

# 2638617

Registered provider: Next Step Independence Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this children's home

A private provider owns this home. It provides care for up to 2 children who may have social and emotional needs.

At the time of inspection, 2 children were living in the home. They were both spoken to as part of the inspection.

The registered manager's post is vacant. The Responsible Individual supported the inspection.

### Inspection dates: 27 and 28 May 2026

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

**requires improvement to be good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

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:** 2 March 2026

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** requires improvement to be good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Recent inspection history

| Inspection date | Inspection type | Inspection judgement            |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| 02/03/2026      | Full            | Requires improvement to be good |
| 05/02/2025      | Full            | Good                            |
| 21/11/2023      | Full            | Good                            |
| 23/08/2022      | Full            | Requires improvement to be good |

## Summary of findings

Although staff and leaders provide a warm, welcoming environment and children generally feel settled, supported, and able to build positive relationships, inconsistencies in practice mean that standards are not always maintained. This includes shortfalls in cleanliness of the home, boundaries around online safety, and educational support. Safeguarding practice is not yet sufficiently robust, particularly in relation to online safety and risk management. Leadership of the home is developing under a new manager. However, improvements are at an early stage and are not yet consistently embedded.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good**

The standard of cleanliness in children's bedrooms and bathrooms is not consistently maintained. Staff do not always maintain oversight to ensure children are living in clean and well-presented environments. Despite recent deep cleans, some areas were found to be unclean, including one bathroom that was not functional. Maintenance issues are not always addressed promptly, including damaged wallpaper in a bedroom and delays in redecorating shared areas. This is in contrast to the communal areas of the home which are generally warm and welcoming. Managers recognise these shortfalls and are taking steps to address them.

Staff are starting to introduce clearer boundaries and expectations, helping children to build skills for adulthood. However, this approach is not yet applied consistently in line with each child's individual needs, leading to variability in practice. Actions have been identified and are beginning to be implemented to address these gaps.

Children indicate that they feel settled and are developing relationships with staff and the new manager. They feel able to approach staff and managers for support when needed.

Leaders and staff recognise the importance of children's education and work with partner agencies to support their learning. However, staff do not always carry out educational activities consistently with the children. Despite this, children have been supported to sit examinations and have made applications to college.

Families speak positively about the setting. They describe a warm, family-like environment and report that their children are making progress. Families feel welcomed, involved in their children's lives and receive communication from staff to keep them informed about their children. This contributes to maintaining positive relationships between children and their families.

Children's health needs are appropriately met. They are registered with relevant health services and attend routine appointments, including GP, dental and optician checks.

Additional health needs are identified and responded to, with staff supporting children to access services such as sexual health provision where required. This ensures that children receive suitable advice and support to promote their health and wellbeing and to make informed choices.

Children's milestones and achievements are recognised and celebrated. Birthdays and special events are marked in meaningful ways, with children given choice and encouraged to plan how they wish to celebrate. Examples include meals out and barbecues to celebrate achievements such as completing examinations. Family members and friends are welcomed to take part in celebrations, helping children to build positive memories. Staff also capture children's achievements creatively, providing children with a record of their experiences while living in the home.

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

Incidents within the home are generally low level and managed at the time. However, reflection following incidents does not always take place and identified learning is not always embedded, limiting opportunities to identify patterns or respond to emerging risks. Staff do not consistently demonstrate professional curiosity when considering factors, such as the influence of children's past experiences, emotional wellbeing, relationships with others, and what may be influencing or contributing to their behaviour.

Leaders and managers are beginning to take steps to achieve a more balanced approach to risk, enabling children to take part in age-appropriate activities while giving greater consideration to both their safety and independence. However, this approach is not yet embedded in practice. Although agreed risk management strategies are in place, oversight of online safety is limited. The lack of parental controls on devices, together with children not accessing the home's Wi-Fi, reduces staff's ability to effectively monitor online activity. In addition, direct work with children on online safety is not always undertaken.

