

SC390751

Registered provider: Acorn Care (UK) Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is run by a private organisation. It provides care for up to 5 children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

At the time of this inspection, 4 children were living in the home. The inspector spoke with 2 children.

The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2022.

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 May 2026

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 **outstanding**

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

Date of last inspection: 30 July 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
30/07/2025	Full	Outstanding
28/08/2024	Full	Good
20/09/2023	Full	Good
25/10/2022	Full	Good

Summary of findings

Staff build warm nurturing relationships with children, which helps them to settle quickly. Children receive good-quality care from staff who understand their needs, and as such, they are making good progress in all areas of their lives. Children say that they feel safe in this home environment. The registered manager carries out comprehensive risk assessments that are regularly reviewed. Decisions for children to move on when risks increase are rare, but when it is necessary, the registered manager makes careful considerations. He has high expectations for staff to provide high-quality care to enable children to thrive. However, gaps in practice have led to shortfalls, which the registered manager has acknowledged and addressed with strong safety measures.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The registered manager carefully considers all relevant information to ensure that sensitive and thoughtful plans are made for children to live together safely. Since the last inspection, 2 children have moved on from the home successfully. One child aspires to join the navy, and another child is attending college. One parent spoke highly about the support that their child received while living in this home.

Staff are good at supporting children to develop self-care skills. They identify early where children need support and focus on developing their confidence. Staff also actively support children to develop their independence skills.

The home's therapist plays a vital role in supporting staff to provide therapeutic parenting to the children. They help staff to understand the children's complex trauma histories and provide essential guidance that shapes their practice. The therapist is actively involved in reviews of the home's safety plans to ensure that staff respond consistently to the children's changing needs.

Three of the children attend full-time education. One child is completing high school examinations and has secured a college place. The registered manager has advocated strongly for another child to access alternative education. One education professional described staff as 'brilliant communicators'.

Staff support children to have family time. The registered manager has been instrumental in supporting family members to repair their relationships with one of the children, resulting in meaningful and enjoyable family time. When family relationships create risks for children, the registered manager shares concerns with social workers to ensure that a review of family time takes place. This keeps children safe.

Staff understand the importance of ensuring that children's physical and mental health needs are met and understand the role that physical exercise can play in this. However, on one occasion, staff did not seek mental health support for a child during a period of crisis. This means that the child did not have access to appropriate professional intervention at the time. The registered manager acknowledges this shortfall and has strengthened the child's plan to ensure that staff respond in a consistent manner.

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

The registered manager strives to maintain a safe home for the children. When risks increase, he ensures that all staff are alert and understand how to respond. The registered manager works well with the responsible individual to take urgent and decisive steps to address emerging risks. This includes making decisions for children to move on at short notice when they are no longer safe in the community.

Children understand that staff may search their bedrooms to keep them and others safe. Staff are alert to risks of arson, and when dangerous items are found, they confiscate them and have conversations with the children involved. In addition, staff increase levels of room searches during periods of increased risks. The registered manager has oversight of these incidents. He provides opportunities for staff and children to reflect and learn from their experiences.

When risks for children increase, the registered manager ensures that comprehensive safety plans have clear actions for staff to follow. The responsible individual contributes to the review of the home's own 'child protection plans' as a means of strengthening safeguarding practice. Leaders and managers have ensured that children understand how staff are keeping them safe, although they have not yet been provided with their own child-friendly plans that are easy for them to read and understand.

Children regularly participate in the home's fire drills, which are generally executed well. However, on one occasion, during an accidental kitchen oven fire, one staff member's delayed response in removing a child from the home during this incident was not aligned to the home's policies. While none of the children were harmed, this created potential risks. Case records for that incident were not consistent. The registered manager has identified these shortfalls in staff practice and has implemented additional training and addresses individual staff performance promptly.

Staff have clear plans in place for the appropriate supervision of children to prevent them from going missing from home. However, gaps in staff practice resulted in one child being missing overnight without staff's knowledge. Staff only became aware when the child's family member alerted them. On a different occasion, staff did not follow family time handover plans effectively, resulting in the child going missing. There have been no further incidents of children going missing from home since the registered manager strengthened supervision of children and family time handover plans.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager aspires to drive meaningful improvements, not only in the lives of the children but also in staff practice. He uses monthly audits, independent person visits and feedback from parents and professionals to contribute to a comprehensive review of the home. In addition, he uses research-informed safeguarding guidance to help staff improve practice and outcomes for children. Through these effective approaches, he has been able to identify the gaps in practice and implement measures required swiftly.

Leaders and managers review and act on known risks to the children in the community. They work with agencies to ensure that there is a shared multi-agency responsibility to protect children. The deputy manager carried out a comprehensive exercise to track potential criminal exploitation concerns in the community. This was shared in a multi-agency meeting and led to child protection enquiries being initiated. This resulted in coordinated actions to safeguard children.

The registered manager promotes a culture of professionalism. He understands the strengths and areas for development of the service. He has created a learning environment where practice is constantly scrutinised to ensure that it meets their high standards. There is evidence of proactive responses and anticipation for change, and when there are any shortfalls in practice, the registered manager takes effective measures to address issues that arise.

The registered manager openly acknowledges the areas of further improvements and speaks highly of the strengths of the home. This approach helps staff to learn, develop and maintain high levels of motivation to carry out their roles. Staff are reflective; they take responsibility and are held to account for their individual actions. This has resulted in staff being able to support children to reflect openly about their experiences and learn from their mistakes. Children are now more open about issues that affect them, such as risks of knife crime, gangs and arson.

Staff benefit from regular formal supervision sessions. They say that they find a lot of value in the regular joint meetings with the home's therapist, which supports good practice. Children's experiences and needs are a focus of all meetings. Staff continuously seek ways to enhance the quality of the care that they provide. Staff say that they feel supported and valued.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person 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 must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The health and well-being standard is that— the health and well-being needs of children are met; and children receive advice, services and support in relation to their health and well-being. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that each child has access to such dental, medical, nursing, psychiatric and psychological advice, treatment and other services as the child may require. (Regulation 10 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c))	31 August 2026
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; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; 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;	30 June 2026

take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and

are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies.

(Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iv)(v)(vi)(vii))

In particular, the registered manager must ensure that staff follow risk management plans in place to keep children safe.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that staff record discussions with individual children in a way that distinguishes their views. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that is helpful to them in the future should they wish to review their records. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)
- The registered person should ensure that staff are familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. In particular, they should ensure that children's safety plans are easy for them to understand. Also, when fire drills are carried out, staff should record accurate details of the incident and the actions taken to keep children safe. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

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: SC390751

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Acorn Care (UK) Limited

Registered provider address: Yarm Road Business Park, Darlington, County Durham DL1 4YA

Responsible individual: Alan Wood

Registered manager: Michael Cowans

Inspector

Tenji Wesa, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked-after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2026