

SC023645

Registered provider: Acorn Homes (UK) Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This privately operated home is part of a larger organisation, which has a number of homes in the area. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to seven children and young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Inspection dates: 24 to 25 January 2018

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 outstanding

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

Date of last inspection: 19 January 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- The staff and young people have caring relationships, which assist young people to progress.
- Young people's views and opinions are frequently sought and are valued.
- Contact between young people and their families is supported well.
- Young people's health improves during the time that they live here.
- The staff know how to safeguard young people and help them to learn how to safeguard themselves.
- Leaders and managers prioritise and focus on young people's needs.
- The registered manager's leadership has resulted in significant improvements to the service.
- The staff build and maintain excellent relationships with external professionals.

The children's home's areas for development:

- There is variable practice in relation to the records of recruitment and monitoring and reviewing of the home's practice.
- Support from the organisation's health and well-being team is not as effective as possible.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
19/01/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
19/10/2016	Full	Good
23/02/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
01/12/2015	Full	Good

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- When a child returns to the home after being missing from care or away from the home without permission, the responsible local authority must provide an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. Homes should take account of information provided by such interviews when assessing risks and putting arrangements in place to protect each child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30)
In particular, the registered person should advocate for independent return home interviews.
- In addition to the requirements of this standard, the registered person has specific responsibilities under regulation 34 to prepare and implement policies setting out: arrangements for the safeguarding of children from abuse or neglect; clear procedures for referring child protection concerns to the placing authority or local authority where the home is situated if appropriate; and specific procedures to prevent children going missing and take action if they do. The policy on protection of children from abuse and neglect should include arrangements in relation to dealing with allegations involving staff in the home, e-safety and to counter risks of self-harm and suicide. All policies should be reviewed regularly and revised where appropriate. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 44, paragraph 9.19)
In particular, the registered person should ensure that the content of the safeguarding policy relates directly to residential care in all of its detail.
- Children should be encouraged by staff to see the home's records as 'living documents' supporting them to view and contribute to the record in a way that reflects their voice on a regular basis. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 58, paragraph 11.19)
In particular, the registered person should ensure that all records of one-to-one discussions with young people are written, taking into account young people's age and reading ability.
- Staff need the knowledge and skills to recognise and be alert for any signs that might indicate a child is in any way at risk of harm. The registered person should ensure that skills in safeguarding are gained, refreshed and recorded in the home's workforce plan. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 43, paragraph 9.12)
In particular, the registered person should ensure that the staff are kept up to date about new issues that arise regarding safe internet use.
- As set out in regulations 31–33, the registered person is responsible for

maintaining good employment practice. They must ensure that recruitment, supervision and performance management of staff safeguard children and minimise potential risks to them. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)

In particular, the registered person should ensure that records of internal staff appointments clearly demonstrate that the person is suitable to work in residential care.

- The registered person should oversee the welfare of the children in their care through observation and engagement with: each child; the home's staff; each child's family/carers where appropriate; and professionals involved in the care or protection of each child including their social worker, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), teachers, clinicians and other health professionals etc. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', pages 54–55, paragraph 10.23)
In particular, the registered person should ensure that their monitoring systems effectively cover all aspects of the home's operation.

- Any individual appointed to carry out visits to the home as an independent person must make a rigorous and impartial assessment of the home's arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children in the home's care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 65, paragraph 15.5)
In particular, the registered person should ensure that the independent person undertakes their visits as rigorously as possible, including seeing the home at different times of the day.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Young people have good experiences when they move into the home. The manager plans well with outside agencies, ensuring that as much information as possible is gained. Young people are matched well and this leads to good placements in which young people remain for some time. However, the quality of the impact assessments completed before a young person arrives do not log the level of scrutiny that the manager takes to decide on placements.

Supportive relationships between young people and the staff provide a strong foundation for young people to progress. All young people and social workers praise the staff for the positive difference that their care makes to young people's lives. One social worker said she was 'proud of the immense progress' that the young person had made here.

Children's views are listened to and acted on appropriately. From the time a young person arrives here there are a range of formal and informal systems to continuously gather young people's views and engage them in their care. This empowers young people to talk

about things that they think are important and learn positive ways of putting their views forward. This creates a very child-centred environment, which supports young people to feel valued and appreciated.

Independence programmes are well organised and help young people to progress. The staff carefully evaluate and evidence the progress that young people make and celebrate new skills attained.

Young people have fun here. They are encouraged to be involved in a wide range of interests, which they find stimulating and enjoyable. Activities for the young people as a group are also promoted to encourage good relationships to develop and flourish.

Contact with families and friends is well organised and focuses on improving young people's relationships with their families. The staff understand the importance of engaging with a young person's family and promote their involvement in decisions that are made about their children's care. There is a policy that young people can have friends over, but young people were not clear that this was the case. The manager is arranging for this topic to be discussed at the next young people's meeting.

The attention to improving young people's physical health and emotional well-being is effective. For example, one young person is fitter and takes more pride in his appearance and another young person's ability to manage their mental health has improved. The staff provide good emotional support. One young person said about the staff, 'They pick you up when you are down.' However, the staff do not use the organisation's health and well-being team to best effect. This is a missed opportunity to use all of the organisation's resources to best effect such as determining which young people are best matched to come to live here.

