

2561501

Registered provider: Smartcare Services

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This privately owned home was registered with Ofsted in April 2020. It provides care for up to four children who experience social and emotional difficulties.

Two children were living in the home at the time of the inspection. The inspector spoke with one child during the inspection.

The manager's post has been vacant since July 2024. A new manager was appointed in January 2025.

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 May 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	requires improvement to be good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 18 June 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
18/06/2024	Full	Good
11/07/2023	Full	Good
20/04/2022	Full	Good
18/05/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children thrive in a warm and inviting environment, where they feel secure and valued while forming strong and trusting relationships with caring staff.

One child, who has been living in the home for some time, has made considerable progress. This progress has been helped by them having consistent and nurturing care that has been provided by the dedicated staff team.

Staff actively promote children's learning. The two children currently living in the home receive educational support. One child has a visiting tutor. Leaders have strongly advocated for this child to be offered a school placement as soon as possible, recognising the importance of a structured school environment over home-based learning. Additionally, staff encourage children to explore alternative educational pathways, such as apprenticeships that help them to broaden their opportunities.

Staff understand children's individual needs and encourage them to take part in key-work sessions. These sessions are not only opportunities for children to share their wishes and feelings, but also serve as a means for staff to support children to explore their vulnerabilities and to understand why staff can sometimes be concerned for their safety.

Children are encouraged to attend children's meetings. These meetings enable children to participate in planning the weekly menu, creating the shopping list, and identifying activities they would like to take part in. Staff also use this time to gather children's views on the home decor and to practise their rights, including checking that they know how to raise concerns or complaints.

Children enjoy a variety of activities linked to their interests. For example, children attend a local youth club, attend a music studio, and have opportunities to have trips to the seaside.

Staff support children to stay in touch with family and friends. This has included staff arranging a birthday barbecue for one child, which the whole staff team attended, and the child was able to invite their friends and family.

Since the last inspection, some children have moved into the home but have only stayed for a short period. Some of these children's endings have been sudden and with little notice. When these moves occur, staff support the children during their moves.

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

Staff understand children's needs well. Risk assessments and care plans detail children's risks, their needs and triggers. De-escalation strategies are tailored to each child,

matching the communication styles from the placing authorities' care plans. This approach has resulted in one child's risks significantly reducing.

Leaders and managers ensure that when significant risks, such as criminal and sexual exploitation or allegations of sexual harm, are identified that comprehensive safety plans are swiftly implemented. While care plans are robust, some suitability assessments for new children moving into the home are not always thorough. These assessments do not consistently take into account all the children's needs or adequately evaluate whether staff possess the necessary skills and training to meet the children's diverse needs.

Staff follow established procedures when a child goes missing from the home, adhering to agreed safety protocols. They maintain contact with the child and ensure that all relevant professionals and agencies, including the police, are kept fully informed. Leaders take decisive action to escalate concerns when other professionals fail to recognise a child's vulnerabilities.

Leaders and managers respond appropriately to allegations against staff, ensuring swift reporting to safeguarding agencies and working closely with placing authorities to address concerns effectively.

Bedroom searches are conducted responsibly, only in response to identified risks or concerns. Children are informed in advance when a search is necessary. If children are not present during the search, they are promptly notified afterwards.

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

Since the last full inspection, there have been changes in leadership and management, and the home has been without a registered manager since July 2024. After an active recruitment process, a new manager was appointed in January 2025. They have started the process to apply to Ofsted to be registered. However, at the time of this inspection, Ofsted had not received a completed application that could be processed.

At the last inspection, a high proportion of staff were agency workers. Since then, many have moved into permanent roles, leading to a significant reduction in the use of agency staff. However, on reviewing recruitment practices, leaders were unable to provide dates when Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) update service checks were carried out for the manager and some agency staff.

Despite leaders acknowledging delays in the submission of monthly reports from the independent visitor to Ofsted, these issues have continued. As a result, leaders have failed to ensure the timely and regular review of the quality of care. This has limited regulatory oversight.

Staff morale is good, and staff feel supported in their roles. Leaders ensure that staff have the training they need to best support the children they care for. Team meetings are regular and well attended. Children are discussed at these meetings so that any risks to children are highlighted, and staff can be alerted to these.

The manager and staff benefit from regular reflective supervision and yearly appraisals.

Leaders actively oversee the home, holding daily manager's meetings with the current manager to assess children's care and progress and identify areas for improvement.

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
A person may only manage a children's home if— the person is of integrity and good character; having regard to the size of the home, its statement of purpose, and the number and needs (including any needs arising from any disability) of the children— the person has the appropriate experience, qualification and skills to manage the home effectively and lead the care of children; and the person is physically and mentally fit to manage the home; and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the person in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. For the purposes of paragraph (1)(b)(i), a person has the appropriate experience and qualification if the person has— within the last 5 years, worked for at least 2 years in a position relevant to the residential care of children; worked for at least one year in a role requiring the supervision and management of staff working in a care role; and by the relevant date, attained— the Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management for Residential Childcare (England) ("the Level 5 Diploma"); or a qualification which the registered provider considers to be equivalent to the Level 5 Diploma. (Regulation 28 (1)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(c) (2)(a)(b)(c)(i)(ii))	1 July 2025

In particular, the manager must submit a complete application to Ofsted so that their fitness to manage the home can be assessed.	
The registered person must ensure that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month. The independent person must provide a copy of the independent person's report to— HMCI. (Regulation 44 (1) (7)(a)) In particular, the manager must ensure that these reports are sent to Ofsted each month.	1 July 2025
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The registered person may only— employ an individual to work at the children's home; or if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). The requirements are that— 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)(b) (3)(d)) In particular, the manager must ensure that, when recruiting staff, a DBS is completed by the provider or a record of the check on the update service is maintained. This must also include checks on agency staff.	1 July 2025

Recommendation

- The registered person should only accept placements for children where they are satisfied that the home can respond effectively to the child's assessed needs as recorded in the child's relevant plans, and where they have fully considered the impact that the placement will have on the existing group of children. Considering the skills and training of staff. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulation, including the quality standard', page 56, paragraph 11.4)

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: 2561501

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Smartcare Services

Registered provider address: 10 Watermark Way, Foxholes Business Park, Hertford, Hertfordshire SG13 7TZ

Responsible individual: Neville Henry

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Salean Bryant, Social Care Inspector

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