

2509731

Registered provider: Acorn Residential Care Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

A private company operates the home. The home is registered to provide care for up to two children with social and emotional difficulties.

There is a permanent manager who registered with Ofsted in April 2023 and is suitably experienced and qualified.

The inspection started on 15 January 2025. Inspectors returned on 30 January 2025 to gather additional evidence in line with 'Ofsted inspections and visits: deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence' policy.

Inspection dates: 15 and 16 January 2025 and 30 January 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and/or the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 6 September 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
06/09/2023	Full	Good
18/10/2022	Full	Requires improvement to be good
22/06/2021	Full	Good
11/12/2019	Full	Requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Children's overall experiences and safety have been affected by some serious safeguarding failings, which have increased children's vulnerabilities and left them exposed to harm. In addition, leadership and management systems in the home are inadequate. For example, leaders and managers fail to take effective action when children make allegations of abuse against staff working at the home. As a result of these findings, the registration of the home was suspended, to prevent children from being exposed to further risk of harm.

At the start of the inspection, there was one child living in the home, who was present and spoken to. The child has been living in the home for over three years. One child has moved out since the last inspection.

The quality of children's day-to-day experiences is varied and dependent on which staff are supporting them. For example, some staff and the registered manager have developed good relationships with the children. However, other staff have not developed positive relationships with the children. One child said that they 'hate two people' and will 'avoid' these staff in the home. Leaders and managers did not take sufficient action to address the child's concerns. Children do not always receive an individualised approach to their care, which has the potential to leave them vulnerable.

Despite the shortfalls identified, children make some progress. For example, children have good attendance at school and are supported by staff to achieve. For one child, staff received training in phonics, so that they could work alongside education professionals to improve the child's reading skills. This support helps children to enjoy and engage with their learning.

Children regularly spend time with the people who are important to them. Staff prioritise children's relationships with their loved ones. Staff have successfully supported one child to move back to their family home and another child's family time has significantly increased. As a result, children stay connected and maintain relationships with their families.

The current child's bedroom was nicely decorated, and personalised. In contrast, some areas of the home are in need of redecoration and refurbishment.

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

There have been repeated failings to respond to serious allegations made by children living at the home. Allegations have not been investigated appropriately and those involved or who witnessed these alleged incidents have not been consulted as part of these processes. The registered manager and staff do not demonstrate that they have the skills and knowledge to keep children safe. Their understanding of whistle-blowing

procedures is poor and the registered manager's awareness of the barriers to staff whistle-blowing is inadequate, and indicative of a closed culture in the home.

Staff fail to act to safeguard children in line with their safeguarding roles and responsibilities. In addition, leaders and managers lack professional curiosity. For example, managers do not always explore the causes of injuries to children. On one occasion, the registered manager failed to identify that a child had bruising to their head following an incident. This lack of professional curiosity leaves children at risk of harm and creates a weak culture of safeguarding in the care team.

Leaders fail to ensure that restraint records are clear and accurate. Some records of incidents lack the required information and robust management evaluation. This prevents effective oversight of whether the physical intervention used was necessary, proportionate and effective. Furthermore, it is unclear when and how children and staff are spoken to after incidents, which limits the opportunity for reflection and learning.

On some occasions, staff help children to reflect on their behaviour and make positive choices. Incentives and rewards are tailored to the individual child. Consequences used are proportionate and help the children to learn.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Leadership and management of the home are inadequate. Leaders have failed to ensure children's safety, which has compromised children's experience of care. Since the last inspection, the registered manager has led on several investigations in response to serious allegations of abuse raised by children. However, she has not received any formal training or support to enable her to perform this role. Consequently, the safeguarding concerns have not been investigated appropriately and children have been left vulnerable to harm.

Management oversight and monitoring of the home are poor. The registered manager's oversight is poor and insular and does not effectively review the quality of care and fully understand children's day-to-day experiences. Furthermore, there is a lack of external scrutiny from the responsible individual. Oversight by leaders is ineffective and has not supported the protection of children or improved the quality of care that they receive.

An independent visitor attends the home on a monthly basis. However, the visits frequently take place during school hours and on many occasions reports have not included the children's voice. Children are therefore not routinely given opportunities to raise any concerns they might have with someone who is not directly involved in their care.

Training and development systems fail to adequately equip staff with the knowledge and skills to safeguard children. Supervision sessions are sometimes used to provide staff with additional support. However, leaders are not using training and their systems effectively to fully develop staff to improve their safeguarding practice and ability to manage complex incidents.

The registered manager ensures that the home is suitably staffed. As a result, children receive care from staff who know them well.

Following the significant concerns identified during this inspection, the registered person applied to voluntarily cancel the registration of this home with immediate effect from 30 January 2025.

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, The 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
The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child; help each child to understand how to keep safe; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; and take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iv)(v)(vi)) In particular, leaders and managers must ensure that staff assess children's risks effectively, recognise when children are at risk of harm and take action to keep children safe. This particularly relates to incidents involving physical restraint with children, and when there are identified concerns with staff safeguarding practice. This also refers to the registered manager's understanding and implementation of safeguarding procedures and the actions to take when she has identified concerns for the safety and welfare of children.	31 March 2025

The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose; demonstrate that practice in the home is informed and improved by taking into account and acting on— feedback on the experiences of children, including complaints received; and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(g)(ii)(h)) In particular, leaders and managers must ensure that the home has suitably trained and skilled staff to provide consistent care to children and protect them from harm. In addition, the registered persons should ensure that they have effective oversight and monitoring of children's risks and staff's responses to significant incidents in the home. It further relates to the manager's oversight of the quality of care children receive in the home. The registered persons must ensure that they act on children's views and feedback about their experiences, for example, their relationships with individual staff. Managers must also have clear monitoring and review systems in place to improve practice and understand children's progress and experiences.	31 March 2025
The registered person must ensure that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month.	31 March 2025

When the independent person is carrying out a visit, the registered person must help the independent person—

if they consent, to interview in private such of the children, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as the independent person requires.

In particular, the registered person should ensure the independent visitor actively seeks to obtain the views of children living in the home during their routine visits.

(Regulation 44 (1) (2)(a))

In particular, the independent person's oversight and reports must set out specific actions that the registered person should take to improve the quality of care received by children in the home. Furthermore, the independent person should ensure that children are given the opportunity to share their views about the care that they receive.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure the home provides a nurturing and supportive environment that meets the needs of the children. Specifically, this relates to the bathroom window not providing sufficient privacy and dignity, lack of timely redecoration following occurrence of damp in a child's bedroom and closing the gate in line with the location risk assessment, due to the home being on a main road. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- The registered person should ensure that staff can access appropriate resources to support their training needs. Specifically, this relates to not all staff receiving training specific to the needs of a child living in the home. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.11)

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: 2509731

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Acorn Residential Care Ltd

Registered provider address: 9 Summerfield Road, Wolverhampton, West Midlands
WV1 4PR

Responsible individual:

Registered manager: Jemma Pollock

Inspectors

Louise Naylor, Social Care Inspector
Sonia Sullivan, Social Care Inspector
Dean Wilton, Social Care Inspector
Mark Dickinson, Regulatory Inspection Manager

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