

2787939

Registered provider: Steps 4 Life Care LTD

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is part of a private organisation and provides care for up to 6 children who may experience childhood adversity. The home is registered as a multi-building site comprising 3 properties.

The manager has been registered since April 2020. He holds a level 5 Diploma in 'Leadership and Management for Residential Childcare'.

At the time of the inspection, 5 children were living across the multi-building site. The inspector spoke with 4 of these children.

Inspection dates: 26 and 28 January 2026

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: 4 February 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
04/02/2025	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children form secure and trusting relationships with staff, who are caring, compassionate and committed to helping them reach their full potential. Staff take time to get to know each child well and develop a strong understanding of their individual needs. This enables them to provide tailored support that helps children make progress towards their key developmental milestones. Staff have a clear understanding of children's starting points and are effective in recognising and celebrating each child's individual achievements.

Children are supported and encouraged to take part in a wide range of hobbies and new experiences that promote their confidence and self-esteem. Staff help children to explore activities that reflect their interests while also introducing opportunities to develop new skills. For example, staff have successfully supported a child living in a solo section of the multi-build site to access a local youth club, which the child now attends regularly. This approach helps children to build resilience and form positive relationships with peers and trusted adults.

Staff consistently recognise and celebrate children's achievements, taking account of factors that may, at times, affect their ability to sustain or maintain progress. They demonstrate a sensitive and child-centred approach, ensuring that children feel safe and secure when reflecting on their experiences, including during periods of instability. Through supportive and purposeful discussions, staff help children to understand their experiences and work with them to identify appropriate strategies. This approach helps children to build resilience and reduces the risk of future harm.

Children know how to make a complaint and are encouraged to do so. Staff consistently support children to share their views, wishes and feelings, ensuring that their voices are heard and that appropriate action is taken to uphold their rights. For example, this approach directly helped one child to avoid a premature move from the home at a critical point in their life. Maintaining stability enabled the child to plan effectively for their future and secure several university offers to study law. Staff worked proactively with the child's local authority and clearly evidenced the potential impact that a move at that time would have had on the child's progress and wellbeing. As a result, the child achieved a long-held ambition to study law.

Educational progress is a significant strength of the home. Staff and leaders prioritise supporting children to achieve positive outcomes in their learning. Several children who had previously missed substantial periods of education now benefit from personalised learning plans tailored to their individual needs. Staff and leaders are confident in creating a positive and inclusive learning environment, which is reflected in the comprehensive educational plans in place for all children. These plans demonstrate a

clear commitment to ensuring that every child is supported to make progress and reach their full potential.

Plans for children moving into the home are carefully considered and tailored to meet each child's individual needs. Children are supported effectively to understand and manage upcoming changes, including the arrival of new children and the transition of peers who are moving on. When children leave the home, the positive relationships they have developed with staff are nurtured in a sensitive and appropriate way. This reflects the strength of relationships within the home and demonstrates that children feel safe, secure and valued by the staff who care for them.

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

Children report that they feel safe and can identify adults they trust and can turn to for support. Staff and leaders have a clear understanding of each child's individual vulnerabilities and take effective steps to manage these. Detailed risk management plans provide staff with the information they need to respond appropriately and consistently, ensuring that children's safety is consistently maintained.

Children are supported to take age-appropriate and balanced risks, helping them to develop confidence and independence. Staff enable children to spend time in the community and with friends and family unsupervised, when it is safe to do so. Staff undertake direct work with children to help them understand potential risks. When necessary, they work effectively with other agencies to respond to identified risks, ensuring that children are protected from harm. This approach enables children to make progress in developing their independent living skills and preparing for life beyond the home.

Staff demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of ensuring that children experience the least restrictive practice. They are confident in using de-escalation strategies, which reduces the need for physical intervention and helps children to manage their behaviour safely. Physical restraint is used only when necessary and as a last resort to ensure children's immediate safety. However, records of restraint do not consistently include the duration of holds, which limits leaders' ability to fully evaluate their effectiveness. Leaders are addressing this by providing additional training and guidance to staff on recording practice, which will support effective monitoring and the continued use of least restrictive approaches.

When children experience risk, staff consistently follow up with them to explore their feelings. Staff are skilled at recognising moments when children feel safe and secure enough to reflect on past experiences of harm. This ensures that children are regularly given meaningful opportunities to share concerns and receive support that is responsive to their individual needs. As a result, children develop greater emotional resilience.

Delays have been identified in the notifications sent to relevant professionals following serious incidents. These delays limit external oversight of children's welfare and can slow

responses that may reduce the risk of future harm. The management team has acknowledged this shortfall and has outlined plans to strengthen internal auditing systems to ensure more effective monitoring and timely notifications.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is child focused and is supported by a leadership team that shares his ambitious vision to provide nurturing care for children. They maintain high expectations for children and are committed to supporting them to achieve their full potential. The manager advocates for staff to have a thorough understanding of each child's individual starting point, enabling them to recognise and measure meaningful progress for every child.

The manager has developed a supportive environment in which staff are encouraged to learn and develop in their roles. Staff report that they receive regular, good-quality training that is bespoke to the individual needs of the children, enabling them to deliver consistently good care. However, staff supervision records do not consistently demonstrate how leaders support staff to reflect on their wellbeing or identify any additional support needs. In addition, the records lack clear detail about how agreed actions are monitored and reviewed in subsequent supervision sessions.

The staff team have built strong working relationships with key professionals and important people in the children's lives. Feedback received highlights the high quality of practice demonstrated by leaders and staff. One professional commented, 'It is such a warm environment, with lovely interactions. It feels really warm and playful and truly feels like a home.'

The manager maintains effective oversight of the home and regularly reviews its strengths and areas for development. Feedback from external support systems is used effectively to evaluate the impact of changes and inform ongoing improvements. This proactive approach supports positive outcomes for children and ensures that the staff team remains responsive to children's individual needs.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered person should have a system in place so that all serious events are notified, within 24 hours, to the appropriate people. The system should cover the action that should be followed if the event arises at the weekend or on a public holiday. Notification must include details of the action taken by the home's staff in response to the event. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 63, paragraph 14.13)
- The registered person should ensure that staff are familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. In particular, this refers to recordings being sufficiently detailed and of consistent quality. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)
- The registered person should ensure that staff supervision enables staff to reflect and act on how they are feeling, specifically how they may be affected by the behaviour of the children they care for. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 39, paragraph 8.15)

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: 2787939

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Steps 4 Life Care LTD

Registered provider address: 3RD Floor, International House, Walsall, West Midlands
WS4 2LA

Responsible individual: Sharon Tott

Registered manager: Nicholas Buttery

Inspector

Charlotte Tippet, Social Care Inspector

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