

SC023646

Registered provider: Acorn Homes (UK) Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is one of six owned and operated by an independent provider. It is registered to accommodate and provide care for up to seven children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Inspection dates: 5 to 6 December 2017

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 14 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is outstanding because:

- Children with complex or challenging needs make exceptional progress. They thrive in all areas of their lives.
- Children demonstrate increased maturity, self-worth, resilience, improved confidence and self-esteem.
- The home provides children with stability and they feel part of a family. This gives children a sense of belonging and permanency.
- Children influence their own care planning, risk assessments, incentives, sanctions, activities, menu planning, staff recruitment and staff appraisals.
- Staff prioritise children's health and well-being. Children benefit from counselling and support from the organisation's therapeutic team.
- Children are achieving, and in some cases exceeding, their educational expectations.
- There is an exceptional investment in the children through activities, incentives, holidays, gifts, meals out and experiences.
- Children make a positive contribution to society. They volunteer, support charitable appeals and are involved in their local community.
- All children are developing their independent living and personal development skills. They learn to appreciate equality, diversity, fairness and respect.
- Behaviour management is exceptional. Professionals unanimously praise the staff team's consistent way of working.
- Innovative partnership arrangements with the police and a local university are in place. This involves influencing the sector through research.
- Children benefit from the excellent safeguarding arrangements. All children feel safe. There are no issues with missing, exploitation or offending.
- The high-quality interactions between staff and children are commendable. Children respond well to the nurturing, open and honest atmosphere.
- Children benefit from highly effective leadership and a competent, committed staff team which is determined to improve the children's life chances.

The children's home's areas for development:

- Regulations highlight the need to include comments from children, parents, staff and placing authorities. Although this information is gathered and influences service development, it is not included in the quality of care report. This minor shortfall does not have an impact on the high-quality care provided to children.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/03/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
29/06/2016	Full	Outstanding
03/03/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
25/11/2015	Full	Good

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
<p>Review of quality of care</p> <p>The system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the quality of care must provide for ascertaining and considering the opinions of children, their parents, placing authorities and staff. (Regulation 45 (5))</p>	01/04/2018

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children with complex or challenging needs make exceptional progress, based on their starting points. Children are thriving educationally, emotionally and socially. They demonstrate increased maturity, self-worth and resilience, and improved confidence and self-esteem. This enables children to enjoy their lives and be aspirational for the future. Children proudly list the positive aspects of living at the home. Several children scored the home '10 out of 10'; another child stated: 'We are lucky.' A staff member said that the children are now 'totally different'.

Children blossom within a nurturing environment. The quality of care enhances their life chances through comprehensive care planning. A child affirmed that the home has, 'changed people's lives' and had 'made a massive impact'. A health professional said: 'Children have told me that they are happy to live at the home.' A social worker highlighted that their child 'no longer takes drugs', 'no longer consumes alcohol' and 'his missing episodes have significantly decreased'. Another social worker stated that they were 'pleasantly surprised' with their child's progress, stating: 'It has been a very good placement.'

The home provides children with stability and they feel part of a family. There is a strong emphasis on creating a sense of belonging and permanency. Children develop secure attachments with staff. A child affectionately stated on a noticeboard that 'this is home'. A social worker stated: 'I have been really impressed with the clear commitment, trust

and support.' The registered manager confirmed that the home endeavours to give children 'good experiences'. In addition to 'as many opportunities as they can, like my kids'.

Children have an active voice within the home, contributing to social activities, menu planning, staff recruitment and staff appraisals. They also influence their own care planning, such as contributing to their risk assessments. Children know how to complain; however, they have not made any complaints since the last inspection.

Children take pride in who they are. Memory boxes help them to reflect on their lives and to collate meaningful memories. Staff facilitate contact well, when it promotes a child's best interests. Staff help children to maintain a positive link with family members, assisting with Skype calls and escorting them to visits if necessary.

