

Children's homes – interim inspection

Inspection date	04/08/2016
Unique reference number	SC472139
Type of inspection	Interim
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Amegreen Children's Services Limited
Registered provider address	2 Granary Court, Fair Oak Green, Stratfield Saye, Reading RG7 2DL

Responsible individual	Gary Carlin
Registered manager	Adam Law
Inspector	Chris Peel

Inspection date	04/08/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Good
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection This home was judged good at the full inspection. At this interim inspection, Ofsted judges that it has sustained effectiveness. The home's statement of purpose and children's guide are well written, clear documents. Regular training is helping staff to develop their understanding of developmental trauma, which is the theoretical model used by the provider. This model informs the child and adolescent needs and strengths assessments now made of each resident. These documents provide an understanding of how early experiences have affected the lives of each child or young person, and of how maladaptive coping strategies may have developed. The authors establish future priorities for addressing problematic behaviours and the strategies that are likely to be effective in doing so. A scoring system allows progress to be tracked. Not all practice is in line with the approach, particularly with regard to the setting of sanctions. These are imposed relatively infrequently and the manager makes insightful comments on each one to promote learning for staff members. Far more use is made of rewards to encourage desired behaviour from children and young people. The manager also records comments when these are given, reinforcing the home's philosophy that rewards are at least as important as sanctions in modifying behaviour. One young person told me that he enjoyed trips to the cinema or going swimming, which he had received as rewards. New formats for writing up measures of control and restraint have been introduced to address the timeliness of recording and compliance with regulations. These are now all written up within 24 hours of the incident. Although there is space to enter when 'the user' and the child have been spoken to about the incident, recording of this has yet to be embedded in practice. Case files do not always accurately reflect the current work being undertaken with children and young people. For example, although a placing authority's plans to move one child back to his family were equivocal until close to the discharge, these plans should have featured in the home's placement plan. Also, an incident involving another young person that had caused concern should have led to amendments to his risk assessment and behaviour management plan. The entry of 'some concerns in this area' under one heading was insufficient to alert readers to potential issues.	

Despite this, actual practice as described by staff and in records has been strong. It has included sensitive discussions with one young person that he had tried to avoid, concerning his comments and behaviour that he was subsequently embarrassed about. Steps have been taken quickly to engage a therapist who is accustomed to working with young people with the same diagnosis and who are experiencing similar difficulties.

The manager undertakes audits of files from time to time, but these have not always revealed missing or out-of-date documentation – or where it did, no change has resulted. The issue of key-work sessions being infrequently written up was raised in the last inspection and continues to be a problem. The quality of those records that were found had improved, with agenda items raised by children and young people identified and a clear description of what was discussed being recorded. However, records did not clearly identify actions and were not signed by the child or young person concerned.

There continue to be occasional gaps in the minutes of team meetings.

Monitoring of these issues has not been strong, either by the manager or the independent person conducting regulation 44 visits. The manager acknowledges that because he is also responsible for another home owned by the provider, which has been more demanding of his time, this may have had some impact on the time he has had available for this home.

House meetings with children and young people are sometimes called to address pressing issues but these may be infrequent.

Despite the fact that children and young people who come to the home are quite troubled, there have been no episodes of a resident going missing or absconding. Protocols are in place and staff are well aware of what action to take should an incident occur. Physical interventions are also infrequent. This is at least partly due to the attachments made and the fact that staff are experienced as safe and protective by children and young people. Although excited to be returning to the care of his family, one child told staff that he would miss the emotional security he got from the routines put in place for him and wanted them to continue as far as possible after he moved out of the home.

Mandatory training for staff has been widened to cover child sexual exploitation, radicalisation, and equality and diversity. This increases staff's ability to safeguard those in their care.

Although there has been considerable change in staffing in recent months, care has been taken to introduce workers from elsewhere in the organisation that children and young people know and in some cases have worked closely with. This has led to good continuity for children and young people.

The manager and staff have positive relationships with other professionals involved in the care of children and young people. This includes liaising with them and contributing to relevant plans. One professional, responding to Ofsted's survey, wrote that the home is a 'quiet and calm environment for the child, specifically

suited to them', adding, 'I don't think there is much more that they could do better – they are always responsive to my ideas or suggestions. I have full confidence in the home and its staff and their care of the child.'

There is also evidence of challenge to external practice that is not meeting a child's or young person's needs, particularly to chase overdue documentation and to raise concerns about hasty planning.

Leaders and managers do not have constructive links with all other bodies and organisations that have responsibilities towards young people, particularly the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Improving this could assist with training, the development of protocols that fit better with local procedures, and the formation of useful connections.

A risk assessment for bedroom-door alarms is now in place for each child and young person. There is a commitment from the provider to ensure that their use is proportionate, and the manager is aware of the potential for staff, accustomed to the use of alarms, to be overly risk averse in making assessments.

Children and young people make progress, although not necessarily on a continuous trajectory. One child has made sufficient improvement for the placing authority to have returned him to the care of his family. The other young person has made strides in his self-care and independence skills but needs more assistance in other areas.

This young person commented that staff were 'fine' and he was confident that the manager would listen to any concerns he might raise and take appropriate action. He was particularly appreciative of staff taking him out for activities, which include going out for walks, and was about to be taken on holiday with his brother by his key worker. He therefore sees those working with him as being supportive, wanting to spend time with him and promoting important relationships.

Information about this children's home

This privately owned service accommodates up to two children or young people who have emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The home specialises in working with children and young people who have experienced developmental trauma. It has access to equine therapy with the organisation's own horses.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
12/01/2016	Full	Good
02/09/2015	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
26/03/2015	Full	Good
14/01/2015	Interim	Sustained effectiveness

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(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
In order to meet the leadership and management standard, the registered person is required to: use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (2)(h))	30/09/2016
The registered person must maintain case records for each child which are kept up to date, specifically key-work sessions, behaviour management plans and risk assessments. (Regulation 36 (1)(b))	30/09/2016

Recommendations

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

- The home should take the initiative in identifying others, including Local Safeguarding Children Boards, who must play a part for their children, and engage with those relevant people proactively, advocating for the children in their care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 12, paragraph 2.7)
- Children should be able to see the results of their views being listened to and acted upon, and in particular that actions agreed in key-work sessions are reported back to children and recorded. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 22, paragraph 4.11)

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 young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference 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 whom 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 young people 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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