Young people's engagement and progress with their education are variable. One young person is achieving well, but the others are either not in education or their attendance is sporadic. However, the staff are aspirational for young people's education and they work hard to promote and improve young people's engagement and attainment. One member of staff with an education background monitors young people's engagement on a monthly basis and the manager presses local authorities for formal education plans if these are not forthcoming.

Plans for making lasting memories of young people's time at the home have been enhanced over the last year. Each young person has a memory book, which provides positive records of their achievement and enjoyment here. A digital photo frame, containing photographs of everyone at the home, is given to each young person when they leave. The staff work with young people, local authorities and others to ensure that the timing of a young person's departure is right for them.

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

Young people's safety is protected and promoted well. The staff know how to make safeguarding concerns known and understand whistleblowing procedures.

Behaviour management is an area of strength. The staff successfully promote and develop good behaviour and manage unacceptable behaviour well. Sanctions are minimal and reviewed effectively. There are clear, succinct and relevant goals, which young people know well and work towards achieving.

Discussions with young people about their behaviour are frequent and relate to the current issues that the young person is grappling with. The quality of recording of these talks varies. Some records use child-friendly language, others are written in a formal style which does not consider young people's ages and reading abilities.

The staff support for young people who are engaged in criminal activity reduces the young people's risk of offending. Young people learn about the consequences of their actions and positively engage with the youth offending services. The staff are careful that their actions do not criminalise young people unnecessarily. For example, the staff manage difficult behaviours wherever possible without police involvement.

Restraint is used only when necessary and young people's views are always sought afterwards. Records are well written and provide a good view of what occurred. The staff and the young person debrief after each incident of restraint. Information gained from these discussions is used to consider, with young people, how the staff can manage young people's behaviours better and prevent its escalation.

The staff manage episodes of young people going missing well. They follow young people when they go to leave and continue to look for them if they go out of sight. Young people say that they are welcomed back if they go missing and that the staff try to find out why this occurred. The staff write clear records each time a young person goes missing and record what young people tell them.

Some local authorities have agreed that the home's staff can complete return home interviews on their behalf. It is good practice for the staff to have discussions with a young person about why they went missing. However, these arrangements do not meet the expectation that the local authority will ensure that an independent person visits the young person to explore why they went missing.

There are well-organised and clear records of how safeguarding concerns have been managed, which demonstrate that the staff liaise appropriately with the local authority safeguarding team. The content of the safeguarding policy does not all relate well to residential care.

Internet safety is promoted. The staff regularly question young people about their understanding of the risks that internet use can pose and often check young people's internet usage. However, there are no plans for maintaining the staff's knowledge of the ever changing issues of online safety. This is a missed opportunity to keep as up to date as possible about this important aspect of young people's lives.

Health and safety continues to be managed carefully. The registered manager has

improved the environment to reduce and eliminate risks and any damage to the property is quickly repaired.

Recruitment is appropriately undertaken for external applicants. Procedures for externally recruited staff are well organised and support the managers to appoint applicants who have the necessary skills for their roles. Records of an internal appointment did not record all of the actions taken to assess the person's suitability, such as interview notes.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager passionately and dedicatedly leads the home well. In the two years since he was registered he has:

- improved how young people can make their views known
- strengthened staff's reflective practice
- supported clear aims for young people's care
- developed and maintained very positive partnerships with professionals
- embedded a culture of continual improvement, which is having a positive influence on young people's progress.

The registered manager's support and guidance results in a calm and fun environment where the underlying ethos of reflective practice successfully helps young people to progress.

Tolerance and acceptance of others is an integral part of the home's ethos. The staff appropriately plan how to integrate young people from differing backgrounds into the home. The make-up of the team reflects a variety of cultures, ages and backgrounds. This mix of staff gives young people a variety of apt role models. Young people felt able to approach staff for support; several young people said that they could go to speak to any of the staff members.

Social workers value the manager's views and are confident about the level of care provided here. Social workers say that the staff communicate with them well and support young people's care plans effectively. One social worker said, 'I cannot recognise [name of young person] as the same girl I first met. What they do here is fantastic.'

A stable staff team is deployed well. There are good numbers of staff on duty each shift. The flexible staffing levels enable the staff team to quickly change plans when necessary and provide the staff with plenty of time to balance the demands of paperwork and time with young people.

Staff supervision is regular and supports the staff to meet the responsibilities of their differing roles. The staff team is strong and cohesive, which has positively helped it to look after young people effectively. Good, regular supervision helps the staff to develop and recognise their skills as well as areas for development.

Staff training is kept up to date and reflects young people's needs. The staff regularly

attend training and they said that the content was helpful. Some of the staff are able to reflect on how their training improves their practice; other staff were less clear.

Monitoring systems are structured well, cover most aspects of the service provision and link directly to the home's development plan. For example, attention to ensuring that the staff keep up to date with record-keeping has resulted in records being more up to date. However, managers do not regularly review how well training impacts on staff's performance. The managers do not also check that the staff have the knowledge and understanding to undertake roles such as the role of appropriate adult if young people are interviewed by the police.

The independent person's reports are detailed, clear and question the quality of staff practice well. His visits always include insightful discussions with young people and staff, which assist him to understand the quality of care. However, the visits are always announced and never vary in time of day that the person visits. The visitor rarely speaks to outside professionals or parents about the quality of care provided. These are missed opportunities to ensure that their monthly visits take every opportunity to understand the quality of the service.

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: SC023645

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: Christopher Davies

Inspector

Ruth Coler: social care inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence>, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2018