

Children's home inspection – Full

Inspection date	30/11/2016
Unique reference number	SC366002
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Alliance Care and Education Limited
Registered provider address	Brow Top Farm, Quernmore, Lancaster LA2 0QW

Responsible individual	Andrew Taylor
Registered manager	Robert Allen
Inspector	Marina Tully and Michelle Edge

Inspection date	30/11/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Improved effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Requires improvement
The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

SC366002

Summary of findings

The children's home provision requires improvement because:

- Not all young people benefit from having detailed education and health plans in place to ensure that staff understand their needs, monitor their progress and support them to reach their full potential.
- Relationships between young people and staff are variable. Young people do not develop trusting, warm relationships with all members of the team. As a result, some staff struggle to implement safe boundaries within the home and to manage young people's behaviour effectively.
- The home is not maintained to a high standard. In particular, staff do not support young people effectively to keep their personal space clean and tidy, which undermines a nurturing homely environment.
- Measures of control and discipline, including restraints, are not consistently recorded or evaluated to measure their effectiveness.
- Safeguarding practice is not yet good because of the following reasons: staff do not consistently follow young people's risk assessments; staff do not demonstrate an in-depth understanding of young people's vulnerabilities when assessing risk; staff do not manage situations effectively to prevent young people from harming each other; and staff do not ensure that the daily routines within the home promote young people's safety.
- Recruitment practice can be improved to ensure that all pre-employment checks are undertaken prior to staff taking up a post.
- Internal quality assurance procedures are not effective. Consequently, not all shortfalls are being identified and addressed sufficiently. Furthermore, quality assurance reports and the updated statement of purpose have not been sent to Ofsted as required. All of this weakens service development and the external evaluation of the service.

The children's home strengths

- Young people enjoy a range of hobbies and activities that support their social and emotional development.
- Young people benefit from keeping in touch with their family and friends and this helps them to maintain a true sense of who they are.
- Young people who attend the company's school make noticeable progress from their starting points.
- The in-house therapy service is supporting young people to address their emotions and experience and to develop better coping strategies.
- The registered manager demonstrates commitment to improving the service and acknowledges the home's strengths and the areas that need addressing.

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 must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
8: The education standard In order to meet the education standard, the registered person must ensure: (2)(a) that staff: (i) help each child to achieve the child's education and training targets, as recorded in the child's relevant plans. In particular, ensuring that all young people have an education plan in place that clearly documents their needs and progress.	14/01/2017
10: The health and well-being standard In order to meet the health and well-being standard, the registered person must ensure: (2)(a) that staff help each child to: (i) achieve the health and well-being outcomes that are recorded in the child's relevant plans. In particular, ensuring that all young people have a health plan in place that clearly documents and reflects their needs and progress.	14/01/2017
11: The positive relationships standard In order to meet the positive relationships standard, the registered person must ensure: (1) children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on: (a) mutual respect and trust; (b) an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and (c) positive responses to other children and adults.	14/01/2017
12: The protection of children standard	14/01/2017

In order to meet the protection of children standard, the registered person must ensure: (2)(a) that staff: (I) 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, if any, harm to the child; (iv) manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; (b) that the home's day-to-day care is delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm.	
13: The leadership and management standard In order to meet the leadership and management standard, the registered person must: (2)(h) use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home.	14/01/2017
The registered person must keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it. Also, to notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (3)(a)(b))	14/01/2017
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The registered person may only employ an individual to work at the children's home if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). The requirements are that 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)(3)(d))	14/01/2017
The registered person must ensure that: (3)(a) within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a child in the home, a record is made which includes: (i) the name of the child; (ii) details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of the measure; (iii) the date, time and location of the use of the measure; (iv) a description of the measure and its duration; (v) details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure; (vi) the name of the person who used the measure ('the user'),	14/01/2017

and of any other person present when the measure was used; (vii) the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; (viii) description of any injury to the child or any other person, or any medical treatment administered, as a result of the measure. (b) within 48 hours of the use of the measure, the registered person, or a person who is authorised by the registered person to do so ("the authorised person"): (i) has spoken to the user about the measure; (ii) has signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and (c) within 5 days of the use of the measure, the registered person or the authorised person adds to the record confirmation that they have spoken to the child about the measure. (Regulation 35(a)(b)(c))	
The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children ("a quality of care review") at least once every 6 months. In order to complete a quality of care review, the registered person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating: (2)(a) the quality of care provided for children; (b) the feedback and opinions of children about the children's home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it; and (c) any actions that the registered person considers necessary in order to improve or maintain the quality of care provided for children. (3) After completing a quality of care review, the registered person must produce a written report about the quality of care review and the actions which the registered person intends to take as a result of the quality of care review ('the quality of care review report'). (4) The registered person must: (a) supply to HMCI a copy of the quality of care review report within 28 days of the date on which the quality of care review is completed; and (b) make a copy of the quality of care review report available on request to a placing authority, if the placing authority is not the parent of a child accommodated in the home. (5) The system referred to in paragraph (2) must provide for ascertaining and considering the opinions of children, their parents, placing authorities and staff. (Regulation 45 (1)(2)(3)(4)(5))	14/01/2017

