

2720522

Registered provider: Utopia Childcare Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is operated by a private company. It provides care for up to three children who experience emotional or behavioural difficulties. There were three children living in the home at the time of the inspection.

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 November 2025

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 6 January 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
06/01/2025	Full	Good
26/10/2023	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Since the last inspection, one child has moved into the home and one child has moved out. Inspectors spoke to all children during the visit.

The child who moved into the home experienced a well-planned and supportive transition. Opportunities to meet staff and the children already living in the home before moving in helped the child to build positive relationships and settle quickly into their new environment. The other two children have lived in the home for over 18 months. All children are settled and happy living in the home.

Children make good progress in their education. All children have excellent attendance and enjoy going to school. Education professionals confirm that staff know children well and consistently advocate for their needs to be met in their education settings. When a review of one child's education, health and care plan was overdue, the manager worked collaboratively with other professionals to challenge the delay and clearly articulate the impact this was having on the child.

Children are supported to maintain good mental health. Equine therapy is available to promote emotional well-being and provide a safe space with an independent professional. All children have accessed this provision. However, a delay in response to a referral to specialist mental health services for one child was not challenged promptly. This has hindered the child from receiving important care that is critical for their long-term well-being.

The home is well presented and homely. Children are encouraged to feel a sense of belonging through the display of photographs, including school pictures and those capturing enjoyable experiences. Staff take pride in the home and maintain a welcoming environment for children. The recent introduction of a maintenance team within the company has improved the timeliness of repairs, which was evident during the inspection. Children are excited about plans to redecorate their bedrooms to reflect their individual tastes.

Children are encouraged to pursue hobbies that bring them enjoyment and fulfilment. One child attends weekly singing lessons, which he thoroughly enjoys. Staff have supported another child to develop an interest in making ribbon flowers, leading to recognition through an award from the virtual school service. This child-centred approach from staff has helped to build children's self-esteem and confidence.

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

There have been no incidents of going missing or use of physical restraint since the last inspection. A reduction in incidents demonstrates the positive impact of staff using their strong relationships with children to provide effective care and manage behaviour well.

Staff show professional curiosity when exploring children's experiences, which helps children feel valued and respected. Children respond positively to staff support and are able to calm down when they become upset.

Staff understand the risks associated with children. However, risk assessments are not always reviewed promptly. This has been affected by issues with an unreliable electronic system. While steps have been taken to address this, improvements have not been fully consistent. As a result, some information about children's vulnerabilities and the actions staff should take to manage risks is not always up to date. This limits the effectiveness of care planning.

Medication errors have occurred, which increased children's vulnerability. When these incidents happened, investigations were completed and appropriate disciplinary action taken. The manager implemented additional training to ensure that staff have the necessary skills and knowledge. A reduction in errors suggests this action has been effective. The manager also plans to strengthen induction training for new staff to further reduce the risk of future incidents.

Children know how to complain and feel confident to do so. When they raise concerns, staff listen and take appropriate action. Children are supported to repair relationships with peers and staff, using restorative approaches that help them learn how to manage and resolve conflict in a healthy and constructive way.

Management of allegations is robust and ensures that children's voices are heard and incidents are thoroughly investigated. Key safeguarding agencies are informed promptly, and procedures are followed appropriately. The well-being of staff is considered during investigations. Plans are in place to provide senior staff with further training on managing allegations to strengthen practice.

Recruitment practice is generally safe. However, the current approach of introducing applicants to the home before their appointment presents a safeguarding risk. This practice reveals the location of the home and could increase children's vulnerability. Leaders are aware of this and are reviewing arrangements to ensure recruitment remains safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The home is managed by a suitably experienced registered manager who is committed to the home and promotes a culture of high expectations and aspirations for children. The manager is supported by an experienced responsible individual who shares this child-focused approach and is dedicated to achieving positive outcomes for children.

Staff enjoy working at the home and feel well supported in their roles. New employees are welcomed into the team and encouraged to develop professionally. When staff identified a need to improve communication at handovers, this was meaningfully discussed in a team meeting. The manager acted on staff suggestions, for example by

increasing the size of the office whiteboard to capture more information about children. This proactive approach helps staff feel valued and promotes effective teamwork.

Monitoring and oversight of the home are generally effective. However, improvements to the organisation of documentation are needed. For example, documents are not consistently signed by staff or stored in a way that makes them easily accessible. Monitoring has also been affected by dysfunctions within the electronic recording system. Highly sensitive information about children has been lost, and retrieval efforts have only been partially successful. This is an ongoing matter that the company needs to address urgently to prevent further breaches of confidentiality.

Staff receive regular supervision with either the manager or a senior member of the team. While this provides opportunities for discussion, minutes show limited focus on individual children's needs and experiences. This is a missed opportunity to deepen staff understanding and improve the care provided. Additionally, incidents are not consistently discussed and reflected on in supervision, which further reduces opportunities for learning and development.

Feedback from professionals and parents is consistently positive and reflects the view that staff understand and care for children. The manager is particularly noted for being a strong advocate for children and goes above and beyond to ensure their voices are heard.

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 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>helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and</p> <p>promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child;</p> <p>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;</p> <p>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))</p> <p>This specifically refers to ensuring that staff receive good-quality supervision that promotes learning from incidents and improving understanding of children’s individual needs; ensuring that delays to referrals to specialist services, such as CAMHs, are escalated; monitoring systems are robust; and ensure the timely reviewing of key documents for children that inform staff of the care they should receive.</p>	<p>28 February 2026</p>
<p>The registered person must ensure that the following items, which may be kept in electronic form, are kept in an accessible manner—</p> <p>children’s case records (see regulation 36);</p>	<p>28 February 2026</p>

other records (see regulation 37). (Regulation 38 (i)(j))

This specifically relates to ensuring that the storage of records in electronic form is safe and reliable and that information can be easily accessed.

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: 2720522

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Utopia Childcare Limited

Registered provider address: 9 Bedford Grove, Alsager, Stoke-on-trent ST7 2SR

Responsible individual: Paulette Hussey

Registered manager: Yazmine Hinds

Inspectors

Becky Rutter, Social Care Inspector
Sophie Coogan, Social Care Inspector

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