Staff actively and successfully prioritise children's health and well-being. Children benefit from integrated counselling and support from the organisation's therapeutic team. A child said: 'My mental health is better, I am proud of myself for what I have achieved.' Staff undertake specialist training, which enables them to incorporate psychological theories and research-informed practice into day-to-day care. This, alongside their personal qualities, enables them to work with children in a naturally innovative way. An excellent example of this is the way that staff apply attachment theory to their care of the children.

With staff support, all children attend health appointments. Children's health is improving overall. Older children benefit from support to enable them to access sexual health services. Staff strongly advocate for the children's needs, an example being advocacy for a health assessment. Exercise is linked to fun activities, which include going to street-dance, swimming, trampolining, skateboarding, cycling, ice-skating, tobogganing and playing football.

Children are achieving their educational potential and in some cases they are exceeding expectations. Children benefit from the organisation having its own school. They also attend mainstream school and college. When children do not have a school place, staff resourcefully provide wide-ranging educational activity throughout the day. This includes workbooks, research projects, reading, cookery and learning experiences within the community. They also tirelessly advocate for the children's educational needs.

Children's achievements include completing their GCSEs, excelling in archery and performing arts. Staff celebrate children's achievements through praise, gifts, meals out and special experiences. An excellent example of staff going above and beyond to enrich children's lives is the lengths they went to in order to make a child's school prom a success. Staff provided a tailored suit and high-quality accessories, and hired a 'top of the range' car.

Children make a positive contribution to society. They volunteer, enthusiastically support charitable appeals, are members of the police cadets and participate in citizenship programmes. Children enjoy going away on holiday. All children pursue their hobbies

and talents and attend a wide range of clubs. This also promotes their socialisation and community inclusion. Children enjoy a varied social life, going to pop concerts, theme parks and popular attractions, while also enjoying in-house activities or watching television together.

All children are developing their independent living skills. They take turns to cook meals and assist with household chores, alongside taking responsibility for doing their laundry and keeping their room clean. Children also learn budgeting and personal development skills. They learn to appreciate equality, diversity, fairness and respect. Staff actively challenge sexist, racist and homophobic language. Children enjoy the freedom to express their uniqueness and are encouraged to practise their religion.

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

Children benefit from excellent safeguarding arrangements. All children feel safe. A child said that they feel like 'a totally new person', confirming, 'If I was not here, I would probably be locked up.' Behaviour management is exceptional. A social worker praised the 'excellent and positive changes' in a child's behaviour. Professionals unanimously praise the staff team's consistent way of working. A health professional said that staff 'consistently put in firm boundaries' and 'should be commended for their approach to their care'.

Staff are highly responsive to children's complex needs. They use a substantial range of interventions to ensure that all action benefits children. Research-informed training enables them to respond positively to trauma and helps them to de-escalate potential incidents. The high-quality interactions between staff and the children are commendable and staff take pride in their open and honest communication. This enables them to establish nurturing and mutually respectful professional relationships. A child confirmed that the manager is 'strict but fair'.

The home provides a stable base for children. Since living at the home, children's behaviour and their emotional well-being have significantly improved. There are fewer challenging incidents and children highlighted that they feel 'more calm' and 'chilled'. Children feel safe and are able to disclose past histories of abuse. This enables professionals to address related issues. Children become more secure and trusting.

Staff prefer not to sanction children, favouring a positive reinforcement model. There is a personalised incentive system, which rewards achievements and good behaviour. Children enjoy the opportunity to earn extra money or very special treats, such as a trip to Disneyland Paris.

When given, sanctions are appropriate and teach children the importance of reparation. Children reflect upon and identify their own sanctions, demonstrating the ability to reason and negotiate. This promotes self-responsibility and helps children to accept the consequences of their actions.

Occasionally, staff have to physically intervene to protect a child from causing harm to

others. Incidents are appropriately recorded. A social worker said that they were 'really impressed' with the management of extremely challenging behaviour and the fact that restraints had reduced significantly.

