

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	09/11/2016
Unique reference number	1183936
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Acorn Homes (UK)
Registered provider address	Acorns Homes (UK) Ltd, 424 Margate Road, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 6SJ

Responsible individual	David Knowles
Registered manager	Christopher Holland
Inspector	Angus MacKay

Inspection date	09/11/2016
Previous inspection judgement	N/A
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

1183936

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- Staff receive good management support from the parent organisation.
- Accommodation is of high quality.
- Keyworkers maintain good records of interventions with children.
- The health and well-being team provides support, guidance and training to staff. It also provides assessment and planned interventions with the children in line with placement plan targets.
- Staff help children to stay safe and reduce unauthorised absences from the home.
- Managers provide staff with good support, including training and regular supervision.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person(s) meets 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
40: Notification of a serious event The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if: (a) a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation; (b) an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious; (c) there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there; (d) a child protection enquiry involving a child: (i) is instigated; or (ii) concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or (e) there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (5) A notification made under this regulation: (a) must include details of: (i) the matter; (ii) the other persons, bodies or organisations (if any) who or which have been notified; and (iii) any actions taken by the registered person as a result of the matter; (b) must be made or confirmed in writing. (Regulation 40(4)(a–e)(5)(a–b))	28/02/2017
44: Independent person: visits and reports (4) The independent person must produce a report about a visit ('the independent person's report') which sets out, in particular, the independent person's opinion as to whether: (a) children are effectively safeguarded; and (b) the conduct of the home promotes children's well-being. (Regulation 44(4)(a)(b))	28/02/2017

32: Fitness of workers (2) The registered person may only: (a) employ an individual to work at the children's home; or (b) if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). (3) The requirements are that: (a) the individual is of integrity and good character; (b) the individual has the appropriate experience, qualification and skills for the work that the individual is to perform; (c) the individual is mentally and physically fit for the purposes of the work that the individual is to perform; and (d) full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in schedule 2. (Regulation 32(2)(a)(b)(3)(a–d)) In particular, ensure that appropriate checks are in place for staff who have recently been working or living abroad.	28/02/2017
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- Ensure that the review of the quality of care provided by the home focuses on the specific circumstances of the home at that particular time, and any areas of high risk to the children whom the home is designed to care for. Consider what information or data to include. The report should clearly identify any actions required for the next six months and how these actions will be addressed. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 65, paragraph 15.4)
 - Revise the statement of purpose and function, ensuring that it is child focused and indicates how the home provides individualised care to meet the quality standards for the children in its care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 14, paragraph 3.5)
- In particular, ensure that it comments on how the effectiveness of the healthcare is measured, and remove unnecessary repetitions.
- Ensure that the home complies with relevant health and safety legislation.
- in particular, ensure that the fire risk assessment identifies the required frequency of testing of portable firefighting equipment, fire detection and alarm systems, and who is responsible for this. ('Guide to the children's

homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)

- Ensure that when a child returns to the home, having been missing from care or away from the home without permission, staff record whether the responsible local authority has offered them an independent return home interview and the child's response. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30)
- Revise risk assessments, ensuring that they aid staff in identifying signs that children are at risk, and give them a framework to support children in strategies to manage and reduce any risks. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 43, paragraph 9.10)
- Establish a system for measuring and evidencing children's progress in education, including but not limited to achievement and success in formal tests and awards. Measurement should include qualitative information, such as how well the child is being prepared for the next stage of education, training or employment, and quantitative data, when available. Other factors may also be attendance and, when appropriate, the reduction in behavioural incidents, including exclusion. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 26, paragraph 5.2)
- Ensure that, when accepting placements for children, the assessment should not only show that the home can respond effectively to that child's needs, but also evidence that his or her impact on the existing group of children has been fully considered. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.4)
- Work closely with the placing authority and the virtual headteacher to support and enable the child to resume full-time education. When the placing authority does not identify an education placement for its child, challenge it to meet the child's needs. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 28, paragraph 5.15)

Full report

Information about this children's home

This is a privately run children's home offering care and accommodation for up to six children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. All children have en suite bedrooms. Children have access to a health and well-being team that provides assessment, counselling and a range of therapeutic interventions.

