

2786407

Registered provider: Action for Children Services Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This is a short-breaks service run by a national charitable organisation. The home can care for up to six children at any one time. A total of 23 children currently access the service. The children's needs range from moderate to severe learning disabilities, with associated physical, health and sensory impairment and/or complex multiple needs.

There were six children staying in the home at different times during the inspection.

The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2024.

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 August 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	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 provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 23 September 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
23/09/2024	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Staff focus on establishing trusting and positive relationships with children and understanding their individual needs. For example, one child overcame initial challenges related to ethnic biases, influenced by their past trauma. The staff have worked sensitively with them, ensuring that the child is able to develop positive relationships with others.

When children first arrive at the home, they are able to choose their bedroom. Staff carefully match the groups of children staying at any one time and take children's friendships into account when planning their stays.

Children have a wide range of access to social, educational and recreational activities. The use of grid communication cards at the local shop is a notable example of fostering community engagement and helping children to feel safe and included in their local community.

Staff use various communication methods to obtain children's views before an activity is arranged, and to ensure that they understand what is going to happen. For example, before a child is taken out to the local park, a social story is used to explain to the child where they are going and the route that they are going to take. This careful consideration helps the child to remain calm and to feel safe to go out with staff and enjoy the activity.

Children are supported to develop independence by accessing the kitchen area to prepare food and drinks and by participating in daily routines, such as making their beds. This support builds self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment. Children's meals are planned to meet their nutritional needs and personal preferences.

Children with lifelong health conditions receive specialised support. Staff seek external training from nurses and occupational therapists to ensure that safe and appropriate practice is maintained.

Staff prioritise the well-being of individual children's needs, and this is confirmed by feedback from parents and professionals. Communication with parents is maintained through diaries, phone calls and emails, providing reassurance about their children's care.

Children's achievements are recognised and shared with parents to foster a sense of pride and accomplishment.

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

Children feel supported and protected from harm when they spend time at the home. One child said: 'Grown-ups give us a lot of attention.'

Staff consistently promote positive behaviour. When undertaking personal care, staff are proactive in listening and responding sensitively to both verbal and non-verbal children, ensuring that their needs are understood and met and that any distress is minimised. For example, one child can be calmed and reassured by singing their favourite song to them.

Managers use a standard risk assessment for children which looks at their medical, sensory and language needs. However, these assessments lack the necessary individualisation, particularly regarding the use of restrictive practice.

Some children are using specialised beds, and closed-circuit (CCTV) cameras and listening devices are being used to monitor children during the night. Managers have not reviewed their use in line with the child's rights and dignity and are not considering the individual impact of restrictive practice on each child. For some children, they are using restrictive practice with the intent of ensuring the child's safety. However, managers have not developed a personalised risk assessment and care plan in collaboration with external agencies.

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

Since the new manager has been appointed, significant efforts have been made to train the staff and to change the home's culture and dynamics. The manager has set aspirational goals and high expectations for staff to deliver high-quality care to children. Additional staff are being appointed to strengthen the management of the home and to provide support with regard to care planning and risk assessments. The requirement and recommendation from the previous inspection have been met.

Staff are working proactively with the children, encouraging increased communication and engagement. Newly appointed staff have benefited from comprehensive induction and training programmes designed to ensure high-quality care.

The manager demonstrates a clear understanding of the team's strengths and weaknesses and has initiated plans to address key areas of concern. While some improvements in practice have been noted, the use of restrictive measures, including safe beds, CCTV and listening devices, has not been rigorously reviewed or challenged. Appropriate policies are not in place regarding the review and updating of individual risk assessments so that reliance on restrictive practices can be minimised.

Children are not informed or aware that restrictive practices are in place as safeguarding measures. Staff and managers have not demonstrated sufficient curiosity or proactivity

in considering whether current practices align with children's health, social and emotional needs.

Children's care plans and risk assessments are not consistently reviewed or updated with accurate, timely information following each visit. This gap compromises staff's ability to remain fully informed and confident in meeting each child's individual needs, while maintaining children's safety.

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— 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)(f)(h))	20 September 2025
The registered person must ensure that— children can access all appropriate areas of the children's home's premises; and 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.	20 September 2025

(Regulation 21 (b)(c)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv))	
The registered person may only use devices for the monitoring or surveillance of children if— so far as reasonably practicable in the light of the child’s age and understanding, the child is informed in advance of the intention to do the monitoring or surveillance; and the monitoring or surveillance is no more intrusive than necessary, having regard to the child’s need for privacy. (Regulation 24 (1)(c)(d))	20 September 2025
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; help each child to understand how to keep safe; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child’s welfare; and that the home’s day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(vi)(b))	20 September 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that all incidents of control, discipline and restraint are subject to systems of regular scrutiny to ensure that their use is fair and the principles as set out in 9.35 are respected. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 46, paragraph 9.36)

- The registered person should ensure that all restrictions of liberty of movement are recorded as restraint. Some children, perhaps due to impairment or disability, may not offer any resistance, but such measures should still constitute a restraint. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 47, paragraph 9.42)
- The registered person should ensure that staff take reasonable precautions and make informed professional judgements based on the individual child's needs and developmental stage about when to allow a child to take a particular risk or follow a particular course of action. Staff should discuss the decision with the child's placing authority where appropriate. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 42, paragraph 9.7)

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: 2786407

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Action for Children Services Ltd

Registered provider address: 3 The Boulevard, Ascot Road, Watford WD18 8AG

Responsible individual: post vacant

Registered manager: Louise Smith

Inspector

Shaheda Dhandia, Social Care Inspector

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