Recommendation

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

- Ensure that all staff record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes from fact, opinion and third-party information. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. ('Guide to the children's home's regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

Full report

Information about this children's home

This privately owned children's home provides care and accommodation for up to four young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
22/03/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
10/11/2015	Full	Requires improvement
30/03/2015	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
20/08/2014	Full	Adequate

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Requires improvement
The systems in place for recording and monitoring young people's progress are not consistent or effective. Some young people attend the company's school and these young people benefit from having detailed education plans that clearly document their needs and progress. The head teacher of the company's school provided positive feedback on the young people's achievements and confirmed that they are progressing from their starting points. He commented, 'The home is doing everything it can to get young people to school and it communicates with the school every day. It has put routines, incentives and rewards in place to encourage young people to attend school.' In contrast, progress for the young people who attend other schools is less clear, as the schools do not have education plans in place that reflect the young people's needs and achievements. Improvements are needed in the planning and monitoring of all young people's education to ensure consistency in how they are supported. Similarly, inconsistencies were found in the promotion of young people's health. For example, some young people have access to weekly sessions with the company therapist and this supports them to address their emotions and develop better coping strategies. Additionally, staff encourage and support young people to attend their routine appointments with the dentist and opticians, which supports their physical well-being. However, some young people's health plans lack details in respect of their specific needs and omit any guidance on promoting good health. On occasions, there was no evidence of staff taking action to address specific health needs; for example, one young person's health plan specified a referral to drug and alcohol services and there was no evidence of this being followed through. Young people's relationships with staff vary. While some staff members establish positive relationships with young people, this is not consistent across the team. This was clearly demonstrated in young people's comments that ranged from 'I like [staff name], she doesn't talk down to me' to 'Staff don't get it and shout at us. Some staff are worse than the kids.' Inconsistencies in how staff gain young people's trust and respect is undermining the team's ability to effectively engage with young people and, therefore, to have a positive influence on their behaviour. Young people are supported to access a variety of hobbies and activities, such as art, drama, rap music and football. This provides young people with opportunities to experience different activities and develop new skills, talents and interests. This, in turn, strengthens their confidence and self-esteem. Young people's artwork is exceptional and clearly demonstrates their enthusiasm and talent. This is proudly	

displayed in the manager's office.

Young people are fully supported to maintain contact with those who are significant to them and this is helping them to develop a greater understanding of their background and identity. A young person said, 'I get to see my friends and I can do activities. I see my mum and dad and this is going well.'

Whenever possible, young people are well prepared for moving into and out of the home. This is reflected in a young person's comments, 'I was made to feel welcome when I came. I was shown my room and I unpacked my own stuff. I didn't want staff to help me so I did it by myself.' Young people are provided with a budget when they move into the home, which they can use to personalise their bedrooms. This helps them to settle and promotes their individuality. However, staff are not supporting young people to keep their bedrooms clean and tidy. Some young people's bedrooms had dirty dishes and their clothes were thrown over the floor; also, other areas of the home were unclean, including the young people's bathroom. This undermines the sense of a welcoming, nurturing and well-cared-for home where young people constantly feel valued and respected.

The registered manager is currently looking at ways of improving young people's involvement in care planning. This includes the introduction of a new care plan document that young people will complete with support from the staff. Young people attend weekly meetings with staff, which are intended to provide young people with a regular opportunity to have their say and get involved in the running of the home. Nevertheless, staff often use these meetings to remind young people of their chores rather than using them as a forum to seek their views. Young people reflect this in their comments, 'Young people's meetings are like a wrestling meeting. We aren't listened to as they [meetings] are not long enough and if we raise stuff about staff they don't like it and then it all goes pear-shaped.' Staff miss good opportunities to seek young people's views to ensure their full involvement in the development of the home.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
Safeguarding practice is variable. Some young people benefit from detailed risk assessments that provide clear direction on what action staff must take to minimise harm; for example, staff follow clear strategies and procedures when young people go missing and ensure that all relevant safeguarding professionals are made aware. However, the home's records of such incidents do not detail the circumstances surrounding the young person's return, or document if a return interview has been conducted. Recording shortfalls are hindering the manager's ability to monitor	

effectively any emerging patterns or associated risks when young people go missing. Furthermore, these shortfalls are not ensuring that young people are consistently provided with the opportunity to discuss, with an independent person, the reasons why they went missing to help prevent reoccurrence.

