

2742671

Registered provider: Connections 2 Independence Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is owned by a private provider and offers care for up to two children who have experienced social and emotional difficulties. At the time of this inspection, two children were living in the home and they both spoke with inspectors.

The home has been registered with Ofsted since July 2024. The registered manager has been in post since the home was registered. This is the home's first inspection since its registration.

Inspection dates: 15 and 16 January 2025

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	requires improvement to be good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

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: good

Before children move to the home, leaders and managers carefully consider their needs and their associated risks alongside those of any other child living in the home. Leaders and managers assess the skills and knowledge of the staff to determine whether children's needs can be met. Where potential vulnerabilities are identified, staff are provided with relevant training opportunities. If the home is suitable for the child, leaders and managers arrange for them to meet the staff and visit the home so that they can start to imagine what it might be like for them to live there.

One child has made good progress since moving to the home. Another child has continued their positive trajectory and is achieving positive outcomes. One child's school attendance has increased significantly, and the other child's school attendance has remained high. Staff work closely with the children's schools to ensure that they receive the support that they need in the classroom. Due to recent successes, it has been agreed that the number of school hours available to one child should be increased. However, the manager has not pursued this effectively, which has resulted in unnecessary delays.

Children are being provided with healthy routines and boundaries. One child is being supported to access healthcare services, which has helped them to develop healthy sleep patterns. Children who have previously found it very difficult to attend medical appointments are now receiving the support that they need to enable them to attend.

Children are supported to develop and maintain positive relationships with their family members. Children are also provided with the opportunity to participate in a range of fun activities in the community. Children spend time with their friends, who often visit the home for dinner, sleepovers and shared activities. The two children in the home also get along with each other well and often play on the home's trampoline together.

The home is mostly clean, tidy and well decorated. Children's bedrooms are personalised in line with their interests. Despite this, one child's bedroom lacks suitable furniture, and they are not helped to maintain their bedroom to a good enough standard of cleanliness. There are also some institutionalised features and restrictive practices throughout the home that detract from an otherwise homely feel. For example, white cable window restrictors are installed on children's bedroom windows without a clear rationale for their purpose or a known risk that is being managed.

Furthermore, fire evacuation procedures are compromised by the routine practice of staff locking emergency exits with a key. Staff are unsure why this practice is used and stated that they are following advice from managers, despite it contradicting their fire safety training. This practice was resolved by leaders and managers during the inspection.

Children say that the staff are nice and that they can talk to them when they are upset or worried about something. One child said that the home 'feels like home', although recognised that it is different to their family home. Family members can identify the progress that their child has made, and they say that they feel supported by staff to spend positive time with their children.

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

Children say that they feel safe in this home. When one child received inappropriate messages online, they immediately sought staff support and blocked the unknown user. Staff recognised the child's positive response to the messages and provided them with advice about how to prevent similar situations from occurring in the future. Age-appropriate parental controls are in place on internet-enabled devices. Staff share concerns about children's safety with the relevant professionals to ensure a robust multi-agency response.

When children report concerns about the actions of other professionals, staff listen to children and are accepting of their experience. Concerns are shared appropriately, and safety plans are agreed to help keep children safe. Children are informed of the actions that are being taken so that they feel listened to and protected by staff.

Children are provided with praise and rewards to celebrate their achievements. However, children also receive consequences for behaviours that staff consider to be negative. These consequences are not restorative in nature, nor are they assessed for their effectiveness. This has resulted in the use of repeated consequences, as children do not always understand or agree with their use.

Children have not been reported missing from home. However, on one occasion a child walked away from the home after becoming frustrated about a consequence that was issued to them. Staff followed the child and encouraged them to return home, which they did. The support that staff provided to the child prevented them from becoming exposed to increased risk of harm.

Restraint has only been used on one occasion since the home opened, as staff know the children well and can often de-escalate potential confrontations. When the restraint was used, it was necessary and proportionate to the risk of harm. However, although the child was supported to reflect on their actions and the use of the restraint, the conversation was facilitated by the two members of staff who were involved in its use. As a result, the child was not provided with a more impartial avenue to explore any concerns that they may have had.

Key-work sessions are used to provide children with helpful advice and guidance about the topics that are important in their lives. Children engage well in the discussions and appear comfortable talking to staff about their experiences and feelings. However, on some occasions, staff's responses to children and/or their advice is unhelpful and not in keeping with the home's chosen therapeutic approach. Key-work sessions do not always

clearly outline the advice and guidance that staff have provided. Leaders and managers do not always monitor or evaluate key-work sessions, so staff are not supported to develop their practice and ensure that the sessions are effective. Furthermore, follow-up actions and/or discussions are not routinely identified, which results in outcomes being left to drift.

