

SC397112

Registered provider: Alliance Care & Education c/o Keys Group Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is privately owned and is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four children who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The provider merged with another large independent provider in 2018.

The registered manager has been in post since July 2015.

Inspection dates: 12 to 13 November 2018

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: 26 September 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
26/09/2017	Full	Good
08/03/2017	Interim	Improved effectiveness
06/12/2016	Full	Good
24/02/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness

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
The registered person may only use devices for the monitoring or surveillance of children if— - the monitoring or surveillance is for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child concerned, or other children; - the monitoring or surveillance is no more intrusive than necessary, having regard to the child's need for privacy. (Regulation 24 (1)(a)(d)) In particular, that bedroom alarms are only used when assessed as necessary to safeguard young people.	21/12/2018
In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff— if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority's or a relevant person's performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 5 (c)) In particular, the registered person must challenge and escalate when requests for relevant plans that reflect young people's current needs are not acted upon.	21/12/2018
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— - ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(c)) In particular, staff must receive all mandatory and additional training to support young people's specific needs, including learning disabilities.	21/12/2018

Recommendations

- The registered person should undertake a review that focuses on the quality of the care provided by the home, the experiences of children living there and the impact the care is having on outcomes and improvements for the children. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 64, paragraph 15.2) Specifically, this should include feedback and opinions of young people about the home, and consider the opinions of parents, placing authorities and staff in complying with the regulation.
- Staff should be familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective, and clear recording. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4) Specifically, the author should sign each record in accordance with the provider's policy and ensure that records reflect young people's needs, including appropriate incentive targets.
- Staff should provide a nurturing environment that is welcoming. Homes must meet children's day-to-day needs and physical necessities. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.7) In particular, furnishings in young people's bedrooms should be replaced when damaged, and repairs and redecoration should be completed to provide young people with a nurturing and safe environment, where they feel valued.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Young people benefit from good-quality care. They are thriving and are making good progress from their starting points. Staff have a thorough understanding of their needs and encourage them in all areas of development. All young people said that staff listen to them and help them to develop new skills to improve their independence and to make sure they see the people that are important to them. One young person said, 'Staff are amazing, [the registered manager] tells you how it is. He praises, listens and doesn't judge.'

Admissions are carefully planned. One young person spoke of her visits to the home before she moved in and how the registered manager had told her about the house rules and bedtimes, so that she knew what to expect when she arrived. She also spoke of how she and the other young people choose meals for the weekly menu.

Staff encourage young people to be healthy and support them for any appointments they have. One young person was reluctant to attend a follow-up health appointment during the inspection. However, she was pleased that staff persuaded her to go, as it was confirmed that she was able to start activities again that she had missed. Staff therefore help young people to value their health and understand the importance of looking after themselves.

A young person with a history of non-attendance at school is now attending, with significantly improving engagement, and proudly told the inspector she had been to school every day this term. Another young person has passed exams at school and now enjoys attending college. All young people are achieving in line with their abilities. One young person is awaiting completion of an education, health and care plan, which will identify the additional support she needs.

Young people enjoy a range of activities, both with staff and in the community, including after-school and community clubs. One young person is looking forward to participating in a show at a local theatre with her drama club. This enables young people to make friends and develop their confidence.

Independence skills are encouraged through individual programmes. However, staff recognise the potential barriers to progress and adapt accordingly so that young people do not become demotivated. Monthly incentive programmes are designed to reward young people for achieving set targets. One young person had been set a target around education, which is not an area of difficulty. This is a new area of development in the home and staff are aware that they need to refine it to make it more meaningful.

Staff are mindful of the importance of young people's need to see family members and other important people in their lives. Where necessary, they supervise visits and activities in the community, and work proactively with families. Any concerns are shared with social workers to ensure that young people continue to have positive, safe and meaningful experiences.

New paperwork has been introduced to provide individualised and holistic care planning. The staff have risen well to the challenge of transferring information to the new format. The home's plans correspond well with relevant plans from local authorities. However, not all relevant plans relate to young people's current placement and some are missing. Although updated plans have been requested from placing authorities, the home has not challenged or escalated when these have not been provided. This means that staff may lack important information to inform their care of young people.

Young people are at the centre of practice in the home. They are encouraged to share their views in young people's meetings and in individual consultations, so that they can contribute to the running of the home. The format of all forms of consultation is evolving to ensure that they are of interest and engage young people in a meaningful way.

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

Staff have a good understanding of the risks presented by individual young people and follow procedures to ensure that they become increasingly safe. Effective multi-agency working has resulted in a young person no longer going missing from the home. The home and partner agencies have responded to the young person's wishes and feelings so that she is able to visit family members safely and regularly. Her progress in managing contact arrangements means that she is looking forward to spending Christmas with family members.

A Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards Order is in place for one young person. Staff clearly understand its implication and ensure that appropriate levels of supervision are in place. Carefully considered risk management procedures minimise concerns when the young person is in the community.

All young people engage with the therapeutic support they are offered. This helps them to develop the skills to regulate their own emotions. Staff implement strategies to support young people to manage their frustrations and anger through healthier outlets. This has meant that young people are less likely to use potentially harmful strategies, such as self-harming, and use of alcohol or drugs has been minimal.

Young people are encouraged to take age-appropriate risks, such as owning a smartphone. If young people are considered to be misusing it, or are putting themselves at risk, staff support young people to understand the concerns and if necessary reduce access.

When young people have disagreements or display aggression towards each other, staff respond immediately. Resolution meetings and key-work sessions mean that young people are better able to understand each other's points of view, take responsibility for their own behaviour and resolve their differences.

Individualised incentive targets promote positive behaviour. Challenging behaviour is managed well. Police assistance has been required to manage dangerous behaviour on occasion, but this has been as a last resort. Use of physical intervention to manage children's behaviour has reduced over time. Staff have recently trained in a different approach to behaviour management that supports better de-escalation. They have also listened carefully to young people during debriefing sessions, and have worked with partner agencies to ensure that their views are taken into account. This has resulted in young people being happier, less likely to present with challenging behaviour and accepting of boundaries in place to protect them. For one young person, this means that she no longer needs the three-to-one staffing ratio that was required on her arrival.

Bedroom door alarms have been routinely used in the home, without assessment of the need for their use to safeguard young people. This has an impact on young people's right to privacy. The deputy manager stated that they would not be used in future unless there was an assessed need for their use.

Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to safeguard young people. They work effectively with other partners, including police, local authority social workers and independent reviewing officers.

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

An investigation into a historical allegation made against the registered manager was concluding at the time of the inspection. The senior manager conducting the thorough investigation anticipated that the manager would return to the home imminently.

However, at the time of the original incident, senior managers had not followed safeguarding procedures to refer the matter to the designated officer. This has resulted in the current protracted investigation and absence of the manager from the home.

One of the home's deputy managers has managed the day-to-day running of the home in the manager's absence. This has presented challenges, because of staff shortages requiring his presence on shifts at times, in addition to the use of consistent agency staff. The permanent staff have been highly committed and resilient during some difficult periods. Staff have postponed annual leave to ensure consistency when young people are newly admitted to the home.

The responsible individual has not visited the home to provide support as frequently as anticipated in the absence of the registered manager. However, support has been provided from other senior managers, and more recently from an experienced manager of another home. This has supported the deputy manager to maintain oversight of the home, as well as more effective use of paperwork introduced since the home's provider has merged with another large independent company.

The merger has brought considerable changes to the home with respect to working practices and documentation. Leaders and managers recognise the benefits offered by these changes, and increased opportunities for support and development of the home, as well as the challenges for some staff, who will be supported to develop their computer skills. Further development is planned to incorporate a range of therapeutic services, consultation and support. This is outlined in the statement of purpose and will more closely align the home with others owned by the provider. Staff believe that the changes are beneficial for young people; for example, there are incentives linked to rewards to support them to develop their skills and achieve individual milestones. Not all records have been signed by staff to assure managers that they have read and understood them. However, there is no evidence that this shortfall is having a negative impact on young people.

Robust recruitment practice ensures that only suitable individuals are employed. The induction of staff has improved, so that all training and shadow-shifts are completed prior to staff commencing full-time work. However, the current training matrix in the home indicates that not all current staff are up to date with mandatory training. Not all staff are trained in specific areas of need for young people living there, including learning disabilities. This means that staff do not have all the knowledge or skills to support young people's needs effectively. There is evidence that this training was requested by the manager, but it is yet to be delivered.

A new independent person now visits the home monthly. The reports from visits are more robust and better support the manager's understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the home. An improved format for the manager's review of care is also in place. However, these reports still lack sufficient input from young people's opinions and views of stakeholders.

The environment of the home would benefit from redecoration to provide a more homely

and welcoming feel. Some young people need new furnishings in their bedrooms. There are plans in place to address these shortfalls.

Leaders and managers are aware of the home's areas of development and are motivated to make the necessary improvements.

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: SC397112

Provision sub-type: children's home

Registered provider: Alliance Care & Education c/o Keys Group Limited

Registered provider address: Second Floor, Maybrook House, Queensway,
Halesowen, Worcestershire B63 4AH

Responsible individual: Andrew Taylor

Registered manager: James Dawson

Inspector

Karen Willson, social care inspector

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