

## Children's homes – Interim inspection

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| <b>Inspection date</b>         | <b>21/03/2017</b>                     |
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | <b>SC423617</b>                       |
| <b>Type of inspection</b>      | <b>Interim</b>                        |
| <b>Provision subtype</b>       | <b>Children's home</b>                |
| <b>Registered provider</b>     | <b>Acorn Children's Homes Limited</b> |
| <b>Responsible individual</b>  | <b>Waheed Ashiq</b>                   |
| <b>Registered manager</b>      | <b>Post vacant</b>                    |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | <b>Christy Wannop</b>                 |

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| <b>Inspection date</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>21/03/2017</b>           |
| <b>Previous inspection judgement</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Requires improvement</b> |
| <b>Enforcement action since last inspection</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>None</b>                 |
| <b>This inspection</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                             |
| <p><b>The effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection</b></p> <p>This home was judged <b>requires improvement</b> at the last full inspection. At this interim inspection, Ofsted judges that it has <b>declined in effectiveness</b>.</p> <p>This additional interim inspection was required because Ofsted has concerns about the managerial situation. It is the fourth inspection at this children's home in 12 months. The responsible individual is the sole director of the organisation. There has not been a registered manager at the home since January 2016. A manager was appointed in June 2016. The responsible individual removed the manager from work and demoted her after she withdrew her application to register with Ofsted in March 2017. She continues to work at the home. The responsible individual has promptly appointed a new manager this week and is completing employment checks.</p> <p>The registered provider has taken action to make improvements against previous areas of shortfall, but this inspection identifies fresh significant failings to the safeguarding and protection of children.</p> <p>The home has cared for four children since the last inspection. One child moved in and then moved out after two weeks. The responsible individual recognised the home could not meet the child's needs without her engagement and terminated the placement. After that, another child moved in. There are difficulties for all three children in the subsequent group dynamic. The manager did not visit to assess either of these two children. The responsible individual says that some children's powerful behaviour now threatens the security of placements.</p> <p>Safeguarding practice and knowledge are poor at all levels. The registered provider did not immediately share an allegation about staff that was raised by children with the placing or host local authority, in accordance with the organisation's own safeguarding procedures. Critical risk management plans for managing issues such as allegations made by children are not agreed with host or placing authorities. Records of child protection allegations are spread across staff files and are in emails on staff laptops. There is not a cohesive record of the incident and its resolution. Procedures to ensure the security of photographic images of children on staff's personal mobile phones are not rigorous. Children have made allegations about staff's inappropriate use of their mobile phones. There has been no managerial monitoring review of safeguarding procedures after incidents in order</p> |                             |

to learn lessons and improve practice.

Serious sexual and racist bullying has been increasing; this is causing distress and some children fear for their safety. Staff listen, but those affected say they do not feel that anything changes in the house. Staff have not done enough to prevent and tackle this. Staff do not identify serious bullying as such, particularly in children's risk assessments. Their language minimises it as 'rudeness'. A meeting with placing authorities is planned. Staff have also been subject to serious challenge from children that has resulted in criminal charges.

Inadequate recruitment vetting and selection of staff for key posts, including the last manager, staff and a consultant therapist, compromises the safe and stable leadership of the home and children's well-being. The registered provider does not exercise professional curiosity in following up applicants' working histories. They do not pursue references from the last permanent employer or implement their own safer recruitment procedures.

The responsible individual and the previous manager have breached professional boundaries and inappropriately shared information about the managerial arrangements with children. Staff do not respect proper parenting boundaries. They argue in front of children and draw them into personal disputes in a way that is inconsistent with positive substitute parenting. Children have told the registered person that they feel some staff have tried to bribe them with treats to get them 'on side'. Staff do not always help children to keep their rooms tidy. Their bedrooms may reflect levels of neglect that they previously experienced before they came into care. Some staff have a confused, or inaccurate, understanding of children's histories and significant information about their lives. These weaknesses do not reflect a positive ethos of care.

The registered person does not operate robust procedures for induction, probation and supervision of staff. Staff records do not show that there are good-quality inductions, probationary periods are not clear and supervisions for new staff are delayed. Retrospective references from previous employers have borne out subsequent concerns. Children have been cared for by some staff who have not had good enough managerial guidance and support to deliver positive care.

There are some positive aspects of the home. Children like the staff and the home. They say they feel at home there, despite current unhappiness for one of the children. One child said, 'Staff help me to think about the future, try to push me to do things even though I don't feel I'm ready to.' One child said, 'It's a caring home.' Another described the good support staff give them, reflecting that this had not always been there at previous placements or at their home. He said, 'This is how a home should be.'

Risk assessment has improved since the last inspection, although further improvements are necessary. Records better evidence the planning and good work to promote children's independence. All staff are now qualified or are undertaking

the nationally recognised minimum award for working with children and young people at level 3.

Staff, including the previous manager, have worked hard to secure a full-time educational placement for one child by challenging the placing authority. All three children are in full-time education. An education professional spoke very positively about the good level of support and close working to maintain positive educational outcomes. Direct work and key work with children are actively planned and linked each month to individual need. Staff have a good understanding of mental health issues, and support children's understanding of health, including sexual health, well. There has been no physical intervention since the last inspection in August.

