

SC416915

Registered provider: Acorn Homes (UK) Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home provides care for up to five children with social and emotional difficulties. The provider also operates a school on a separate site, which children may attend. The home is operated by a private organisation.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 2014.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 February 2022

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 **outstanding**

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: 17 December 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
17/12/2019	Full	Good
29/08/2018	Full	Good
20/06/2017	Full	Good
22/02/2017	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children receive high-quality care that makes them feel valued and secure. Every child in this home has made significant and meaningful progress from their starting points.

Children make and sustain excellent relationships with the long-term and consistent staff team. The staff provide a safe and homely environment that is based on love and respect for all the children. Children are valued and their voices are heard. They have positive experiences because of the consistent and predictable routines and structure that they understand.

Staff thoughtfully plan to support the needs and current issues for each child through effective key-working practice. Meaningful topics and areas are discussed with the children so that they receive guidance and support from the staff. Key-working sessions are focused around the areas of need that have been identified in the children's placement plans. This exceptional level of support provides children opportunities to explore difficult issues. One child has needed extensive support to attend his health appointments, and staff remain sensitive and supportive to this child's fears and anxieties. However, this extensive support does not impinge on the children having fun. This approach by the staff empowers children to have positive control over important aspects of their own lives.

Staff are keenly interested in the children's education. They invest significant time and energy to encourage, support and, where necessary, motivate the children to be interested in learning. The staff's planned and structured approach throughout the COVID-19 restrictions meant that the pandemic had a minimal impact on the children's learning. The staff and the children were creative during periods of home learning and used this to redesign the garden. One child told the inspector he now has his own planter that he is lovingly growing roses in. Staff also spend time supporting the children to complete their homework, and they encourage them to expand their interests and hobbies. This broadens the children's horizons and opens up their thirst for knowledge and curiosity of the world. During this inspection, there was growing excitement and sharing of knowledge to organise LGBTQ+ history month. These examples demonstrate the confidence of the staff to engage the children in topical, meaningful discussions that promote tolerance and respect for one another.

The staff place great emphasis on children making memories and having shared experiences that they can cherish and keep forever. These are captured by a sparkle book, which is filled with photographs and other literature that capture many of their achievements, milestones, activities and special memories. One child said, 'The book holds my memories so I can enjoy them over and over again.'

Staff clearly value the importance of an environment that is respectful and maintained to a very high standard, with the children at its heart. This is enhanced by the two cats that are loved and cared for by the children and the staff. Valuable life skills, such as taking responsibility and learning to care for another being, are naturally occurring in this warm and nurturing home.

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

Children's safety and well-being is a top priority for the staff team. The strength and consistency of the safe relationships that children have with the staff make children feel secure. Children say that they feel safe and that the staff protect them. Staff are clear about their responsibilities and know how to respond to safeguarding concerns. Comprehensive training, regular supervision and team meetings provide staff with the knowledge and skills they need to inform their practice and safely care for the children.

Due to the positive relationships enjoyed between the children and staff, the use of physical intervention is rare. When restraints do occur, the registered manager carries out a thorough review. Staff use this knowledge effectively in order to identify, manage and review the risks for each child. Clear and supportive debriefs occur with the children. This gives them the space to reflect and learn from these incidents, as well as the staff.

The staff clearly understand the specific safeguarding risks and vulnerabilities that affect the children. Staff use this knowledge effectively in order to identify, manage and review the individual risks for each child. The registered manager's thoughtful assessments result in well-written guidance for the staff to follow, and this is discussed in team and supervision meetings. Daily staff handover meetings include the plans and strategies for the day, and this routine practice serves to ensure that the children's safety and well-being remain central to the staff's communication at every opportunity.

Staff work consistently with partner agencies to keep the children safe. This has resulted in effective management and safe return when children have previously gone missing from the home. The registered manager's meticulous and effective admissions practice fully includes consideration of the needs of a prospective child, alongside the needs of the current children, the home's location, and the skills of the staff. These factors drive down the risks and actual incidents of missing episodes. However, there are clear and known plans to follow should this become necessary.

Staff follow robust health and safety practice. The home is well maintained because the combination of external and internal assessments lead to necessary checks and balances being routinely completed. Staff keep clear and well-documented records and report any issues swiftly.

The registered manager ensures safer recruitment procedures are followed effectively when employing staff. This promotes the children's safety and reduces the risk of children being looked after by unsafe adults.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager is passionate and motivational. She knows each child well and holds high aspirations for each one of them. Her enthusiasm and engagement with the children and the team inspire the staff, who, in turn, appreciate her modelling of good practice and care. One staff member said, 'The manager wouldn't expect us to do anything she wouldn't do.'

The staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities. They demonstrate that exceptional childcare practice is imperative to the progress and development of the children. Their consistent approach is supported by regular and effective supervision, appraisals and team meetings. This is enhanced by the staff's motivation to learn from each other and develop their individual and team practice. These forums promote reflection and learning and provide opportunities for personal and professional development.

Leaders and managers have a culture that inspires the staff to learn and develop and promote engagement and enjoyment for the children. Community involvement and engaging in the wider network are innovative. Examples include the staff and children completing the colour run for charity, engaging with the neighbourhood's community events and positive, regular contact with the community police, health and education provisions. These opportunities provide valuable opportunities for the children to engage with, and be valuable members of, their community and society.

The registered manager is confident to challenge partner agencies when she considers that best interest decisions for children are not being made. In one example, the staff supported a child to challenge their care plan. This resulted in the child being able to remain at the home, with a clear plan in which he agreed to be supported in building relationships to return to his family. Staff regularly reflect on how they have liaised with partner agencies to ensure that it has led to the best outcomes for each child.

Social workers are extremely positive about the care that the children receive and the progress that they make. The regular reports that social workers receive are well written and reflect the children's progress and difficulties. When issues of concern occur, social workers receive clear information about how these are being managed. One social worker said she had been so impressed that she has now placed a number of children at the home due to the exceptional care that the staff provide.

The combination of exceptionally strong leadership and the quality of the care provided creates an environment where staff are proud to work and which children are proud to live in.

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: SC416915

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Acorn Homes (UK) Limited

Registered provider address: Unit 73–74, Maple Leaf Business Park, Manston, Ramsgate CT12 5GD

Responsible individual: Keith Riley

Registered manager: Tania Smith

Inspector

Rebecca Fisher, Social Care Inspector

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