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
Children have good relationships with staff. They could all identify someone in the staff team whom they trust and feel safe confiding in. Prior to the inspection, several children had completed planned moves out of the home and all children present during the inspection had only recently arrived. Some of the children had not fully settled in the home or formed strong attachments yet. Children who had recently left had well-planned exits, either returning to their birth family or moving to a more independent setting. Children live in a well-maintained and comfortable home. All bedrooms are large, well furnished and have en suite facilities. Children can personalise them as they choose, with some being colourful, highly personal spaces. They say that they like their rooms and staff respect their privacy. Staff encourage children to take part in activities, both at the home and in the local community. When children try to isolate themselves, staff are diligent in positively engaging them, and seeking additional support and guidance from the health and well-being team. Children take responsibility for maintaining their own rooms and learning some basic self-help skills, including cooking and baking. Staff have a strong focus on education and enjoy good relationships with education services, including the virtual school. Managers are aware of the need to make these links more routine and established in the admissions process. Not all of the current children have engaged appropriately in education, and one was receiving an inadequate level of support from his placing authority. When children have settled in the home, they have often made good to outstanding educational progress, with good support from staff. A special educational needs coordinator said: 'Although the pupil's attendance at school dropped, staff were very supportive. They attended all meetings and were very proactive, if ultimately unsuccessful.' The staff have supported innovative approaches to children's education, in partnership with the virtual school. One child achieved excellent exam results and is now studying in the sixth form. The virtual headteacher praised the staff support for this child, saying, 'Staff escorted her into exams and picked her up. She was on time for every exam and they were making a very difficult journey. With their support, she achieved excellent exam results and is now studying at A level.' Staff work in conjunction with the health and well-being team, from referral onwards, to improve children's mental health and self-esteem, and address other presenting problems. The health and well-being team also offers support to children following absences from the home and following any restraint. It also	

supplies this support to staff following serious incidents, including restraints, aiding all parties in achieving successful outcomes from these situations. Children have successfully reduced their violent outbursts and aggression, with staff support.

The children in the home during the inspection have not fully engaged with the health and well-being team, although they have completed initial assessments. The team plans to use this information to track children's progress in self-esteem and in addressing their often-complex presenting problems. Working with staff in the home, it has aided a reduction in absences from the home and provided guidance to staff on depression and suicidal ideation in children. The team is expanding and is continuing to offer the children support in creative and engaging ways. For example, one of the children recently commenced drama workshops. However, she has not sustained her engagement with this.

As mentioned, children have reduced their absences from the home. They all have monitored targets, including not going missing, and can achieve rewards by attaining these targets. All of the children have regularly met this target and have dramatically reduced their absences from the home and consequently reduced their exposure to risks in the wider community.

Staff support children in achieving their targets and use regular, focused key-working sessions to aid in this. Key workers record sessions and provide evidence of good support following incidents, including restraints and absences, or achieving target behaviours. Staff monitor progress through regular key-working summaries and creative use of photographic evidence, linked to detailed tracking of a variety of social and interactive skills and aptitudes. Children have shown progress in self-esteem, reducing incidents of self-harm and aggression, with this support. Some of the children have achieved good to outstanding results in education. However, staff acknowledge that they do not measure broader educational progress effectively.

Children receive good support in addressing health issues. Staff work with them, encouraging healthy eating and good primary healthcare. When the team lacks knowledge, members seek appropriate training with assistance from parents and social workers. However, one parent commented that, although the staff worked well with his child, it would have been preferable for them to have the knowledge and competency to meet his needs prior to accepting him into the home. The management team has acted on this and say that they now ensure that this occurs prior to any child arriving in the home. The health and well-being team has provided cognitive behavioural therapy, counselling, and drama and movement therapy to individual children. This has resulted in some improvements, including aiding one child to gain an understanding of how his thoughts affect his behaviours, and of their consequences.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The home's management team notifies the Local Authority Safeguarding Board and designated officer of all relevant incidents. It deals with allegations swiftly, ensuring that it safeguards staff and children. The health and well-being team supports all parties in any such situation, assisting them in achieving positive outcomes. The management team conducts its own investigations, identifying learning from any incident and enacting this to enhance the good care of children. Managers provide good staff training in the safeguarding of children, including current and emerging threats such as radicalisation, and the risks of child sexual exploitation, online grooming and internet safety. Staff understand how to apply this learning in practice and children confirm that key-working sessions focus on relevant risks, enhancing their safe care. Staff make helpful recordings of these regular key-working sessions, addressing key areas of risk. One child said: 'Staff are always on at me about things like staying safe. If I try to leave, they are really irritating, following me and persuading me to return.' Risk assessments identify significant risks for individual children and include measures for staff to contain the risk. Staff regularly review them, including after any incident. However, they do not include clear risk-reduction strategies to aid children's progress. The organisation has a thorough recruitment procedure that staff generally rigorously apply to all appointments. Staff files contain evidence of most required checks and of decision making in appointments. During the inspection, a small sample of staff files was scrutinised. One appointment involved seeking a certificate of good conduct for an overseas applicant. The registered manager allowed this member of staff to commence work prior to obtaining this check. There is no record on the staff file of the manager's decision making or risk assessment, leaving staff and children vulnerable to working with an unsuitable person. Staff are knowledgeable about the home's missing from care procedures and implement them rigorously. When possible, staff go to look for missing children and have travelled over 60 miles to pick up or support missing children. Staff always request a return interview from social workers, and will provide this service for them or arrange for the health and well-being team to undertake this. However, staff were unaware that local authorities must provide an opportunity for children to have an independent return home interview, and few children have received this important additional safeguard. Staff encourage desired behaviours in children through the use of rewards and sanctions. They directly link rewards to targets in children's care plans. Children earn rewards by meeting personal targets, which they review and discuss with their key worker and the health and well-being team. The management team has	

worked with staff to ensure that sanctions are appropriate and have a clear link to the actual behaviour. The system has positively supported the reduction in aggression and episodes of missing from care.

