

SC000673

Registered provider: Action for Children Services Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is owned and managed by a charitable organisation and provides care for children with learning disabilities. The home offers a short-break service for up to five children and permanent care for up to five children. There were three children accessing the short-breaks service during the inspection, and three children reside permanently in the home.

The home has been without a registered manager since December 2024.

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 May 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: 29 October 2024

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
29/10/2024	Full	Requires improvement to be good
06/06/2023	Full	Good
31/08/2022	Full	Requires improvement to be good
28/03/2022	Interim	Sustained effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are making good progress. The staff understand children's social and education plans and support children to meet these targets. One child is being supported to make their favourite meal, while another child can now brush their teeth independently. Staff also support children with their dietary needs. This has resulted in a less intrusive level of care for one child.

Children are provided with a variety of visits and activities for them to experience. This includes things that they may not otherwise experience, such as trips on public transport and visits to the cinema and pantomime. Photos of these events are captured in albums so that children can look back on their memories of living in the home.

Professionals and family members say that they feel well informed about children's progress and experiences. Staff contact family members in advance of children's short-break stays to obtain updates about any changes to children's needs. This is to ensure that they know about any change in a child's circumstances.

Children's bedrooms are personalised for them in preparation for their short break. This includes staff ensuring that they have their own bedding and belongings to help to make their bedroom homely during their stay. Children who live in the home have input into how their bedroom is decorated. There is a plan in place to refurbish other areas of the home.

There is not always sufficient staffing in place to ensure that children are supported appropriately when coming to the home for their introductory visits. This means that the staff are not able to support all the children in the home during the visit.

Staff use various methods of communication with children to understand their wishes and to provide them with choices. However, staff do not always liaise with education professionals and children's family members about which method of communication the child prefers and best suits their needs. When a child's preferred method of communication is known, not all staff are trained in this. This means that children do not receive a consistent approach to communicating with them and may struggle to share their views about the care that they receive.

Staff do not help children to understand their own physical and emotional development. For example, staff do not have conversations with children about puberty and the impact this may have on their bodies, moods and emotions. Staff do not deliver these important messages in a way that is aligned to the children's level of understanding.

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

Staff do not consistently follow the organisation's processes intended to help them to keep children safer. This includes an occasion where the manager did not follow the home's safeguarding policy when a member of staff implemented the whistle-blowing process. This resulted in one staff member continuing to care for children, contrary to the home's safeguarding policy.

Children are rarely held. When a physical intervention is required, staff will usually guide a child to safety. Staff are provided with the opportunity to reflect on what could have been done differently to prevent a similar incident from recurring. This contributes to the learning culture that senior leaders are striving to embed. However, children are not always spoken to following a restraint. This prevents those children from sharing their views about how staff support them at times of distress.

Staff understand the risks associated with the children's vulnerabilities. Risk assessments are personalised and updated with any new or emerging risks specific to each child. Staff implement the strategies in place to manage these individual risks. This helps to reduce risks to children and support them to be safer.

Body maps are used to record any unexplained injuries that children sustain. Staff follow the required protocol to seek clarity from other adults involved in a child's care when an unexplained injury is identified. Staff share any concerns that they have with the necessary professionals. This helps to ensure that the child's care team is vigilant to any safeguarding concerns.

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

The home is managed by a newly recruited manager. The manager has limited knowledge of the needs of children with disabilities, which prevents him from being assured that staff are meeting the children's needs appropriately. Senior leaders have implemented a development plan to support the manager to improve his skills and knowledge of the children and the organisation's safeguarding processes.

Leaders and managers are a visible presence in the home. Their response to previous shortfalls has resulted in improvements in practice in some areas. Leaders have also made significant changes to the management structure, which has resulted in newly recruited managers. This allows the organisation to have better oversight of practice in the home. However, staff say they receive conflicting messages about practice due to the new management structure, and important information is not always shared with them. This contributes towards staff feeling confused about the care they are expected to provide, and to staff saying they do not always feel supported.

Supervision sessions are regular and reflective. However, staff are not always given a response to the questions that they raise about practice during these sessions. This further contributes to the staff feeling unsupported and uncertain about some of the home's procedures.

Managers continue to have difficulty in recruiting staff, leading to a high use of agency staff. Where possible, managers use the same agency staff to try and provide children with a consistent staff team. However, the dependency on agency staff has meant that children's planned activities have been cancelled due to staff not having the necessary skills to support children. Managers have increased staffing during the night. This has relieved some of the pressures that staff faced during night shifts. However, permanent staff also work beyond their contracted hours on occasion to ensure that there is safe and sufficient night-time staffing.

Leaders have implemented a revised system to monitor staff training. This supports the manager to ensure that all staff are up to date with the organisation's mandatory training requirements. When shortfalls in practice are identified, managers provide training that supports staff with their learning.

The quality of record-keeping is a strength of the staff team. The language contained in documents about children is child centred.

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 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— understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies; 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)(v)(vi)(vii)(b))	1 August 2025
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;	1 August 2025

ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for 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. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(c)(d)(f))	
The registered person must ensure that— within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a child in the home, a record is made which includes— the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and within 48 hours of the use of the measure, the registered person, or a person who is authorised by the registered person to do so (“the authorised person”)— has spoken to the user about the measure; and has signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35 (3)(a)(vii)(b)(i)(ii)(c)) This requirement is reissued.	1 August 2025

Recommendation

- The registered person should work in partnership with relevant people as appropriate to ensure that each child is provided with support to communicate their views, wishes and feelings and participate in their daily care. This may include the use of and support to use communication aids, equipment and/or any necessary language support. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 22, paragraph 4.6)

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: SC000673

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Action For Children Services Limited

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

Responsible individual: Ruth Baldwin

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Julia Hagan, Social Care Inspector

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