

SC066115

Registered provider: Alliance Care & Education Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is registered to accommodate four young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home is privately owned.

Inspection dates: 6 to 7 December 2017

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 **requires improvement to be good**

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

Date of last inspection: 2 February 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: Improved effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- Based on their starting points when first entering the home, most young people make good progress in all areas of their lives.
- Young people benefit from living in a structured environment with clearly

defined boundaries. This helps them to grow in confidence, enjoy improved health, reduce risky or challenging behaviours and remain safe.

- Young people develop strong and trusting relationships with staff who act as good role models and genuinely care about their welfare. The staff team is relatively stable with few recent changes. This provides young people with a high consistency of care.
- Staff work co-operatively with partner agencies and, wherever possible, parents and carers. This reflects the inclusive culture in the home that encourages young people to have a voice, which allows them to influence the day-to-day running of the home as well as being party to important decisions about their lives.
- At the time the inspection took place, the home was between managers. Other senior staff have worked supportively with care staff to keep the home functioning, that ensuring the needs of young people continue to be met and that the overall standard of care does not slip.

The children's home's areas for development:

- Re-generate the formal staff supervision and appraisal programmes to ensure that they are implemented with greater consistency.
- Ensure that the admission and discharge records are kept fully up to date.
- Staff should regularly review providing young people with a home computer alongside assessed risk.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
02/02/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness
22/08/2016	Full	Good
11/01/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
19/05/2015	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
33: Employment of staff The registered person must ensure that all employees receive practice related supervision by a person with appropriate experience; and have their performance and fitness to perform their roles appraised at least once every year. Regulation 33(4)(b)(c)	30/01/2018
36: Children's case records The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child; with the address, and type of establishment or accommodation, to which the child is to go when the child ceases to be accommodated in the home. Regulation 36(1)(a) Schedule3 (6)	29/12/2017

Recommendations

- Children should have access to a computer and the internet to support their education and learning, unless there are specific safeguarding reasons why this would be inappropriate. In such cases, the home should consider whether and how it can support the child to access a computer and the internet safely. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 29, paragraph 5.19)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The inspection took place following the recent resignation of the home's registered manager. A new manager has been appointed and was due to take up their post the day after the previous managers official end date, which coincided with the final day of

inspection. When the inspection took place, the previous manager was on annual leave and was not available.

Apart from this, the home has experienced a settled twelve months with all young people in stable, long-term placements. The staff team has remained relatively unchanged since the previous inspection, which has provided young people with a high standard of care that has remained consistent. As a result, all young people are continuing to progress in all areas of their lives.

A strength of the home is the continuity of the main staff group. This has allowed strong and trusting relationships to develop between young people and a staff group they have got to know well. A young person told the inspector, 'Of all the places I have lived in this one is the best. Staff are mad. You can have a laugh but they also really care for us.' Another said, 'I love most of the staff, they help and support me when I am unhappy.' A young person soon to leave said of his key worker, 'Whoever gets him as a key worker when I have gone is very lucky.'

The progress made by young people along with their identified needs, are clearly evidenced in the range of planning documents, assessments of risk and strategies used to manage behaviour. Regular review and updating keeps them current. Further evidence of their progress is found in weekly reports sent to social workers and in the high quality, comprehensive reports prepared by staff prior to a young person's review. Collectively they track and evaluate progress as well as identifying areas of continuing need.

A visiting independent reviewing officer told the inspector, 'During her time in the home she has progressed well developing a more positive attitude. She is more confident, self-motivated and has real purpose and ambition for the future.' A social worker said, 'The placement has been spot on from the go. The change in him in the last year has been remarkable.' A parent said, 'Staff are excellent with many going beyond the call of duty. Staff have high skill levels, they cope with issues really well.'

The home has a registered school on site that was inspected separately at the same time as the children's home. The school inspection will generate a separate report. However, only one of the four young people resident attends the on-site school, with the others attending separate schools within their original home communities. The high attendance levels achieved by all four young people, reflects the educational progress they are making.

Staff are extremely committed to supporting and maintaining school placements. This is reflected in the logistical jig-saw that takes place daily to transport young people to and from their respective schools which are spread around the region. A social worker acknowledged this when saying, 'Staff are very committed to meeting and maintaining her needs.' Staff also go to great lengths to support young people through difficulties they may have at school. For example, staying around in case issues arise in class and by being there at lunch-times when a young person was not allowed to stay in school over the lunch-break.

That commitment is recognised by the young person concerned who says, 'Staff really stuck up for me particularly with my school. I have improved so much I am in school full-time and I don't get into the same sort of bother with teachers anymore.' His social worker backs this up when saying, 'I am very impressed with the dedication and commitment of staff in supporting the school placement under what have been at times, very difficult circumstances.'

Staff work diligently and at times creatively to repair, encourage and maintain relationships and contact between young people and their families. For example, in facilitating and supporting contact that could end in crises, due to the sensitivity of relationships between some young people and family members. Family members appreciate this with one saying, 'The staff have been very supportive to us. They listen and care.'

The arrangements to promote young people's health are good. They all currently enjoy good health with their everyday health needs being addressed effectively through community based facilities. In addition to this, the home have a therapist who visits regularly to carry out individualised work with young people. Other specialist services can be accessed and brought in where necessary. Detailed health plans reflect the medical histories and the current health needs of young people.

The promotion of health is an area in which the home is working hard to improve. For example, a young person spoke in some detail, displaying a good level of knowledge around the healthy eating programme she has embarked on. She has also integrated a fitness regime to compliment this. Staff also take account of fitness and exercise which is heavily promoted when discussing weekly activity plans with young people.

