

2593915

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 privately run children's home is registered to care for three children who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. One child was being cared for at the home during this inspection.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since the home opened in September 2020.

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.

Inspection dates: 29 and 30 September 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

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 are cared for by a committed and skilled staff team and, as a result, children's day-to-day experiences of living in the home are positive. The one child living at the home at the time of the inspection has no previous experience of residential care. The child is being supported to settle in to his new environment with the care and support of the staff team. Staff have quickly adapted their approach to meet the needs of a much younger child than they have cared for previously.

Children's progress while living in the home is more of a mixed picture. Two children have left the home due to staff not being able to engage them effectively and meet their needs. The registered manager's decision to extend the notice period for one child to support the local authority in finding a suitable alternative placement resulted in the child disengaging from the home and an increase in negative behaviour directed towards staff. Consequently, this decision had a detrimental impact on the child and the staff team.

Children's health needs are promoted effectively. Staff have worked well with specialist health services for one child with type 1 diabetes. All staff were trained to meet his complex health needs prior to his admission to the home. As a result, staff were able to support him to manage his health needs and reduce the need for hospitalisation.

Children's education is promoted and there are good relationships with schools. The staff are working with the school of the one child currently living in the home to maintain his place in school. The manager and staff team recognise that his school is the one constant for him at a time of significant change. One child who left the home to move back to live with his family continued to be transported to school by staff for a short period of time after his return home. This was put in place to support the transition home and maintain his established routines.

Children are supported to maintain positive relationships with their families. Staff currently support family time between a child and their siblings. When family relationships are assessed as detrimental to the welfare of a child, staff advocate on their behalf with their social worker. This is to ensure that, where possible, children are still able to see people who are important to them with agreed safeguards in place.

Children's privacy is compromised by the closed-circuit television in use in the staff office. This issue has been raised with the provider previously. In addition, the downstairs bathroom is identified as being for staff only and children must go upstairs to use the toilet. As a result, children do not have reasonable access to all areas of the home as is expected in a family environment. The house requires some attention to ensure that children benefit from living in a homely environment. This

includes children having curtains in their bedrooms and consideration given to the use of large notice boards in communal areas.

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

Children's case records are well recorded, organised and comprehensive. Staff regularly review plans and update assessments. There is a clear link between these written plans and the care children experience. Children have regular planned one-to-one time with staff to progress areas of need identified in their placement plans. As a result, children are supported to build on their strengths, make progress and reduce any risks they may face.

When local authority staff do not provide their records to the home in a timely manner, this is not escalated swiftly with senior managers in the local authority. As a result, staff do not always have all the information they need from placing authorities to inform their care of children.

When children go missing from the home, staff are proactive in their response to finding them and bringing them safely home. Records of missing-from-home incidents are detailed and staff ensure that return-home interviews are provided by the local authority. This has led to clear action plans being drawn up, taking into consideration information obtained in these interviews to support staff to reduce risks to the children when they go missing.

Searches conducted of children's bedrooms are proportionate to the risks or potential risks identified by staff. The recording of the rationale for searches and the actions undertaken are generally good. Children are informed of rooms searches and encouraged to sign written records. This means they are fully informed about staff actions and decision-making.

Restraint is used infrequently. When children are restrained by staff, written records of these incidents are detailed and provide a clear understanding of the circumstances surrounding the actions. The use of professional language and jargon to describe the type of restraint means that children are excluded from understanding and contributing to their records. Children and staff are offered time following these incidents to speak with the registered manager or another senior staff member to reflect on events. However, the responsible individual is not ensuring that when she has management oversight of incidents, she is completing a formal written evaluation of the event. As a result, there is the potential that learning from incidents is lost, and patterns and trends in practice are not identified.

