

2727134

Registered provider: Smoothstone Care and Education Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is privately owned and is registered to care for up to three children who may have learning disabilities.

There was one child living at the home at the time of the inspection. The inspector spoke with the child.

The registered manager registered in May 2023.

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 December 2024

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: 11 March 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/03/2024	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

One child continues to live in the home. The child says that they are happy and feel safe. The child initiates play and seeks out physical affection from the staff. Staff are caring and show the child emotional warmth.

Children's care plans are clearly written. These provide staff with symbols that the child understands to help staff to better communicate with the child. However, although staff understand the care plans, not all staff consistently follow these. This has resulted in incidents which may have been avoided had the care plan been followed.

Staff are embracing the use of caring language. This is used in written documents and in day-to-day conversation, such as describing the staff as 'grown-ups'. This helps to contribute towards the caring ethos of the home.

The manager and staff create a safe, homely environment for the child to live in. The child has lots of space to explore and play. A door alarm is used to alert the staff to the child leaving their bedroom during the night.. However, the use of this alarm is not reviewed, and it remains unnecessarily activated throughout the day. This is an area for development.

Staff support the child to participate in activities that they enjoy, such as bowling. This has helped the child to improve their self-confidence. However, staff have not created opportunities for the child to form friendships outside of the organisation. This limits the child's ability to make progress with their social skills and creates a dependency on adults.

Staff advocate well for the child. For example, staff requested a review of the child's medication. The review resulted in a change to medication. This child has since experienced fewer seizures. Although this is positive, staff do not consistently follow the home's policy when administering medication. This is an area for development.

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

Staff understand the child's risks well. The staff are alert to potential triggers to the child's behaviours and seek to pre-empt this by reminding the child of boundaries and expectations in behaviour when playing games. This helps to reduce the likelihood of incidents. As a result of the reduction in incidents, the child can now use cutlery and plates made of materials other than plastic. This is progress.

When the child makes allegations against staff, the appropriate safeguarding procedures are followed. There is a policy and an individual plan in place which helps the manager to support the staff member concerned, while prioritising keeping the child safe.

Staff sometimes physically restrain the child to keep the child and others safe. The child is spoken with after they have been held, this is to help the child to understand the reason for this. This provides the child with the opportunity to share their views, which helps the child to feel valued and listened to. For example, after the child shared that one hold caused them discomfort due to their disability, the hold has been safely adapted.

Staff rarely use sanctions to manage the child's behaviour. When these are used, the manager has oversight and amends any sanctions she thinks are disproportionate. The child mainly experiences natural consequences.

There is an effective whistle-blowing process in place. When staff have concerns about another staff member's conduct, they bring this to the attention of the managers following the relevant procedure. This helps managers to support staff to improve their practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager was not available during the inspection; the deputy manager was available and assisted throughout the inspection process.

The home is led by an experienced manager. She is supported well by a dedicated deputy manager. Together, they support the staff to provide good care to the child living in the home. Staff are well supported by managers. One member of staff said that as a management team, 'they are the best managers I have ever had'.

There has at times been a shortage of staff, due to some staff leaving. However, the manager has responded well to this, pro-actively recruiting staff. When the use of agency staff has been necessary, the manager has ensured the same staff are used to help with continuity of care.

The managers are creative in identifying ways to reduce incidents. The manager amended the staff's shift patterns to reduce the number of transitions the child experienced. This has led to a reduction of behavioural incidents. In addition, staff now sing a 'goodbye song' to the child when they leave. This is to help the child better manage the changes in their care arrangements. The child is also given the option of how to say goodbye – whether this is a high five or a hug for example. This helps the child to feel they are contributing to the changes in their care arrangements.

Team meetings are well attended. They provide staff with the opportunity to reflect on practice and learn new skills. However, staff are not held to account when they have not acted on a recommendation from a previous meeting. For example, identifying clubs in the community which the child can participate in. This has caused unnecessary delay in broadening the child's social network.

Staff receive regular supervision sessions. These are reflective in nature and support staff well to understand the needs of the child. Records indicate that staff are helped to

understand how to strengthen and develop their practice. Discussions reflecting shortfalls in practice are well documented. This helps the manager to hold staff to account.

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 quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children; use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(iv)). The registered person must ensure that all staff consistently follow the home's policies and procedures. Everyone working at the home must understand their roles and responsibilities and what they are authorised to decide on their own initiative. There should also be clear lines of accountability.	15 February 2025
The registered person may only use devices for the monitoring or surveillance of children if— the monitoring or surveillance is no more intrusive than necessary, having regard to the child's need for privacy. (Regulation 24 (1)(d))	15 February 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children should be supported to understand how to build friendships with other children. They should be able to spend time with their friends in the local community, in their home area, and by having friends visit them at the home, in line with the child's plans, age and understanding. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.20)

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: 2727134

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Smoothstone Care and Education Limited

Registered provider address: Datum House, Electra Way, Crewe CW1 6ZF

Responsible individual: Raymond Scales

Registered manager: Rhianne Palmer

Inspector

Julia Hagan, social care inspector

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