Children receive training and clear messages regarding the dangers of social media. This enables them to recognise potentially dangerous interactions, including cyber-bullying. Staff identify, understand and manage effectively risks to children. Radicalisation toolkits help staff to assess and monitor children's vulnerability as part of the 'Prevent' duty. Staff also have access to indicators and toolkits to measure risks of gang involvement and sexual exploitation. No children are involved in sexually exploitative relationships. Children are no longer involved in gangs or criminal activity and they are successfully engaging in youth offending services.

A comprehensive risk management system is in place. This addresses individual and environmental risks effectively. The location risk assessment includes local intelligence and concisely details potential threats. Extensive certificates further confirm the safety of the premises and staff undertake regular health and safety checks. Robust recruitment practices protect children. The registered manager is currently assisting the organisation with a staff recruitment project

There are currently no children who are going missing from care. This is an excellent achievement, as one child had the highest missing record in their local authority. If there are issues with unauthorised absences, staff have a global positioning system tracker. This helps with searching for children, and staff go to known addresses. In the absence of the child's social worker and when appropriate, staff will also undertake return home interviews.

Staff benefit from wide-ranging safeguarding training and have established good links with the designated officer. Any allegations are appropriately managed and used as a reference for future learning. Leaders and managers acknowledge when they are unable to meet children's complex needs. They work with placing authorities to ensure a smooth transition to the next placement.

There are innovative partnership arrangements with the police and a local university. These involve participation in research and sharing statistics for training courses. Leaders and managers also share practice at a regional children's home forum.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Children benefit from a consistently high-quality service. A health professional praised the 'strong leadership' and the 'strong team of staff'. A social worker described them as 'a pleasure to work alongside'. A good matching risk assessment evaluates the impact of each new placement. Highly effective leaders and managers ensure that the home is continually improving. A social worker confirmed that staff are 'always advocating' for their child and 'working in his best interests'.

The home has a good quality-assurance system, which is focused on enhancing children's quality of life. Constructive monthly monitoring reports highlight the home's

strengths and identify areas for further improvement. The registered manager completes an evaluation of the quality of care. This takes into account how they meet the quality standards and their plans to achieve positive outcomes. The report does not include the comments from children, parents, staff and placing authorities, although this information is gathered elsewhere and influences service development and practice.

The highly experienced, dynamic registered manager has relevant qualifications in management and in therapeutic childcare. Strong deputy and team leader arrangements strengthen the management structure. A child described the registered manager as 'thoughtful and kind'. The child gave an example of her bringing them all presents back from a recent holiday. A staff member described the registered manager as 'amazing, really helpful and very attuned' to staff's needs. The registered manager brings a great passion to her role and is focused on providing positive childhood experiences for the children.

Children receive care from an experienced and competent staff team. Staff say that they feel valued and they demonstrate a commitment to their role. Staff take pride in children's achievements and in their consistent way of working. Good peer support is evident. A staff member confirmed that 'the team works hard together and sing from the same hymn sheet'. A child described staff as 'kind'. Staff benefit from a wide range of training, which includes the required vocational training. Therapeutic support also informs their practice. Staff have regular individual supervision sessions, team meetings and annual appraisals.

Leaders and managers have addressed the recommendations from the last inspection effectively. Children benefit from improvements in documentation and fire safety. The updated safeguarding policy provides clear guidance on referring child protection concerns to the host authority. The statement of purpose clearly reflects the home's unique aims and objectives. The fire safety induction also gives children greater clarity regarding evacuation procedures. The fire door seals in the office are now fit for purpose.

Children live in a spacious house around the corner from a park and shops. The beach is also a short walk away. The premises are maintained to a high standard. Children can personalise their rooms to reflect their individuality. They can relax in a range of communal areas, which include two lounges, a games room and a dining room with a sofa. At the time of the inspection one of the lounges was being transformed into a Christmas grotto. Children's artwork, collages of their photos and inspirational quotes are on display throughout the home. The registered manager and staff have an open-door policy, which enables children to approach them easily when they are in their offices. Children also benefit from a large back garden.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children

and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC023646

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Acorn Homes (UK) Limited

Registered provider address: 424 Margate Road, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 6SJ

Responsible individual: David Knowles

Registered manager: Tiffany Healy

Inspector

Sharon Payne, social care inspector

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