

SC028174

Registered provider: Keys Direct Care Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is operated by a private organisation. It provides care for up to three children with emotional and social difficulties. The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2023.

Since the last inspection, one child has moved into the home. At the time of this inspection, three children were living at the home. The inspector observed and spoke to all three children. Children told the inspector about their experiences of living at the home. These were shared with the manager, who took action to keep the children safe.

During this inspection, the inspector was aware that a serious incident that occurred at the setting since the last inspection is under investigation by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the setting in response to the incident were considered (where appropriate) alongside other evidence available at the time of inspection to inform the inspector's judgements.

Inspection dates: 29 and 30 July 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account

requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

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: 20 May 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
20/05/2024	Full	Good
23/01/2024	Full	Requires improvement to be good
13/07/2022	Full	Good
07/09/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

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

The home is spacious, well maintained by staff and thoughtfully personalised to meet the individual needs of children. Staff have created a dedicated sensory space to support children's emotional well-being. Throughout the home, staff have displayed photos capturing positive shared experiences between children and staff. This helps to create a memory-rich environment. Staff help children feel at home by supporting pet ownership and encouraging visits from friends. One child has pet rats, while another has pet guinea pigs.

Staff support children to move into the home in a well-planned and thoughtful way. The manager involves the children already living at the home in the decision-making process. Input from the wider professional network is also sought before a child moves in. When a child arrives, staff make them feel welcome by decorating their room, providing essential items and considering their cultural needs. Staff recognise the importance of family time for children. Maintaining family connections helps children feel secure, promotes emotional well-being and supports their identity.

Staff aim to build positive relationships with children. They offer a wide range of activities, including roller skating, swimming, pamper evenings and holidays. Staff have demonstrated a secure and trusting relationship with one child. However, other children report feeling unheard or unsupported. Challenging team dynamics, including conflict between staff, have led to breaches in professional boundaries. Some staff have shared information about internal team conflicts with children. This has affected the consistency of care and two children's sense of stability. Work to improve team culture is underway but remains in progress, and its impact has yet to be evaluated by managers.

Staff place a strong focus on education and actively support children to engage in learning. When children are not accessing education provision, staff will facilitate education at the home. The manager challenged a declined college referral to secure further education for one child. The manager also escalated concerns about another child's lack of education provision. As a result, all children are attending school and making progress. Staff ensure that children have access to healthcare, including specialist provision. When children have health needs, staff respond to these with care, discretion and empathy.

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

Staff take prompt and appropriate action when children go missing from the home. They actively search, maintain contact with the children and notify the police. On the children's return, staff support them to speak with an independent person.

Staff ensure that children receive prescribed medication as directed. When medication errors have occurred, managers have implemented lessons learned and procedures have improved. Staff understand the risks posed by the internet to children. They have put measures in place so children can access the internet safely.

Children know how to make a complaint. Following one child's complaint about a staff member, the manager arranged mediation. The impact of the mediation was not evaluated, and the child later submitted a second complaint about the same staff member. The outcome of the second complaint placed responsibility on the child and staff member to improve the relationship. This was not realistic or achievable for the child.

Staff have not identified emerging bullying dynamics between children early enough to enable timely intervention. This was despite the presence of indicators suggesting a bullying dynamic could develop. The impact on children is that one child is isolated and struggles to live alongside the other children. The child has expressed a wish to take a break from the home due to the distress caused by interactions with other children. In response to bullying concerns, staff prevented two children from speaking privately with a social worker, limiting their opportunity to share their experiences confidentially. Recent work has been carried out with the children to address bullying. The effect of this is yet to be evaluated by managers.

Staff carry out bedroom searches when safeguarding concerns arise, involving children where possible by seeking consent and encouraging participation. However, lessons learned regarding respecting a child's dignity and privacy during searches have not been used to improve practice. After a bedroom search, a child found pages from their personal diary torn out and discarded in the bin. A staff member confirmed taking this action, which was not part of the child's agreed care plan. The child is upset by this breach of privacy and has raised a complaint.