Young people are encouraged to participate in a wide range of community based activities. Good staffing levels and transport allows for both collective and individual needs to be met. For example, a young person told the inspector about his trips with a staff member to watch football matches. Another spoke about attending army cadets twice weekly. Activities are discussed and chosen with a view to promoting existing interests or developing new ones.

The strong relationships created between young people and staff enhance the high levels of communication and consultation taking place. Weekly meetings between staff and young people take place, but young people prefer to rely on informal consultation. This works because of the high levels of ongoing communication and the confidence young people have in approaching staff on issues of concern, or in making choices. Encouraging and developing skills in preparation for greater independence commences when young people are first admitted. For example there is a clear expectation they will keep their own bedroom clean and tidy as well as helping with various chores around the home. Staff work well with young people to develop their skills and give them experiences that will serve them well in the future. For example, in handling money, traveling independently and in planning and preparing meals.

The home is a large detached building set in its own grounds and blends well into the local community. It is spacious and overall, has a good standard of repair, fixtures, fittings décor and equipment. Bedrooms are single occupancy. They are decorated and personalised to reflect the taste of the occupant. Young people were observed as being comfortable and at ease in their environment. Throughout the visit they mixed well with staff and each other, creating a calm, happy and relaxed atmosphere. Currently the home does not have its own home computer, which is an issue to some young people and staff.

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

There are good systems in place which keep young people safe. For example, detailed risk assessments that are updated regularly, identify risks in and around the home as well as the local community. Service contracts are maintained which helps to ensure that safety equipment is working efficiently. Visitor's credentials are checked on arrival, adding to a sense of security.

Strong, professional relationships with external agencies charged with keeping young people safe are maintained. The safeguarding procedures adopted and implemented keep young people safe. This is helped by a multi-agency response should a safeguarding issues arise. Staff are familiar with and understand safeguarding procedures and recognise their own role and responsibilities in this area. All staff have received training in this field which is refreshed regularly. All young people confirm they feel safe living the home.

The challenges posed by some young people at times can test the skills and resources of staff. It is to their credit and a reflection of their resilience and professionalism that many challenges posed, are dealt with quickly and efficiently before they become behaviour management issues. A confident, staff team have the skills to manage any challenges posed in a supportive and caring manner. As a result, young people benefit from living in a non-punitive environment.

Behavioural incidents, including those requiring physical intervention have been rare during the last year. Incidents are managed effectively. Senior staff monitor and evaluate incidents to look for indicators, trends or patterns. This helps to improve practice and aid consistency. This has resulted in a significant downward trend of serious incidents over the last year. A relative of a young person told the inspector, 'In his time at the home he has become more mature and responsible. This has been the right place for him at the right time.'

Local protocols along with the homes own procedures are followed should a young person go missing. Since the previous inspection the number of incidents occurring are low. This is another area where a significant downward trend has taken place within the last year.

Bullying in the home is not an area that raised any concerns from young people. However, staff remain vigilant and step in at the first sign of anyone falling out. Good

staffing levels mean opportunities for bullying are limited.

The recruitment and clearance procedures for new staff are thorough and meet with regulatory requirement and current guidance. Longer serving staff are being re-checked regularly which is deemed to be good practice. This ensures that young people are only being looked after by staff who have been suitably cleared and recruited.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The first paragraph of this report explains the situation regarding the position of manager at the time the inspection visit took place. Over recent months there has been slippage of some areas, notably with a lack of consistency regarding the formal staff supervision programme and with no recent appraisal of staff having taken place. Other areas of slippage noted include omission of some discharge addresses in the admission and discharge records.

However, this and a reported lack of direction imposed on staff has generated a spirited and collective response from the rest of the staff team. For example, senior staff have provided basic support to the rest of the staff group, which has helped to maintain staff morale. This has ensured the care given to young people along with the homes own routines and function has remained intact. At no time throughout the inspection could the management issues described, be seen to have impacted negatively on young people or on the progress they are making.

Staff are encouraged and supported with their training needs. There are clear expectations placed on them to complete the core staff training programme. Recently this has been extended following the procurement of a new training provider. This is aimed to develop and refresh the skills required to address the ever changing needs of young people. The staff group is well experienced and professionally qualified. This has helped them to negotiate the last few months without letting standards of care slip.

An external senior manager is active in monitoring the home regularly and is providing support to the staff team. The issues highlighted in this report and reflected in the requirements made, have been picked up by both the external manager and in the monthly external monitoring of the home. The swift appointment of the new manager should allow those issues to be addressed quickly.

No requirements or recommendations were made following the last inspection. Some areas of improvement have taken place. For example with the quality and detail contained in impact risk assessments and reports produced for young people's reviews. The issues that have necessitated the two requirements should be quickly rectified with the advent of a new manager. Despite this, the care of young people has remained high with staff fully committed to meeting their needs. A young person told the inspector, 'Being here has helped me a lot, like I can now think things through better. If it wasn't for the staff, I don't know where I would be.' A social worker reflected the views of others in saying, 'This has been a really good placement for him where he has received such a lot of support, which has helped with his transition.'

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: SC066115

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Alliance Care & Education Limited

Registered provider address: Brow Top Farm, Quernmore, LANCASTER, LA2 0QW

Responsible individual: Andrew Taylor

Registered manager: Post Vacant

Inspector(s)

Graham Robinson, social care inspector

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