

1278966

Registered provider: Smoothstone Care & Education Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is privately owned and is registered to care for up to six children who may have learning disabilities.

Since the last inspection, no children have moved in or out of the home. There were four children and one young person living at the home at the time of the inspection. All children were seen and spoken to by the inspector.

The manager is registered with Ofsted.

There is a school on the same site, which the children attend. Inspectors only inspected the social care provision on this site.

The inspector was aware during this inspection that an alleged 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 alleged incident were considered alongside other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform the inspector's judgements.

Inspection dates: 27, 28 and 29 August 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	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: 17 March 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
17/03/2025	Full	Good
24/10/2023	Full	Good
08/11/2022	Full	Requires improvement to be good
08/02/2022	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive individualised care. Children's wishes and feelings are regularly sought, and they have a genuine say in their day-to-day care. Children are well supported to maintain relationships with those who are important to them, particularly those children who live far away from home. For example, one child is being supported to get to know their birth parents, and another child has met with extended family for the first time.

Children do well in education considering their starting points. For one child who struggled to attend school prior to moving to the home, they now enjoy school and have excellent attendance. Another child has successfully completed and passed their exams and is undertaking some work experience at a local authority.

Children's health is well supported by staff. For example, one child has made positive progress with their personal hygiene and improved diet. Another child with Cerebral Palsy lives an active life, which keeps their muscles strong. Children's mental and emotional health is also well supported. Specialist mental health support is sought where appropriate, and children receive input from professionals such as psychologists and art psychotherapists. This ensures that children's overall health and well-being improve.

When children are preparing to leave the home, transitions are thoughtfully considered. Children's 'life stories' are promoted and celebrated through memory books and praise books. When placement endings are unplanned, the welfare and well-being of children remain paramount and the needs and feelings of other children living in the home are considered.

Children enjoy positive and meaningful relationships with core staff. These staff know children well and understand their complex needs. However, some children have struggled with the recent high turnover of staff. This inconsistency in care makes children feel insecure and unsettled.

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

Staff respond well to behaviours that are difficult to manage, such as physical aggression. Physical intervention is used as a last resort to keep children and staff safe. The least force and measure are used. Children and adults are spoken to afterwards and a manager reviews each incident to identify any learning to improve practice. Incidents are monitored and tracked to look for patterns and trends. This helps to understand what might be going on for the child.

Risks to children are well known and understood by staff. Safety plans are clear and tell staff how to respond. All staff are up to date with safeguarding training. Managers and staff have a balanced approach to risk, which enables children to live fulfilled lives. For example, children with learning disabilities are encouraged to be independent through

going to the shops while staff stand a safe distance behind, and one child volunteers in a shop taking orders at the till.

When children or staff raise a concern, managers take appropriate action. The relevant authorities are informed, such as Ofsted, the police and the local authority designated officer. Effective safeguards are put in place to keep children safe, and children are well supported through the investigations. However, there has been a considerable delay in one member of staff reporting a serious concern. This put children at significant risk. Once this concern was known, effective action was taken by the manager to safeguard children.

Medication is safely stored. Daily medication audits are undertaken, ensuring any administration errors are identified promptly. When errors do occur, appropriate actions are taken, and learning is used to improve practice and prevent further incidents. However, there is a shortfall in the recording of medication administration; staff do not record the reason children are given pro re nata medication.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is committed to his role and strives to achieve the best outcomes for children. He leads by example, covering shifts when staff call in sick. However, a high turnover of staff has created an unstable and worn-out staff team. This has led to some staff feeling underappreciated. There is a plan in place to address this, but time is needed for these changes to take effect.

Staff are well trained and feel confident in their role. They receive training in relation to children's needs, such as autism spectrum disorder and sexualised behaviour, and additional physical intervention workshops have helped to upskill the team and support them in this area.

The manager works well with other professionals, such as the police and social workers. He communicates effectively with others and works in collaboration. Specialist support is sought where appropriate. For example, an autism assessment has helped to inform one child's level of need and subsequent transition plan. This ensures that decisions about the care of children are well considered and in their best interests.

The manager has effective oversight and quality assurance systems in place. He knows what is happening in the home daily. Regular internal and external audits are undertaken. Areas of shortfall are promptly identified and addressed. However, external stakeholder feedback is not proactively sought. This prevents a holistic review of the service.

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
<p>The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff—</p> <p>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;</p> <p>help each child to understand how to keep safe;</p> <p>have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm;</p> <p>manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other;</p> <p>understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person;</p> <p>take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and</p> <p>are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(iii)(v)(vi))</p> <p>In particular, this relates to staff taking effective action to safeguard children and report concerns to managers without delay.</p>	17 October 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person must demonstrate every effort to achieve continuity of staffing so that children's attachments are not overly disrupted, including ensuring that the employment of any temporary staff will not prevent children from receiving the continuity of care that they need. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 51, paragraph 10.1)
- Records must be kept of the administration of all medication. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 35, paragraph 7.15)
- The registered person should actively seek independent scrutiny of the home. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 55, paragraph 10.24)

This recommendation was made at the last inspection and is restated.

Information about this inspection

The inspector has 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: 1278966

Provision sub-type: Residential special school

Registered provider: Smoothstone Care & Education Limited

Registered provider address: Datum House, Electra Way, Crewe CW1 6ZF

Responsible individual: Raymond Scales

Registered manager: Jonathan Bunting

Inspector

Emma Dacres, Social Care Inspector

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