The management team ensures that all relevant health and safety checks are in place. Staff and children have all practised fire evacuation and the company has been conducting tests of fire safety equipment, including emergency lighting and smoke detection. However, the fire risk assessment is basic and does not include guidance on the recommended regularity of this testing of portable firefighting equipment, emergency lighting and smoke detectors, which is necessary to ensure the safety of children and staff.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers The registered manager has been managing children's homes since 1998. He has a suitable level 5 qualification and a positive inspection record. He was absent due to sickness prior to the inspection and tendered his resignation during the inspection. However, due to his planned move to another setting, the company has already recruited a replacement manager. The quality assurance manager is providing temporary management cover until the newly recruited manager is available in December 2016. The quality assurance manager was providing effective guidance and support to staff during the inspection. The company has good succession planning, including ensuring that all deputies undertake the level 5 qualification. Supervision occurs as described in the statement of purpose. It is frequent and perceived as helpful by staff. Records show supervision to be helpful in developing staff and providing them with the opportunity to reflect on their practice and improve their interactions with the children. Staff have completed their half-yearly induction programmes and have appraisals planned to occur after their first year in post. One member of staff said, 'Supervision is helpful and happens every two weeks. It helps me to know what progress I have made. In particular, it has helped me to understand how to involve children in activities and education.' Independent visitors have been thorough in their scrutiny of records and observation of interactions in the home. Reports are detailed and provide good analysis of the functioning of the home. The reports are a useful management tool, including helpful analysis and further improvement actions for the manager to address. Each report includes an update from the registered manager on progress, with previous targets showing that the management team is using them appropriately to aid improvements in meeting the quality standards. However, the reports do not explicitly say if staff safeguard children effectively or if they promote children's well-being.	

The registered manager has completed a review of the quality of care. The report focuses on the care provided and the experiences of the children living there. It contains an appropriate level of data, with some analysis of this and evidence of progression by the children. However, the report does not set targets for the next six months. This diminishes its effectiveness as a tool for continuous improvement in the home. The quality assurance manager has completed an additional review of the functioning of the home, creating a development plan from this. She evidences a reasonable understanding of the children, staff and general functioning of the home.

The statement of purpose is a lengthy document which contains some repetition and some slightly confusing information in the section on enjoyment and achievement. In other sections, it does provide a picture of how the staff safeguard and aid the development of children in the home. However, it does not explain how the effectiveness of the healthcare is evidenced and measured. The document contains details of all of the staff employed in the company, rather than the core team working at this setting. The young people's guide is easier to read and provides children with useful information on expectations at the home and their rights. The senior managers, including the quality assurance manager, were aware of the need to review and redraft the statement of purpose, and had commenced this prior to the inspection.

Managers apply the home's admissions policy as described in the statement of purpose when deciding on new admissions to the home. The policy talks about ensuring the best match for the referral, but does not comment on the impact on the young people at the home. There is no evidence of this being included in the matching process. The current management team has identified this as an area for development and the home has commenced a review of the admissions policy. The new procedure includes a sophisticated interactive assessment process which includes pre-programmed links to notify all relevant parties and engage them in the matching of the young person. The system includes notifications to the virtual school to aid the early identification of a suitable education provision for new admissions.

The management team has evidence of challenges that it has made to placing authorities to ensure that children receive appropriate education. However, this has not happened in all cases. The virtual headteacher praised past challenges raised by the manager and staff in the home and the support that they have given to students, saying, 'They have always been supportive of children and the virtual school, and their responses have been very measured.' However, staff had no routine contact with the virtual headteacher, leading to at least one child not receiving adequate education. The management team is implementing a new referral process intended to enhance children's educational opportunities through early engagement with the virtual school, as described above.

Staff do not always make notifications of serious events in a timely manner. One recent notification was made a week after the incident. In addition, staff have written some notifications with confusing detail, making it difficult to follow the

sequence of events. Some notifications have not made clear what the registered person considers to be serious, or the actions that the registered person has taken as a result of the incident. The quality assurance manager has recently provided guidance to staff on these issues and the content of reports has improved. She has included a review of notifications in her development plan for the home.

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of looked after children is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place, however, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, 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 who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service 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'.

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