

2590824

Registered provider: Action for Children

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

Action for Children operates this home for up to six children. The statement of purpose states that the home provides care for children who have a diagnosis of learning disability but may have additional needs such as physical, behavioural or sensory impairments. The home provides short breaks.

The home and its manager were registered with Ofsted in August 2020. The registered manager has recently resigned. The home's new manager has submitted an application to register with Ofsted.

Currently, there are 15 children who receive short breaks at this home. There was one child staying overnight at the time of this inspection.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

This home has not been previously inspected.

Inspection dates: 7 to 8 July 2021

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: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit from care that is personalised to their individual needs and focused on helping them develop independent living skills. For example, children are learning to prepare snacks, put their plates away and put their clothes in the laundry.

Children are making good progress. Use of social stories and picture cards has a positive impact on children's learning and progress. Their emotional self-regulation and communication have improved since they started to receive short breaks at the home.

The home has a good, outcome-focused, easy-to-use scaling tool to monitor and record children's progress. However, this is not used consistently for all children. Similarly, the quality of case recording is varied. Not all children's case files are designed visually to help them understand and contribute to their care plan. The manager is working with staff to improve children's case files to ensure that they include good-quality visual recording.

Staff communicate closely with social care professionals, schools and families to ensure that they provide consistent care to children. However, important documents such as the local authority child in need plans and education, health and care plans are not received in a timely manner. This limits the ability of leaders and managers to plan for children effectively.

Children receive care from a diverse and dedicated staff team. Staff know children well and meet their needs. The staff express joy in their work and are making a positive difference to children's lives.

Overall, professionals and family members provided very positive feedback about the quality of care provided to children. One social worker stated, 'Staff are well attuned to children's needs. The structured routines and boundaries are helping children progress.' As an area for improvement, one mother commented that she would like her child to be involved in more activities with other children, to enable her child to have opportunities to develop socially. This information was shared with the manager, who agreed to act to address this.

Children live in a clean, comfortable, bright and spacious home. The rooms are decorated to reflect children's interests, such as a rainbow room, dinosaur room and natural room. However, some internal doors have a fob system and give the home an institutionalised look. The manager acknowledges this, and plans are in place to change the design of the home in a few months.

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

Children live in a safe home environment. The staffing ratio ensures that children receive the necessary supervision and support to meet their needs.

Staff understand how to identify safeguarding concerns. However, not all staff demonstrate an understanding of the procedures for sharing information with other safeguarding professionals. Consequently, all staff need to undertake refresher training regarding the external reporting of safeguarding concerns to ensure that they respond appropriately to safeguarding concerns.

Ofsted were not notified of safeguarding concerns about one child, as required by regulation. However, this shortfall did not place the child at risk of harm and the manager appropriately made a referral to the local authority.

There are clear, consistent and appropriate boundaries in place that help staff to support children effectively. This helps children to self-regulate and present with positive behaviour. Incidents are managed well and there have not been any incidents requiring the use of restraint.

There is a strong matching and impact risk assessment process in place. This has protected children from potentially harming one another. For example, one child who presents with sexualised behaviour is cared for alone, to help to safeguard other children from harm.

Safe recruitment and employment practices prevent unsuitable persons from working with children at the home. There is a permanent and stable staff team, and this ensures consistency and continuity of care for children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders, managers and staff are ambitious to make a positive difference to children's lives. The manager is present and readily available to support children and staff.

A psychologist praised the manager for his insightful reflections on their input and observations. The psychologist reported that this ensures a consistent approach in the development and implementation of the positive behaviour support plan and co-ordination of the care for children.

Managers and staff know the home's strengths and areas for improvement. They identified and acknowledged that visual case recording, communication tools with children, recruitment and further development of staff, and reflective supervision are areas in need of improvement. Managers have a clear action plan to address these shortfalls.

The COVID-19 pandemic initially had a negative impact on the speed of the recruitment of new staff. Two permanent staff members have now been recruited and will join the team shortly. This will strengthen child-focused work.

Staff informed the inspector that they feel well supported and valued. They say that leaders and managers are available and approachable. Staff receive a range of support, which includes induction, training, regular supervision, annual appraisal and educational team meetings. A staff member commented, 'For me this is like my second home.'

There is a good-quality assurance system focusing on obtaining feedback from children, family members and professionals. However, the independent visitor's monthly reports do not always provide required scrutiny and challenge to the manager. For example, the independent visitor did not challenge the manager about not notifying Ofsted of safeguarding concerns. This was a missed opportunity for the regulator to be informed of serious safeguarding concerns, in line with regulation.

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 that— children can access all appropriate areas of the children's home's premises; and any limitation placed on a child's privacy or access to any area of the home's premises— is intended to safeguard each child accommodated in the home; is necessary and proportionate; is kept under review and, if necessary, revised; and allows children as much freedom as is possible when balanced against the need to protect them and keep them safe. (Regulation 21 (b)(c)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)) In particular, the registered person should ensure that the home is redesigned to remove the internal fobbed doors.	30 September 2021
The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which— are kept up to date. (Regulation 36 (1)(b))	30 September 2021
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation; an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious;	30 September 2021

there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there;

a child protection enquiry involving a child —

is instigated; or

concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or

there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious.

(Regulation 40 (4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(i)(ii)(e))

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that any placing authority is challenged to provide a complete and current relevant plan. In particular, the home should ensure that case files contain up-to-date child in need plans and education, health and care plans from the placing authority. This will inform care planning for the children concerned. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the short-break service offers children the opportunity to develop friendships, by carefully matching groups and, where possible, by arranging for children to frequently stay with the same group of children. In particular, to ensure that staff extend and increase the opportunities available to children to share, socialise with others and choose activities alongside their peers. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 40, paragraph 8.20 and 8.21)
- The registered person should ensure that staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs and should understand the key role they play in the training and development of staff in the home. In particular, to ensure that staff receive refresher safeguarding training and complete their level 3 and level 5 qualifications, and the manager receives reflective supervision training. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.11)
- The registered person should actively seek independent scrutiny of the home and make best use of information from independent and internal monitoring to ensure continuous improvement. Specifically, the registered manager should ensure that Regulation 44 reports provide independent scrutiny and challenge. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 55, paragraph 10.24)

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: 2590824

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Action for Children

Registered provider address: Action for Children, 3 The Boulevard, Ascot Road, Watford WD18 8AG

Responsible individual: Lee Furniss

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Gulcin Ardic, Social Care Inspector

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