Not all young people's risk assessments are robust and some contain stigmatising language that fails to differentiate between fact and opinion, in particular child sexual exploitation assessments. Such language is unhelpful to young people should they read their records. Furthermore, it does not demonstrate that staff have a good understanding of young people's vulnerability when assessing child sexual exploitation.

Incidents of disruptive and aggressive behaviour, involving children threatening and assaulting each other and causing damage to the home, have led to an increase in physical restraints. On occasion, staff have not followed young people's risk assessments and have not used the specified restraint technique identified in the young person's risk assessment. Physical interventions are not consistently recorded and some restraint records lack detail, such as the type of hold used and its duration. Similarly, other behaviour management strategies, such as rewards and sanctions, are not routinely evaluated to ensure that they are effective and help young people to learn and move on. This is preventing the manager from robustly monitoring the behaviour management strategies used in the home to ensure that only safe and effective measures are applied.

The home's day-to-day care does not fully promote a safer home environment. Staff do not check young people's bedrooms as part of their daily routines to ensure that their bedrooms are hazard-free, clean and safe. Consequently, young people have had dangerous items in their rooms that could be used as a weapon, such as large pieces of broken furniture.

In the main, allegations made against staff are swiftly reported to external safeguarding professionals, including Ofsted. This ensures independent scrutiny of the home's safeguarding practice, which enhances young people's welfare and safety.

Staff recruitment practice is not yet robust enough to ensure that only suitable people are employed to work at the home. The shortfalls found included a missing application form and not verifying references prior to staff taking up a post. Lack of rigour in pre-employment checks is placing young people at risk of potential harm.

Young people are not afraid to make a complaint and the manager responds to their complaints quickly and fairly. When necessary, independent advocates are commissioned to support young people to escalate their concerns. This ensures that young people have access to independent people who they can confide in and which, in turn, enhances their welfare and safety.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement
The registered manager is suitably qualified and experienced. He has been in post for less than a year. He was promoted from a deputy manager's position from another home within the company and this is his first registered manager's position. He acknowledges that he is new to the role and recognises the areas that he needs to develop, in particular his confidence in challenging staff, delegating tasks more effectively and improving quality assurance systems. Since the registered manager took up post, the home has undergone significant changes, including the introduction of six new members of staff and three new young people to the home. These changes have clearly affected the manager's ability to sustain a good standard of care, while simultaneously embedding his own management practice. Without a doubt, the registered manager genuinely cares about the young people and he demonstrates commitment to improving the home. The home now employs a sufficient number of suitably qualified and experienced staff; all staff either have, or are working towards acquiring, the relevant qualification. The recent recruitment of new staff has reduced the need to use agency workers. However, when temporary cover is needed, regular agency staff are used to enhance continuity in care. Although staff members receive monthly professional supervision and attend regular team meetings, staff supervision and team meeting records lacked detail and did not demonstrate in-depth case discussion or document agreed actions when necessary. This highlights missed opportunities for the registered manager to monitor, evaluate and continually develop staff practice and, thus, make continued improvements within the home. Supportive links have been established with parents and other professionals, including placing authority commissioners, social workers and the company's head teacher. These partnerships are essential to promoting joint working to help improve young people's outcomes. The home's statement of purpose has been updated and provides a clear picture of the service aims and objectives. This ensures that parents and placing authorities know what to expect from the start. However, the updated version has not been sent to Ofsted as required. Monthly independent monitoring benefits young people by providing them with regular opportunities to share their experiences with an impartial person. In the	

main, these reports are comprehensive and frequently raise actions to support improvements within the home. Furthermore, Ofsted receives these reports in good time and this is enabling the regulator to evaluate the service, including the views of young people and other professionals.

Improvements can be made in the manager's monitoring of the service to ensure that the home's records are sufficiently detailed, updated and clearly document all decisions and agreed actions. Furthermore, the registered manager has not provided Ofsted with the six monthly quality of care reviews as required, which prevents external scrutiny of the care provided in 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 children looked after 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 that 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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