Staff use incentive charts and positivity jars to promote positive behaviour. Achievements are celebrated with either a monetary reward or an activity of the child's choosing. When children need support with their behaviour, staff use consequences. Consequences are not always restorative, and often children do not understand why they have been given. Staff sometimes lack curiosity about the reasons behind behaviours. For example, when a child expressed hatred towards a staff member, this was not explored by staff with the child.

Staff have created plans to help keep children safe. This includes talking to children about their needs and associated risks. However, these plans are not always followed. A child told two staff members how the dynamics at the home were having a significant negative effect on how this made them feel. This was not shared with the wider team, and no immediate support was offered to the child. Action was only taken the following day, once other staff became aware.

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

The registered manager has experience and relevant qualifications for the role. The team currently has one vacancy. To maintain staffing levels, the manager initially used agency staff. More recently, the manager covered staffing shortfalls using staff from within the provider organisation. Staff are supported to complete role-relevant qualifications and are given time during working hours to do so.

The manager has ensured that staff complete both mandatory and additional training tailored to the specific needs of the children. Staff said that the training is useful. The manager facilitates regular team meetings. These meetings are used as an opportunity for learning, connection and to consider how the team is meeting children's needs. External professionals attend team meetings to provide specialist consultation to improve the care provided to children.

The manager ensures that staff receive regular supervision, which covers their well-being, the needs of the children and professional development. Concerns about a staff member's ability to care for children is addressed within supervision. Supervision includes clear actions and supports staff growth. Staff said they feel well supported. The manager has put systems in place to help staff communicate and understand children's needs. Staff said they do not always know why certain decisions about children's care are made.

The manager has systems in place to monitor and evaluate children's progress at the home. These systems include the child's voice and ensure that children's progress is reflected in their plan of care. These systems were not robust enough to identify emerging bullying dynamics between children and a problematic team culture early enough. The manager is now aware of these issues and is taking direct action to make improvements at the home. This work is progressing and requires evaluation of its impact. The manager has oversight of all plans for children's care. The manager's oversight did not identify a child's plan was out of date and required review.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person 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 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— 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; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; 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)(i)(iii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii)(b)) In particular, ensure that staff understand what bullying is, how it manifests and how it affects children.	9 September 2025

In particular, ensure that staff respond promptly when a child expresses suicidal thoughts, following the home's safeguarding procedures. In particular, ensure that children's plans are regularly reviewed and reflect their current needs.	
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 work as a team where appropriate; 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)(b)(f)(h)) In particular, ensure that there is a culture of openness, mutual respect and accountability. In particular, ensure that there are robust systems that proactively identify emerging concerns and improve practice. In particular, ensure that staff understand and maintain clear professional boundaries.	9 September 2025
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust; an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and positive responses to other children and adults.	9 September 2025

In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— 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; strive to gain each child's respect and trust; 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; de-escalate confrontations with or between children, or potentially violent behaviour by children; understand and communicate to children that bullying is unacceptable; and have the skills to recognise incidents or indications of bullying and how to deal with them; and that each child is encouraged to build and maintain positive relationships with others. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(iii)(iv)(v)(viii)(ix)(xi)(xii)(xiii)(b)) In particular, ensure that staff model positive, respectful relationships in all interactions.	
The registered person must ensure that— the privacy of children is appropriately protected;	9 September 2025

any limitation placed on a child's privacy or access to any area of the home's premises—

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.

(Regulation 21 (a)(c)(ii)(iii)(iv))

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: SC028174

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Keys Direct Care Limited

Registered provider address: Maybrook House, Third Floor, Queensway, Halesowen, West Midlands B63 4AH

Responsible individual: Katie Harrison

Registered manager: Sarah Simington

Inspector

Laura Copus, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025