

2629230

Registered provider: Stepping Stones Care (Midlands) Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

A private company own this home. It provides care for up to two children aged eight to 18 years with social and/or emotional needs.

A manager was appointed on the 9 December 2021 and is in the process of applying to register with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 11 to 12 January 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be 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	requires improvement to be good
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The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: not previously inspected

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: requires improvement to be good

Since the home was registered in June 2021, two children have continued to live at the home. The care provided to children is of mixed quality. One child is settled. However, staff are struggling to meet the needs of the other child. This is because managers did not understand the extent of the child's needs until they moved into the home.

Children's care plans, behaviour management plans and risk assessments do not accurately reflect children's needs and their progress. For example, children's care plans do not provide guidance to staff on how to support children with their emotional health, behavioural needs or how to keep them safe. The disorganised approach to record-keeping of care planning arrangements means that staff do not receive the up-to-date guidance they require to understand children's individual needs.

The support sessions that staff carry out with children are of varying quality. Language used by staff in the children's records shows that children are not always listened to and valued. For example, staff informed one child, during her first week at the home, that her placement may come to an end because she was going missing from care. Staff failed to take steps to understand why the child was choosing to go missing.

The manager does not support children to read and understand records that are written about them by staff. One child told the inspector that she was rushed by the manager to sign several one-to-one support discussions and was not given the opportunity to read them. This does not support children to feel empowered that they are involved in all aspects of their care.

Partnership working with external agencies is not effective. The manager does not work in collaboration and share information with external agencies. For example, police and a social worker have been requesting that staff document the number plate details of cars linked to episodes of one child going missing from the home. The manager's delayed response to this resulted in one child going missing from care for 12 days. This does not support children's welfare and well-being.

In the main, professionals speak warmly of the staff. One social worker said that he is happy with the communication he receives from staff and is pleased with the progress his child is making. However, another social worker advised that communication with staff had not enabled her to understand how staff were supporting the child and how they were keeping her safe.

Children enjoy a range of activities with staff. Children are supported to develop skills through in-house activities; for example, children enjoy cooking. One child has made progress in independence skills and is supported to look after his pets.

Staff promote the cultural needs of children well. Staff support children who have specific dietary requirements and purchase specific foods because of their faith. As a result, children's understanding of their identity has improved.

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

In the main, managers and staff take appropriate action to keep the children safe when incidents occur. They understand potential risks to children and use their professional judgement appropriately to respond to incidents when children go missing or use illegal substances. However, learning from these incidents is not always captured in the risk assessments. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that staff provide children with a consistent approach to risk management.

Staff do not always take effective action to protect children. On one occasion, staff did not collect a child who wanted to return home. This resulted in the child being at risk of harm for an extended period. This was not followed up by the manager when they were told by the social worker. In addition, the manager does not review independent return to home interviews after an episode of children being missing from home. This reduces the usefulness of these return interviews.

The manager does not ensure that all staff are subject to comprehensive safer recruitment checks and does not consider conflicts of interest that arise through these checks. This means that staff who have been referred for employment by the manager have also been interviewed and supervised by the manager. In addition, employment references are not verified. As a result, there is the potential for unsuitable staff to work in the home.

The location risk assessment does not take account of anti-social behaviour in the local community, including known areas where children can get access to illegal substances. This has resulted in one child, who is known by staff to collect illegal substances, being dropped off and meeting drug dealers close to the home.

The responsible individual has taken appropriate action to investigate an allegation made by a child. The responsible individual completed an internal investigation and shared his findings with all professionals. This led to staff's poor practice being challenged and addressed.

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

The home is currently without a registered manager. The new manager, who was appointed on 9 December 2021, did not receive a handover from the previous

registered manager. This is because the registered manager resigned from his post sooner than was stated on his voluntary cancellation to Ofsted.

The new manager recognises that improvements are needed to ensure that children are safe and well cared for. The manager is receptive to feedback and keen to improve.

Although the change of manager is relatively recent, staff spoke positively of the support received from the new manager. However, there has been a high turnover of staff and there are several vacancies. The manager uses staff from other homes within the organisation and bank workers for cover. This has contributed to the inconsistent care that children receive.

Some staff do not receive supervision regularly. Supervision is not provided in accordance with the home's internal supervision policy, and records do not reflect the discussions that took place. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that there is an effective review of staff practice.

The independent person's monthly audits do not provide enough scrutiny. In part, this is because the independent person does not routinely check that staff have taken effective action following missing-from-care incidents. However, a new independent visitor has been recruited. This is a recent appointment, and the impact of this change is not yet known.

Senior managers are recognising of the shortfalls identified during this inspection and have taken steps to implement an action plan, with some improvement steps having already started.

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
In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff— seek to develop and maintain effective professional relationships with such persons, bodies or organisations as the registered person considers appropriate having regard to the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the children's home is to provide care and accommodation. (Regulation 5 (d)) This specifically relates to the registered manager working effectively to ensure that partnership working promotes the welfare and safeguarding of children in their care.	28 February 2022
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. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)) This specifically relates to the registered manager ensuring that children's risk assessments and behaviour management plans are kept up to date. In addition, staff have an understanding of these plans.	28 February 2022
The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that—	28 February 2022

helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home’s statement of purpose; ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child; understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home. use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(d)(f)(h)) This specifically relates to the registered manager ensuring that there are sufficient staff at the home to provide children with consistent care and get to know the children’s strengths and needs well. In addition, that managers review significant incidents and consider any learning from these.	
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children’s home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that each child’s relevant plans are followed; that staff help each child to access and contribute to the records kept by the registered person in relation to the child (Regulation 14 (1)(a) (2)(c)(f)) This specifically relates to the registered manager ensuring that the children’s care plans are kept up to date and the	28 February 2022

impact risk assessments reflect all risks relating to the children and factors that mitigate such risks.	
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Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that they maintain safer recruitment practice. This specifically relates to employment references being verified and to the manager having safeguards in place in case a conflict of interest arises during the recruitment process. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff, including the manager, receive supervision in accordance with the organisation's supervision policy. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the recording relating to the care of children is clear and is always recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)
- The registered person should ensure that the home's location risk assessment considers the impact of local geographical risk to the home and areas that children access. This specifically relates to details of known hotspots where illegal substances are being purchased. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 64, paragraph 15.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the home receives visits from an independent person who makes a rigorous and impartial assessment of the home's arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 65, paragraph 15.5)

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: 2629230

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Stepping Stones Care (Midlands) Limited

Registered provider address: Apex House, Calthorpe Road, Birmingham B15 1TR

Responsible individual: Peter Cirulis

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Sam Dulay-Kainth, Social Care Inspector

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