

Athena Housing and Support Limited

Registered provider: Athena Children's Services Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this supported accommodation provider

The service registered with Ofsted on 13 November 2023. The service manager registered at the same time.

The provider can accommodate up to 62 children. This is across 10 group-living homes limited to accommodating looked-after children or care leavers and in two one-bedroom flats.

At the time of the inspection, 47 children aged 16 or 17 were living at the shared supported accommodation. Only adults were living in the single occupancy flats.

Inspection dates: The inspection began on 3 March 2025 when we announced the inspection. Two inspectors were on site from 5 to 7 March 2025.

Outcome

Consistently strong service delivery leads to typically positive experiences and progress for children. Where improvements are needed, leaders and managers take timely and effective action. The next inspection will be within approximately three years.

Summary of findings

Equality, diversity and inclusion are integral to the whole service.

Children receive individualised support that strengthens their identities and enhances their life skills. The service prepares children well for living independently and being confident adults.

Staff work closely with other professionals to safeguard children with complex needs and vulnerabilities.

The leaders and managers have embraced regulation of the sector. They want the best for children and are committed to continued improvement across the service.

Overall experiences and progress of children

Children are safe and thrive in their accommodation. They speak fondly of the staff and the other children with whom they share their home. One child said, 'I am happy here. I could have not been happier, great atmosphere. It is like a family in a way. Staff really care.' Another child said, 'Good staff, good house, and they care about us.'

Children experience stability in their lives. The same core staff in each home promote consistency of support and the development of strong relationships. Children know that they have dependable adults around them who they can approach for support at any time. This enhances children's sense of security.

Staff create a nurturing and inclusive environment for all children. They make an effort to accept children unconditionally. They have established an environment in which children can freely express themselves and be who they are. When a staff member dealt appropriately with homophobic language used by one child, this inspired trust and confidence in all the children in that house.

Staff enable children to develop practical life skills, such as budgeting, cooking and cleaning. Staff help children to get to know the finer aspects of their own skills and qualities, in areas such as resilience, reliability and trustworthiness. Children receive thoughtful support that is mindful of their individual needs, as well as of their emerging independence.

The physical environment is homely, comfortable and maintained to a high standard. Children have everything they need to develop their independence as well as to experience living harmoniously with others. The homes reflect the current time of the year in the Islamic calendar, with decorations. Muslim children and staff break the fast together in the tradition of Ramadan. They include other children who want to learn about other faiths. Children and staff were also preparing to mark the forthcoming International Day of Women with special celebrations.

The enrichment activity programme gives children opportunities to develop new interests and to share positive experiences with other children. The children's paintings are framed and displayed in the lounges. The children and the staff are proud of the creativity and displays in the homes.

Children understand the importance of being in education, training or employment. Most are engaging well in education and are planning their careers. Staff support children to overcome any barriers to achieving their goals and to prepare for the world of work. This includes ensuring that children who are neurodiverse receive education that meets their needs and enhances their learning. One child shared a photo of their favourite pony because they are planning a career in equine care.

How well children are helped and protected

The close relationships that staff form with children underpin successful safeguarding. The children spoken to had developed an increased sense of personal safety and security.

Staff know children's personal histories and approach sensitive issues with empathy and patience. Staff are mindful of changes in the mood and behaviour of children. For example, a staff member called for medical support before a child said they had taken an overdose. The staff's vigilance and proactive approach meant that the child received timely medical support.

Staff understand the vulnerabilities of children. They recognise the signs of increased risk to children who are vulnerable to being groomed or exploited. Staff share concerns appropriately and work closely together with other professionals to safeguard children. Staff contribute to strategy meetings and follow safety plans.

The missing procedure promotes a multi-agency approach to safeguarding children. There is a 'grab pack' for each child, with relevant personal information about them that can be quickly shared with the police. Staff welcome children back home and talk to them about the risks of going missing. Staff have conversations with children about how they can enhance their personal safety when they are away from home.

The health and safety arrangements ensure that the physical environment is safe. Cameras are only used externally to ensure the security of the perimeters of the buildings. This maintains children's privacy and supports the development of trusting relationships.

The leaders and managers regularly review the location assessments in consultation with other professionals. They also include children's views when considering the continued suitability of the areas where the homes are situated.

Staff recruitment files are not consistently complete because information about some staff and agency staff's previous employment is not available to the provider.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The service has been providing supported accommodation since 2012.

The leadership team consists of nine people, and they all contribute considerable experience and knowledge to the service. Each manager started their career as a support worker for this organisation. This shows the value of workforce development and succession planning.

The leadership and management team is effective and competent. Together, all the managers have created a positive ethos. The nominated individual is hands on and works well with the registered service manager.

The leaders and managers are visible, approachable and supportive. The arrangements for staff induction, supervision and reviews of practice are effective. Staff members speak highly of the support that they receive from the managers, as well as from their peers.

Several social workers said that the leaders and managers of this organisation go above and beyond in what they do for children. One social worker highlighted that, because of the initiative shown by the organisation, there is no drift or delay in providing support to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Another social worker praised the quality of the progress report developed by the managers.

Since registration, the managers have been working to enhance the quality of records and to evidence the team's good, child-focused practices. This is still a work in progress. The voice of the child is lacking in some written records and there are inconsistencies in the quality of the information recorded when children go missing. The leaders and managers are in the early stages of developing systems to help with the collating of information at a service level to help them to see trends and patterns more clearly. On some occasions during the inspection, they needed extended time to provide accurate information.

The leaders and managers ensure that children remain at the heart of the organisation. They inspire staff and ensure consistency of good practice across the service. They know children well and carefully monitor children's experiences, progress and outcomes. They are embedding reflective practices and have a clear action plan to further the development of the service.

What does the supported accommodation provider 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 Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023 and the 'Guide to the Supported Accommodation Regulations, including Quality Standards'. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety.</p> <p>Subject to paragraph (4), the registered person may only—</p> <p>employ an individual for the purposes of the provision of supported accommodation, or</p> <p>if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work for the supported accommodation undertaking in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work for the supported accommodation undertaking, if the registered person is satisfied that the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3).</p> <p>The requirements are that—</p> <p>full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 1. (Regulation 17 (1) (2)(a)(b)) 3(d))</p> <p>This relates specifically to ensuring that full employment histories and any gaps are considered when recruiting staff and agency staff.</p>	<p>1 June 2025</p>

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that systems are in place to achieve better quality assurance of records and better monitoring of the information at a service level. ('Guide to the Supported Accommodation Regulations, including Quality Standards', page 15)

- The registered person should ensure that the children's files better reflect their contribution to their support plans, quarterly goals and safety plans. ('Guide to the Supported Accommodation Regulations, including Quality Standards', page 58)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children, 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 Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023.

Supported accommodation provider details

Unique reference number: 2753104

Registered provider: Athena Children's Services Limited

Nominated individual: Hayley Murphy

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