feeling well supported and receiving regular supervision sessions, which they describe as both meaningful and beneficial.

The responsible individual generally maintains effective oversight of incidents involving the children and responds appropriately. However, one incident was not fully addressed, as a child's comments during the episode warranted further exploration.

The independent person visits monthly, and the responsible individual uses their visits to consider any changes or improvements needed in care practices.

The responsible individual has made Ofsted aware of serious incidents. However, they had not provided updates on a significant and ongoing incident, which impacts on the regulator's oversight of what is happening in the home and children's experiences.

The staff attend regular team meetings that are tailored towards specific situations, for example a new child moving in or to discuss safety planning. This ensures that the staff have the information needed to support the children effectively.

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
The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires, and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(h)) This relates specifically to the registered person ensuring that they have oversight of any incidents so that any issues with staff practice or concerns raised by the children can be addressed in a timely manner.	19 September 2025
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (e)) This relates specifically to the registered person ensuring that updates to previously submitted incidents are submitted so that the regulator can maintain effective oversight of what is going on in the home and for children.	19 September 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that staff follow agreed procedures when a child is missing until it is agreed otherwise. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 45, paragraph 9.28)
- The registered person should ensure that the home is redecorated in required areas and that a programme for refurbishment is implemented to improve the accommodation provided for children. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 15, paragraph 3.9)

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: 2525774

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Stepping Stones Children's Homes Limited

Registered provider address: Suite 6, Earl Mill Business Centre, Dowry Street,
Oldham OL8 2PF

Responsible individual: Douglas Loney

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Kerri Lynch, Social Care Inspector

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