The rich racial, age and gender mix among the staff team means children have opportunities to form positive relationships with a diverse group of adults. The responsible individual employs two of his own children as residential workers. Children and staff say that he is supportive. He has plans to redecorate areas of the home and is creating a second staff sleeping and bathing area on the ground floor. Staff currently sleep on a couch in one of the children's lounges.

Despite the positives experienced by children, the home has not been able to sustain improvement. There are some systemic safeguarding and management weaknesses that have the potential to jeopardise the good care of children. The responsible individual has acknowledged this situation and says he is committed to improvement.

## Information about this children's home

The home provides care for up to three children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The home is operated by a private company.

## Recent inspection history

| Inspection date | Inspection type | Inspection judgement      |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| 22/08/2016      | Full            | Requires improvement      |
| 24/06/2016      | Monitoring      | No judgement              |
| 25/04/2016      | Full            | Inadequate                |
| 11/12/2015      | Interim         | Declined in effectiveness |
| 14/10/2015      | Full            | Good                      |

## 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) meet(s) 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   |
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| <p>7. The children's views, wishes and feelings standard:</p> <p>In order to meet the children's views, wishes and feelings standard, with particular reference to acting on children's bullying and safety concerns, the registered provider must ensure that staff:</p> <p>1(c) take their views, wishes and feelings into account in relation to matters affecting the children's care and welfare and their lives.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 30/04/2017 |
| <p>11. The positive relationships standard:</p> <p>In order to meet the positive relationships standard, with particular reference to maintaining professional staff boundaries and action to prevent bullying, the registered provider must ensure that staff:</p> <p>(2)(a)</p> <p>(viii) strive to gain each child's respect and trust;</p> <p>(x) are provided with supervision and support to enable them to understand and manage their own feelings and responses to the behaviour and emotions of children, and to help children to do the same;</p> <p>(xii) understand and communicate to children that bullying is unacceptable; and</p> <p>(xiii) have the skills to recognise incidents or indications of bullying and how to deal with them; and</p> <p>(b) that each child is encouraged to build and maintain positive relationships with others.</p> | 30/04/2017 |
| <p>12. The protection of children standard:</p> <p>In order to meet the protection of children standard, with particular reference to risk management plans for allegations, electronic images of children, implementation of correct safeguarding procedures and reducing harm from bullying, the registered provider must ensure that staff:</p> <p>(2)(a)(i) assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 30/04/2017 |

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| <p>necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child;</p> <p>(ii) help each child to understand how to keep safe;</p> <p>(iii) have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm;</p> <p>(iv) manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other;</p> <p>(v) understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person;</p> <p>(vi) take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and</p> <p>(vii) are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies; and</p> <p>(e) that the effectiveness of the home's child protection policies is monitored regularly.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |            |
| <p>13. The leadership and management standard:</p> <p>In order to meet the leadership and management standard, with particular reference to establishing effective management, the registered provider must:</p> <p>(2)(a) 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;</p> <p>(b) ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate;</p> <p>(c) ensure that staff have the experience and skills to meet the needs of each child;</p> <p>(f) understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home;</p> <p>(g) demonstrate that practice in the home is informed and improved by taking into account and acting on—</p> <p>(ii) feedback on the experiences of children, including complaints received; and</p> <p>(h) use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home.</p> | 30/04/2017 |
| <p>The registered provider must appoint a person to manage the children's home if there is no registered manager in respect of the home; and, without delay, give HMCI notice of the name of the person so appointed, and the date on which the appointment takes effect. (Regulation 27(1)(2))</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 30/04/2017 |
| <p>The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. They</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 30/04/2017 |

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| <p>may only employ an individual to work at the children's home; or, if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). This is with particular reference to: establishing integrity and good character; that they have the qualification and skills for the work that the individual is to perform and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2.</p> <p>Regulation 32(1)(2) (3))</p> |            |
| <p>The registered person must ensure that each employee completes an appropriate induction; ensure that each permanent appointment of an employee is subject to the satisfactory completion of a period of probation, and receives practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33(1)(a)(b)(2)(4)(a)(b))</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 30/04/2017 |
| <p>The registered person must implement a procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect and must, in particular, provide for the prompt referral of an allegation about current or ongoing abuse or neglect, in relation to a child, to the placing authority and, if different, the local authority in whose area the home is located; provide for records to be kept of an allegation of abuse or neglect, and the action taken in response; describe how and to whom staff are to report, without delay, any concern about abuse or neglect of a child. (Regulation 34(1)(b)(2)(b))</p>                                                                                      | 30/04/2017 |
| <p>The registered person must implement a policy for the prevention of bullying in the home, which must in particular set out the procedure for dealing with an allegation of bullying. ( Regulation 34(3))</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 30/04/2017 |

## **Recommendations**

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

- Ensure that, where there are safeguarding concerns for a child, their placement plan, agreed between the home and their placing authority, must include details of the steps the home will take to manage any assessed risks on a day-to-day basis. This relates to agreeing thresholds and next steps in reporting allegations about staff with the host authority. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 42, paragraph 9.5)

## **What the inspection judgements mean**

At the interim inspection we make a judgement on whether the home has improved in effectiveness, sustained effectiveness, or declined in effectiveness since the previous full inspection. This is in line with the 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and children living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference that adults make to the lives of children and children. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, children and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and children. Wherever possible, they talked to children, children 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 children who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This inspection focused on the effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and children since the most recent full inspection.

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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