

# 2593032

Registered provider: Smoothstone Care & Education Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this children's home

This home is privately owned and is registered to care for three children who may have learning disabilities.

The registered manager has been in post since July 2020 and is suitably qualified and experienced.

### Inspection dates: 22 and 23 February 2024

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>good</b>
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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:** 29 March 2023

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
29/03/2023	Full	Outstanding
14/04/2021	Full	Outstanding

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Since the last inspection, one child has moved from the home following an unsettled period. The manager worked closely with the responsible local authority, the child's family and external professionals to support the child to move back to their family. At the time of this inspection, there were two children living in the home who have done so for several years.

Staff work hard to form relationships with children, who value the staff and the care they provide. Children feel able to approach staff and ask for help. Staff ensure that children understand what is being asked of them. They are nurturing in their approach and patient with children. As a result, children enjoy living at the home and have lots of fun.

Children said they would score the home '10 out of 10.' One child said, 'This is the best home ever.' They said that staff are 'really nice'. The children know how to make a complaint if they are unhappy. The children enjoy a wide range of varied activities, such as going to clubs, swimming and trampolining. They view the staff as trusted adults and are happy and relaxed in their company and at the home.

Children are at the forefront of staff thinking. Staff encourage children to share their views and wishes to shape the care they receive. Children now chair their own house meetings and record the minutes. They are also supported to attend their own reviews and make decisions about the home, including the decor and making the house their home. As a result, children have an increased sense of belonging and feel loved and cared for.

The children have made progress in education from their starting points when moving to the home. Staff have helped children to understand the importance of education. They work closely with each child's school to review educational engagement and academic progress, ensuring that children are supported to achieve in education. Staff are aspirational about each child's future, and this motivates them to succeed.

When writing records, staff sometimes use language that could stigmatise children, particularly when recording children's behaviours. Records do not reflect the emotional warmth and nurture that children receive.

Local authority plans for one child are out of date. Despite the efforts of the manager to escalate concerns, there is no up-to-date care plan provided by the responsible local authority. As a result, the manager has not been able to ensure the local authority plan informs the child's relevant plans. This is an impediment to good care planning.

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

Staff have a good understanding of children's safety needs. However, risk assessments are not comprehensive and fail to identify all known risks. For example, despite children using electronic devices, the associated risks are not reflected in their assessments. The manager had implemented weekly checks on devices as a measure to ensure children are safe online. However, these have not been carried out at the set frequency. Consequently, children's vulnerabilities are increased.

Children are educated on topics that relate to everyday life, such as online safety, feelings, emotions and staying safe. Staff work with children to help them understand the risks they face and what they can do to keep themselves safe. Staff use worksheets to aid the children's understanding. Children's learning is recorded and shared with others who support them.

Children are regularly praised and rewarded for good behaviour. Staff implement clear and consistent behavioural boundaries, meaning children are helped to understand unacceptable behaviours. The children are offered positive rewards rather than negative consequences. This helps to reinforce good outcomes for the positive behaviour the manager and staff are trying to encourage children to achieve.

Staff rarely use physical restraint to manage children's behaviour. This is testament to the ability of staff to build loving and trusting relationships with children. Staff are trained in behaviour management and use de-escalation strategies to good effect.

Following some damage caused to the home in recent weeks, the home has been redecorated to a good standard. Children chose how they wanted the home to be decorated and this reflects their personalities. However, a step-in shower has been replaced with wooden boards which are not suitable for children to stand on with bare feet. A temporary cover which is more suitable has been put in place while a long-term solution is identified.

The location risk assessment contains information that is out of date. There is a lack of evidence of consultation with relevant external professionals or agencies. This is a missed opportunity to reduce risk and to fully review the home's location.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The manager has led the home through a difficult period. This has included the deterioration of one child's behaviours, requiring increased staffing levels and notice having to be served on their placement. Additionally, there have been changes to the staff team and delays in staff recruitment. This has led to managers working increased hours. As a result, the effectiveness of management monitoring systems has been affected.

The manager leads staff in an aspirational, warm and caring manner. She seeks to work alongside the staff using an approach of high nurture and high challenge. Staff receive detailed handovers and regular team meetings to support them to understand children's current needs and areas of focus, ensuring the staff remain consistent in their approach to supporting children.

Partnership working with other agencies is a strength. Staff work effectively with families, education staff and other external professionals, all with the aim of improving outcomes for children. One social worker said, 'I wish I could duplicate the manager and she is amazing. Care is her priority, and she is compassionate, and wants to make their [children's] lives the best that it can be. As a result, [name of child] has flourished beyond recognition and is excelling.'

The manager is a strong advocate for children. When the practice of others falls short of acceptable standards, the registered manager is rigorous in her challenge. This ensures that children can access the services they need to make further progress.

The manager ensures that staff receive a comprehensive induction and training programme. There is a strong emphasis on staff development. This has meant that staff have been promoted within the company. Although staff receive regular supervision, this is of a variable standard and not all supervision records provide enough evidence to show how staff reflect on their practice.

## 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
<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—</p> <p>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>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)(b))</p> <p>This specifically relates to the registered manager ensuring staff understand their roles and responsibilities in carrying out checks on children's electronic devices to ensure their safety. It also relates to the manager ensuring children's risk assessments identify all known risks.</p>	25 March 2024
<p>The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that—</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (2)(h))</p> <p>This specifically relates to managers ensuring monitoring systems are effective.</p>	25 March 2024

<p>The care planning standard is that children—</p> <p>receive effectively planned care in or through the children’s home.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that arrangements are in place to—</p> <p>manage and review the placement of each child in the home. (Regulation 14 (1)(a) (2)(b)(ii))</p> <p>This specifically relates to managers ensuring that the children’s care plans are accurate and up to date.</p>	<p>25 March 2024</p>
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## Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure the children’s homes to be nurturing and supportive environments that meet the needs of their children, they will, in most cases, be homely, domestic environments. Children’s homes must comply with relevant health and safety legislation (alarms, food hygiene etc.); however, in doing so, homes should seek as far as possible to maintain a domestic rather than institutional impression. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- The registered person should have systems in place so that all staff, including the manager, receive supervision of their practice from an appropriately qualified and experienced professional which allows them to reflect on their practice and the needs of the children assigned to their care. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 61 paragraph 13.2)
- The registered person should ensure staff understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 62, paragraph 14.4)
- The registered person should ensure that they consult with relevant professionals when they conduct the annual review of the premises. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 63, paragraph 15.1)

## **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:** 2593032

**Provision sub-type:** Children's home

**Registered provider:** Smoothstone Care & Education Limited

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

**Responsible individual:** Raymond Scales

**Registered manager:** Alison Harris

## Inspector

Zoey Lee, Social Care Inspector

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