The use of sanctions and rewards is not always appropriate. For example, one member of staff gave a child money towards an e-cigarette as a form of reward. This practice was only addressed by the registered manager when the issue was raised by the independent person when visiting the home. Furthermore, the responsible individual sanctioned a child by postponing an agreed activity day. No timescales were given to the child as to when the activity could be reinstated and no

expectations of behaviour were set out to earn the reward back. This resulted in the child making a written complaint to Ofsted. One child was sanctioned with the withholding of some pocket money each week. Records show that for one week all his pocket money was taken back towards repayment of the sanction. The registered manager informed the inspector that this was done at the child's request. There is no record of the child's agreement to this and, therefore, it is unclear if the child was supportive of this action.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager has been in post since the home opened and is suitably skilled and experienced. She is well organised and has good systems in place to monitor practice in the home and review the quality of care provided to children. The registered manager is supported by two team leaders who are child-centred practitioners and act as positive role models for the rest of the staff team.

In response to the admission to the home of a younger-aged child, the registered manager has spent time with the staff team discussing the care needs of the child and ensuring that staff are supported to build positive relationships and are able to communicate with him effectively. She has amended the statement of purpose of the home to lower the age range of children the home can care for to support the well-being and stability of the child now living in the home.

Staff receive regular reflective supervision, which supports their practice. Staff promoted to supervisory roles are provided with supervision training to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to undertake these roles effectively.

Team meetings are held monthly and are well attended. These meetings give staff the opportunity to review the progress and experiences of children. There is a clear focus on practice improvement. A single-issue meeting was held following the ending of the placement of one child. Staff were able to discuss the challenges they had experienced and acknowledge the impact of this on them as individuals. These opportunities for reflection support staff emotionally and practically to undertake their roles to a high standard.

Additional oversight of the home from the independent person provides the registered manager with good external challenge. However, the independent person's reports have not been provided to Ofsted in a timely manner. Following the registration of the home, there was a gap of several months before reports were provided. As a result, there was no opportunity for regulatory oversight of practice in the home.

The registered manager and responsible individual have acted quickly to address the practice of staff when this has fallen short of expectations. There has been appropriate information-sharing with placing authorities. This practice ensures that children are safeguarded in their home environment.

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 registered person must ensure that the independent person provides a copy of the independent person's report to— HMCI; upon request, the local authority for the area in which the home is located; the placing authorities of children; the registered provider and, if applicable, the registered manager; and the responsible individual (if one is nominated). (Regulation 44 (6)(a) (7)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e))	30 November 2021
In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff— if they consider a placing authority's or relevant person's performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 5 (c)) This specifically refers to ensuring that concerns are escalated with the local authority without delay if minutes of children's reviews and children's care plans are not provided in a timely manner.	31 October 2021
The registered person must ensure that— the privacy of children is appropriately protected; children can access all appropriate areas of the children's home's premises; and	31 October 2021

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 (a)(b)(c)(i)(ii)(iv))

This specifically refers to the removal of all closed-circuit television equipment inside the home and children being given access to the downstairs bathroom.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that when activities are withdrawn or postponed as a sanction, children are given a clear explanation of what they need to achieve to have the activity reinstated, with timescales. If children are paying a financial sanction and choose to pay above the agreed amount each week this should be clearly recorded and signed by the child. (Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.13)
- The registered person should ensure that staff are familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective, and clear recording. Recording of incidents of restraint should be written in a child-centred manner which avoids jargon. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations, including the quality standards 'page 62, paragraph 14.4)
- The registered person must ensure that records of restraint are evaluated in order to review the use of control, discipline and restraint to identify effective practice and respond promptly where any issues or trends of concern emerge. The review should provide the opportunity for amending practice to ensure that it meets the needs of each child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations, including the quality standards 'page 49, paragraph 9.59)
- The registered person should ensure that children have a home environment which resembles that of a family home. Large noticeboards should be removed from the dining room, children should have curtains in their bedrooms, and improvements should be made to the back garden to make it a pleasant place for

children to use. ('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: 2593915

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Stepping Stones Children's Homes Limited

Registered provider address: 34 Church Street, Hyde, Stockport SK14 1JJ

Responsible individual: Nicola Brown

Registered manager: Victoria Gregory

Inspector

Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector

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