

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

The home is operated by a private company and provides care for up to 4 children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

At the time of this inspection, 4 children were living in the home, and the inspector spoke with each of them.

A suitably qualified manager was appointed in August 2025 and registered with Ofsted in September 2025.

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 May 2026

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	requires improvement to be 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: 6 August 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
06/08/2025	Full	Good
20/11/2024	Full	Good
06/03/2024	Full	Good
01/02/2023	Full	Good

Summary of findings

Children make progress in this home, which helps to prepare them to move on, either to return to families or to placements better suited to their emerging needs. Since the last inspection, a manager has been appointed and has begun to influence a positive cultural shift by training staff to respond to children in a more therapeutic way. However, there are some shortfalls in safeguarding. In particular, behaviour management is not always effective, with an over-reliance on the use of restraint and the involvement of the police. Additionally, the management of children's internet access is insufficiently robust, which is disrupting their sleep patterns and daytime routines.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children make good progress. Their attendance and engagement in education have improved, alongside increased time spent with family. As a result, children have a strengthened sense of identity and maintain meaningful connections.

As children mature, staff collaborate with social care professionals to plan for their return to family when this is safe and appropriate. Where staff identify that a child would make better progress in an alternative setting, they escalate this to those responsible for care-planning decisions. For example, it was identified that one child would benefit from living in a smaller, less busy home, and professionals are now working together to identify a more suitable placement.

There are positive relationships between staff and the wider professional network. Effective joint working with social work teams has helped to maintain momentum in planning for children to move on successfully.

Children feel settled in the home and say they are happy living there. They particularly enjoy the activities provided. Staff support children to engage in activities they enjoy, such as baking and playing games, go-karting and going on trips to the seaside.

Children have multiple opportunities to express their views about their care and are encouraged to make decisions about both day-to-day matters and significant aspects of their lives. Regular key-work sessions help staff to understand how children feel.

Staff provide individualised care that reflects children's specific needs. However, there is a lack of personalisation around the premises and in children's bedrooms. Additionally, signs of wear and tear and damage are not always addressed promptly. As a result, the home does not feel as warm and welcoming as it could.

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

Risk assessments and safety plans demonstrate that staff understand children's risks and vulnerabilities; however, these risks are not always managed effectively. There is a lack of tenacity in staff establishing children's whereabouts and activities when they are away from the home. For example, when children misuse substances, there is insufficient clarity regarding how these substances are obtained or funded.

Staff understand the action required when children go missing from the home and follow their plans. However, on one occasion, staff failed to take timely action when a child went missing, as they followed another child's safety plan. This does not provide reassurance that staff always respond effectively.

There has been a slight reduction in the number of behavioural incidents as children are helped to develop alternative strategies for managing their emotions. Historically, staff have had access to specialist support to promote children's emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Children's behaviour management plans are clear; however, they do not align with the risk assessments in outlining when, and if, restraint should be used. This does not promote a consistent approach or ensure staff accountability when managing behaviour. There is no clear guidance in plans regarding when police involvement is appropriate during incidents. De-escalation strategies are not always fully explored before restraint is used, and staff do not always reflect on incidents to prevent them from reoccurring.

Children continue to access online gaming during the night, which disrupts their sleep and daily routines. This lack of sleep contributes to disengagement during the day, and children's objectives relating to consistent bedtime routines are not being met.

Allegations are appropriately investigated, and managers act to promote children's safety while supporting staff through the process. The manager's communication regarding safeguarding matters is praised by other agencies. However, it has been noted that some staff members do not always share information and concerns promptly.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is new in the post, having been appointed since the last inspection. She has a clear and ambitious vision of what she wants to achieve, including developing staff to provide therapeutic and nurturing care. She has inherited an established staff team and is working on promoting this new culture. The provision of training in a therapeutic model of care reflects this new approach and promotes a consistent, nurturing response from staff. Staff say they have the appropriate training to help them understand and support the children.

There have been occasions when the practice of other professionals has adversely affected children. The manager has been proactive in challenging these practices and advocating on behalf of the children.

The manager is aspirational for the children. She speaks warmly about them, and her commitment is tangible. She is implementing plans to support children to move on, arranging opportunities for summer holidays abroad, and developing communal areas in the home, including the garden and games room. Children are involved in the development of these plans.

The manager is devising new ways of working to make gathering feedback from stakeholders easier and more reliable. She is also formalising ways of recording her reviews of the changing peer dynamics in the home. This is contributing to improvements in the overall quality of care.

Feedback from professionals and staff about the manager is positive, and she is held in high regard. Her communication is consistently highlighted as a key strength.

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 protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child; and take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(vi)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that: information held in children's plans is consistently recorded and followed by staff; staff have access to all relevant information to enable them to fully assess risk and respond appropriately; staff share information appropriately and in a timely manner; children's access to online services is managed effectively so that it does not affect their safety or wellbeing.	1 July 2026
Restraint in relation to a child is only permitted for the purpose of preventing— injury to any person (including the child); serious damage to the property of any person (including the child); or	1 July 2026

a child who is accommodated in a secure children's home from absconding from the home;

restraint in relation to a child must be necessary and proportionate. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2))

In particular, the registered person must ensure that:

staff make every effort to use restraint only when it is necessary and proportionate, and only after all other strategies have been exhausted;

children's plans clearly outline when restraint should be used and when police assistance is appropriate;

involvement of the police is used only when necessary.

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that the home is redecorated where required and that a planned programme of refurbishment is implemented to improve the quality of 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: Earl Mill, Dowry Street, Oldham OL8 2PF

Responsible individual: Claire Fitten

Registered manager: Amaara Faisal

Inspector

Rachel Ruth, Social Care Inspector

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