Staff talk with children about staying safe, relationships, and boundaries. Children are generally open in these discussions. However, safeguarding practice is not consistently robust. Checks relating to individuals known to children online are sometimes insufficient, and arrangements for children to meet others are not always underpinned by appropriate risk assessment. On one occasion, responsibility for managing these risks has been inappropriately placed on a child.

There have been no incidents of physical restraint, and no children have been reported missing from the home since the last inspection. Missing from home procedures are clear and accessible to staff, supporting their understanding of the actions required if such an incident were to occur.

Safer recruitment practices are followed within the home. Required pre-employment checks are completed to support the appointment of suitable staff. Recruitment records

show that appropriate vetting processes, including identity verification and references, are undertaken in line with safer recruitment guidance.

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

The manager is new in post and continues to develop their confidence and oversight. While initial changes have been introduced, these are not yet embedded, and expectations are not consistently applied across the team. Important areas for development, including consistency of practice and raising standards, remain at an early stage.

The responsible individual has a clear understanding of the home's strengths and areas for development. Their support to the manager is helping to identify priorities. However, further work is needed to ensure that improvements are implemented and without delay. Systems are not yet organised effectively, and key information is not always easy for staff to access. This makes it more difficult for staff to quickly find and use important information in their day-to-day practice.

Staff speak positively about leaders and managers. They describe having warm relationships with children and a settled, supportive environment. Staff report feeling better supported under the current leadership, with improved communication and a reduced focus on paperwork, allowing more time to spend with children. There is recognition that the manager and responsible individual have introduced a more open and inclusive approach. However, some staff feel that stronger direction and confidence in leadership are still needed to fully embed expectations across the team.

Supervision sessions for staff are regular and reflective, providing staff with opportunities to consider their practice. However, children are not routinely discussed within supervision sessions. The responsible individual has recognised this and has begun to address it to strengthen oversight of children's experiences and progress.

Team meetings are held regularly and include the whole staff team. These provide opportunities to share views, review practice, and consider areas for improvement, supporting the development of a more consistent approach to children's care.

The staff team is stable and consistent, with strong retention, which supports continuity of care and the development of positive relationships with children. This provides a level of familiarity and stability, which contributes to children feeling settled within the setting.

## 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     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <p>The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that staff—</p> <p>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;</p> <p>help each child to understand how to keep safe;</p> <p>have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm;</p> <p>understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person;</p> <p>take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and</p> <p>are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(v)(vi)(vii))</p> <p>In particular, leaders and managers must ensure that staff are clear about their responsibilities when caring for children and the levels of supervision required to manage risks. That staff take appropriate action including completing appropriate checks when children are meeting unknown people online and make sure that children have appropriate levels of checks on their devices.</p> | 30 June 2026 |
| <p>The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires, and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that—</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 30 June 2026 |

helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and

promotes their welfare.

In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—

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 which includes providing consistency of care and boundaries.

(Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(f))

## Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children are provided with a home environment that meets high standards of cleanliness and hygiene. Repairs and routine housekeeping tasks should be completed promptly to prevent slippage in standards. This includes making sure that children's bathrooms are cleaned up to a good enough standard and that decorating of a child's bedroom is completed within a reasonable timescale. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 7, paragraph 3.7)
- The registered person should ensure that systems are organised effectively so that key information is easily accessible to staff. This will support staff to consistently access and use information in their day-to-day practice. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 14.2)
- The registered person should ensure that staff consistently support children who are not accessing full-time education to engage in meaningful educational activities within the home, so that their learning and development continue to be promote. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 28, paragraph 5.15)

## 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:** 2638617

**Provision sub-type:** Children's home

**Registered provider:** Next Step Independence Ltd

**Registered provider address:** Wellington House, East Reach Court, Queen Street,  
Taunton TA1 3UF

**Responsible individual:** Keiran Dunn

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

## Inspector

Karen Hallam, Social Care Inspector

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