

SC000673

Registered provider: Action for Children

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.

The manager registered with Ofsted in May 2023 but is currently on planned leave. A new manager has been appointed to the home and is in the process of applying to register with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 29 and 30 October 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be 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	inadequate
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The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 6 June 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
06/06/2023	Full	Good
31/08/2022	Full	Requires improvement to be good
28/03/2022	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
20/09/2021	Full	Requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

The shortfalls in practice relate to the leadership and management of the home and how children are helped and protected. This has impacted on the children's overall experiences of living in and visiting the home.

Some children receive short-break care and some children live at the home on a long-term basis. Children's access to short breaks has been disrupted due to staffing issues. In addition, one child using the short-break service is waiting to move across to the long-term home. Therefore, the short-break service is not providing support to children and their families at its full capacity.

Staff provide a valuable service to children and their families. Staff develop positive working relationships with parents so that they can feel confident leaving their child for their stay. Parents said that staff communicate well and frequently, which helps them to feel assured that their child is being well cared for.

The property is furnished and equipped to meet the needs of children who stay in the home. Children who need safe spaces to sleep and play have access to what they need. The home is undergoing refurbishment to a communal area, and managers have plans for other areas of the home that need development.

Staff encourage children to engage in new activities in the home and in the community. Staff capture memories for children by taking photos and preparing memory books. This helps children and families to see what progress children are making and to see the new experiences that they are enjoying.

The core members of staff have developed strong relationships with the children. Staff speak with love and affection about the children who live at or visit the home. These positive relationships are nurtured. Furthermore, more-experienced staff support newer staff to build relationships with children.

Staff support children, including those who communicate nonverbally, to express their views and wishes. Staff develop new skills to aid their communication with children. This helps children to contribute to their care, and children are more involved in day-to-day decisions made in the home.

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

One child has restrictions in place in the home and when they go into the community to keep them safe. However, there is no legal order in place, and the managers and staff

are uncertain about the child's legal status or how to promote their best interests. Managers accept that this is an area for learning for them and staff.

Children's assessments and plans are detailed but not always kept up to date. Children's plans do not include all known current risks or directions for staff on how to help keep children safer.

Training is available for staff to gain skills that they need to care for children who live or stay at the home. However, due to staff shortages, not all staff receive training to meet children's needs, including those with complex health needs. This impacts on the continuity and quality of care for children.

Feedback from professionals, staff and parents is that children are safe when they live or stay at the home. Managers ensure that there are enough staff to work safely with each child. When this is not possible, alternative arrangements are made with the child's local authority to support children. Shortfalls in staffing have an impact on the children and families who usually enjoy the short-break service, but this has not compromised the safety of the children who live at or visit the home.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Interim management arrangements during the registered manager's absence have led to shortfalls in the leadership and management of the home. This is because leaders and managers have not assured themselves that there are managers with the skills and experience to make improvements to the home.

The managers have not challenged one child's placing authority about the need for an assessment about the child's capacity or legal status. Although the restrictions are to keep the child safe, the child's liberty continues to be restricted without a legal framework. Managers have failed to advocate for the child or to help them have access to an independent advocate.

The managers do not have effective systems to monitor, review and evaluate the quality of care that children receive. Body charts for children do not always have the oversight of a manager, and incidents involving children are not always reviewed. This means that managers cannot be assured of what has happened to a child or evaluate what support children may need or training staff require.

Managers do not follow their procedures to have important conversations with children and staff after an incident of physical restraint. Staff know how to support children, and most are trained to have the skills to support children in crisis. However, managers' lack of oversight and professional curiosity could leave staff and children without the support they need.

Managers do not routinely escalate their concerns to the child's placing authority when children's records are not up to date. This means that staff do not always have full information about children, such as consent to seek medical attention for a child when

needed. This does not provide staff with the necessary consent and could lead to a delay in children receiving the healthcare that they need.

Not all staff receive regular and reflective supervision. Managers do not ensure that staff receive regular supervision during their probation as set out in the home's policy. When supervision takes place, the quality of this is varied. Agency staff do not receive any supervision from managers. This means that managers are not providing staff with the support they need and are not overseeing their practice and development needs in a formal setting.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that the independent visitor has access to all the children's information. Although the independent visitor goes to the home and reports regularly, they repeatedly have difficulties accessing children's records, such as physical intervention records and incident reports. This prevents the independent visitor from exploring all information relating to children and making a proper evaluation of the quality of care being provided.

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— 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)(c)(f)(h))	11 December 2024
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. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i))	11 December 2024

In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff— seek to involve each child’s placing authority effectively in the child’s care, in accordance with the child’s relevant plans; if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority’s or a relevant person’s performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child’s needs are met in accordance with the child’s relevant plans. (Regulation 5 (a)(c))	11 December 2024
The registered person must ensure that all employees— receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. Regulation 33 (4)(b))	11 December 2024
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))	11 December 2024
The registered person must maintain records (“case records”) for each child which— include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child; are kept up to date; and	11 December 2024

are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b)(c))	
The registered person must ensure that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month. When the independent person is carrying out a visit, the registered person must help the independent person— if they consent, to interview in private such of the children, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as the independent person requires; and to inspect the premises of the home and such of the home's records (except for a child's case records, unless the child and the child's placing authority consent) as the independent person requires. (Regulation 44 (1) (2)(a)(b))	11 December 2024

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

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

Responsible individual: Ruth Baldwin

Registered managers: James Clark / Hayley Armstrong

Inspector

Joanne Wallis, Social Care Inspector

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