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

Leaders and managers are receptive of feedback. The registered manager can identify the progress that children have made, and the strengths of the care that is provided by staff. The registered manager is also aware of some areas for development. However, although leaders and managers have some systems in place to aid their assessment of the quality of care, these systems are not always effective.

Children's plans are not always up to date, nor are they always shared with staff in a timely manner. The registered manager has failed to identify these vulnerabilities, although was able to resolve them during the inspection.

Furthermore, important actions that are agreed at care planning meetings are not always identified or responded to. As a result, not all of the children's needs are considered when care and support are being provided by staff and/or external services.

When incidents happen, children are not always supported to reflect on what happened and how they could respond in safer ways in the future. Furthermore, not all records clearly outline what happened. There is limited oversight and monitoring from leaders and managers to support staff to develop this area of their practice.

Staff supervision sessions are held regularly. However, there is a lack of routine and robust reflection about children's needs and the support that staff provide. In addition, staff are not always given the opportunity to reflect on how they are impacted by children's behaviour, and how this can affect their responses. This vulnerability is somewhat mediated by the provision of external clinical supervision for staff. However, the themes of these sessions are not shared with the manager, so they are unable to address any concerns that are raised.

Overall, staff training compliance is good. The training opportunities that are offered to staff help them to develop their skills and knowledge to help them to meet the individual needs of children. However, staff are not always able to apply their knowledge to their day-to-day practice. Leaders and managers are not yet routinely evaluating the quality of care and identifying learning for staff to promote their development and the care that they provide.

Feedback from staff is mixed. On the whole, staff are positive about working in the home. However, some concerns were raised about leaders and managers undermining the decisions that staff have made when caring for the children. This has resulted in some staff members saying that they do not feel supported. Staff do not fully

understand the home's therapeutic ethos. As a result, they are not always able to understand the rationale behind the care that they provide. Leaders and managers have not taken sufficient steps to address this vulnerability.

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 leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— 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 staff work as a team where appropriate; ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of 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; and 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)(b)(c)(f)(h)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that robust monitoring and oversight of the quality of care that is provided to children allows for continual and sustained improvements to be made. The registered person should evaluate the effectiveness of the care that is provided and identify learning for staff that supports them to develop their practices and meet children's needs effectively.	28 April 2025

Secondly, the registered person must ensure that staff have the skills and knowledge that they require to confidently meet children's needs and help them to keep safe. This includes ensuring that staff can apply the knowledge that they receive during training to their day-to-day practice. Thirdly, the registered person must use robust monitoring and oversight to ensure that children's records are of a good quality and reflect the care that is provided. These records should allow for further support needs to be identified and actioned.	
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— an understanding about acceptable behaviour. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— meet each child's behavioural and emotional needs, as set out in the child's relevant plans; help each child to develop socially aware behaviour; encourage each child to take responsibility for the child's behaviour, in accordance with the child's age and understanding; help each child to develop and practise skills to resolve conflicts positively and without harm to anyone; communicate to each child expectations about the child's behaviour and ensure that the child understands those expectations in accordance with the child's age and understanding; and understand how children's previous experiences and present emotions can be communicated through behaviour and have the competence and skills to interpret these and develop positive relationships with children. (Regulation 11 (1)(b) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(v)(ix)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that the consequences that are issued to children are restorative in	31 March 2025

nature. They should help children to understand how to express their thoughts and emotions safely, take responsibility for their actions and practice safe conflict resolution. Secondly, the registered person must ensure that staff understand how children's previous experiences can impact how they communicate their feelings. The registered manager should review the effectiveness of consequences to ensure that they are meaningful and that they help children to understand behavioural expectations in a manner that is consistent with the home's chosen therapeutic approach.	
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— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose; and 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)(a)(b)(i)(iv)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that staff have a clear understanding of children's individual needs. Staff should have access to children's most up-to-date plans so that their individual needs are understood. The registered person should ensure that the actions to meet children's needs are taken in a timely manner.	31 March 2025

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that the children's home offers a nurturing, supportive and homely environment that meets children's needs. In particular, the registered person should assess and review the use of window restrictors and other institutionalised features in the home to ensure that they are necessary. Furthermore, staff should support children to keep their bedrooms clean. ('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: 2742671

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Connections 2 Independence Limited

Registered provider address: 16 The Glenmore Centre, Jessop Court, Waterwells Business Park, Quedgeley, Gloucester GL2 2AP

Responsible individual: Keaton Pearce

Registered manager: Shellina Brown

Inspectors

Martin Brown, Social Care Inspector

Karen Hallam, Social Care Inspector

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