

SC028868

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

This children's home provides care for up to four children. This home is part of a small organisation.

The registered manager has been registered with Ofsted since July 2020.

Visit dates: 16 to 17 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 6 August 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Good

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

The manager has made sure that children receive consistent care from a dedicated and nurturing staff team. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been no use of agency staff. Staff have worked as a team to cover shortages where needed so that children receive care from those familiar to them.

The manager ensures that children's care plans and risk assessments contain detailed information about risks and behaviours. They include actions for staff to follow to help children reduce these behaviours. The manager shared during this inspection that, despite her attempts, she did not receive some further information about a child's history and past behaviours until after they moved into the home, to assist staff in understanding the child's needs.

A child shared with the inspector during this visit that he really likes the staff and cares about them. He shared that he loves living at the home and feels able to talk with staff and that he has been helped to give up smoking. Staff encourage children to share their feelings and worries and provide reassurance and guidance where needed.

The manager is a strong advocate for children. She supports children to access education provision that meets their needs. For example, one child who has been out of education for some time and was recently excluded from school, has started an alternative provision and is enjoying it. Staff help children to see their family and those who matter to them despite some of the challenges of the pandemic. For example, children have been encouraged to do activities with siblings outdoors, including trips to the seaside, walking in the woods and visits to local castles and the Wye Valley.

The safety of children

Since the last inspection, there have been several significant incidents and allegations against staff. The manager has followed statutory safeguarding processes and keeps comprehensive records of incidents and outcomes to promote children's safety.

When children go missing from the home staff follow them, continue to search for them in known areas while they are missing and persist in contacting them to enable their swift return. The manager ensures that children receive a return home interview to understand why they left the home and what they may be worried about.

In recent weeks, one child's behaviour has escalated to a dangerous level, to the point that the manager informed the placing authority that her needs can no longer be met at this home. As a result, staff have called the police on four occasions during two incidents that occurred in recent weeks. The manager and responsible individual have taken effective action to escalate their concerns to the placing authority as another child living at the home is becoming affected by the first child's

behaviours.

Leaders and managers

The new manager has made significant improvements to the home. For example, the garage has been converted to a games room with a multi-use pool table and it is decorated to a high standard. A new karaoke machine has also been purchased. The manager has introduced and organised a paperless system for children's records. The manager has supported staff to ensure incidents are now recorded in detail.

During this inspection, a social worker shared with the inspector that the care provided is excellent and that the child she is working with has made progress since living at the home. Staff are said to have 'a brilliant relationship with him and have kept him entertained during the pandemic'.

The responsible individual has good oversight of the home and has a strong knowledge of children's needs. The registered manager describes her as highly supportive and approachable. The independent visitor continues to monitor the safety and progress of children and has been completing visits in person. The independent visitor examines a range of documents and provides comprehensive feedback to the manager. He prioritises speaking with children and any concerns raised have been dealt with appropriately.

The manager and staff use restraint as a last resort at this home and the inspector was assured from a review of records that the use of restraint is necessary and proportionate. However, records reviewed during this inspection identified that staff do not consistently record what attempts they make to prevent incidents from escalating or the consequence of using restraint. The manager does not always record the effectiveness of the use of restraint to monitor the impact on children.

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, 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 registered person must prepare and implement a policy ("the behaviour management policy") which sets out— the measures of control, discipline and restraint which may be used in relation to children in the home.	29 January 2021
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— details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure; the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure. (Regulation 35 (1)(b) (3)(a)(v)(vii)) This refers specifically to the staff use of de-escalation techniques, the recording by staff of the child's response to the restraint and the manager's evaluation of the effectiveness of each intervention.	
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Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that full information is available in relation to a child's needs and background before they move into the home to enable staff to provide personalised care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 14, paragraph 3.2)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC028868

Registered provider: Step-a-Side Company Limited

Registered provider address: Step-a-Side, 29 Market Place, Coleford, Gloucestershire GL16 8AA

Responsible individual: Rachel Carwardine

Registered manager: Tracy Bedford

Inspector

Anna Gravelle, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
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M1 2WD

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