

SC472139

Registered provider: Amegreen Children's Services Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This privately owned service accommodates up to two children or young people who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are two other homes run by the same provider in the local area.

The home uses 'Systems-centered' methods of working with children and young people who have experienced developmental trauma. It has access to equine therapy with the organisation's own horses.

Inspection dates: 4 to 5 September 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

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

Date of last inspection: 13 December 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- The manager and staff have created a calm and contained atmosphere in which children are able to settle, form relationships, begin to overcome previous experiences and, in time, consider their futures more positively. Staff know children very well and develop a trusting rapport with them. This means that they are able to work in ways that help children to address sensitive issues.
- Children are kept safe through a combination of: supervision that is appropriate to needs; helping them to understand and manage risks; trusting relationships; and staff having a commitment to and thorough knowledge of safeguarding procedures.
- The staff have established excellent working relationships with other agencies to the benefit of children. One professional commented, 'I am really impressed with the home, they are easy to work with and I enjoy doing so.'
- The manager and staff manage admissions very effectively, working with referrers, previous carers and the child to make it as smooth a process as possible, even when a move becomes urgent. One professional described how 'they bent over backwards to get everything sorted'.

The children's home's areas for development:

- The efforts which the manager and staff make help children to increase their independence, but this can be foiled when day-to-day practices are not reviewed to ensure that every opportunity is given to assist this process.
- Case files have some entries that do not identify the author, are not signed and/or are undated. Placement plans do not record if they have been shared with others, including the child, social workers and parents.
- The workforce plan does not accord with statutory guidance.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
13/12/2016	Full	Good
03/08/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
12/01/2016	Full	Good
02/09/2015	Interim	Declined in 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
In order to meet the health and well-being standard the registered person must ensure: that staff help each child to understand and develop skills to promote the child's well-being (Regulation 10(2)(a)(iv)) This particularly relates to arrangements for teeth cleaning.	31/10/2017

Recommendations

- The children's guide must be age appropriate, provided in an accessible format and explained to each child to make sure they understand it. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 24, paragraph 4.21)
- The registered person should have a workforce plan which can fulfil the workforce related requirements of regulation 16, schedule 1. (Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.8)
- Case records must be kept up to date, signed, and dated by the author of each entry. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The manager and staff utilise the features of the home and its environment well. It is in a rural setting that allows troubled children to stand back from previous problems and experiences to restore equilibrium in their lives. One professional described how its 'snug' feel gives a sense of 'felt security and safety'. It also has a garden that backs onto open fields, which allows children to explore the countryside and enjoy being absorbed in the natural world. The children talked about dens and ant colonies, and showed the inspector a wormery. A recent holiday extended this by providing an opportunity to explore caves and collect rocks and crystals. Some are displayed in the games room of

the home.

Since the last inspection, staff have found more activities suitable for the children to become involved in. These include sailing, street dance and ice-skating lessons. Together and individually, these enable the children to engage in the community and stretch their 'comfort zones'. Opportunities to socialise and broaden friendships are further enhanced by inviting friends from school or one of the provider's other homes to visit.

Although one child professes that he does not get on well with his peer at the home, observations suggest that they engage well in activities together and can spend considerable periods in one another's company with few issues between them requiring adult intervention.

One professional commented that she was 'impressed with facilities, and the calm settled way (a child) is managed in a structured manner, helping him to learn to cook, look after himself and his room, and do his laundry'. One young person countersigns administration of medication records, having been assessed as being competent to do so. However, there are 'blindspots' and children could be helped to take more responsibility for self-care tasks, specifically teeth cleaning, than they do at present. A senior member of staff acknowledged that the practice of staff keeping brushes and paste, and putting one on the other for children was 'because we have got comfortable with it and not "seen" what was happening'.

Admissions are carefully planned, with due consideration given to the potential impact on children already in placement. This is clearly shown in a recent excellent impact risk assessment. Collaboration with other parties over this was particularly appreciated by professionals. One said: 'it was well planned and thoughtful. They visited, got things for his room, prepared things quickly. They made it an easy admission for him.'

Staff seek children's wishes and feelings, and key-worker sessions, particularly, represent their voice by recounting their requests and opinions. However, staff do not always promptly followed up an action, for example an agreement to discuss a child's request with colleagues has not been reported on after several months. Placement plans do not evidence children's contributions.

Generally, the manager and staff promote and facilitate contact with parents and others who are important to children. However, they had not been sufficiently proactive in making arrangements for one child who wished to see a significant person. This left the child not understanding why contact was not happening. The manager remedied the situation during the inspection, arranging a visit to take place in the near future.

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

This home is remarkably calm and stable. There have been very few incidents over a period of years, with no physical interventions and just two recorded sanctions since the last inspection. Staff managed the one instance of a child going missing well and addressed the motives so that it has not been repeated.

Staff are committed to protecting children, and those spoken to have an excellent understanding of the procedures to follow if they have any concerns over children's safety. This includes pursuing matters until they are certain that appropriate actions have been taken to safeguard any child who might be at risk.

Children experience an emotional security at the home, derived from the nurturing relationships that staff establish with them. Although children may not always acknowledge the strength of these relationships, they do benefit from them and look to staff if they are feeling anxious. Children describe how workers have helped them. One stated in a survey: 'staff help me with things I don't understand, including problems I have with my friends.'

Staff have used some very thoughtful and individualised ways of helping children to understand relationships that do not solely rely on verbal explanations. This helps children to learn in ways that suit them. It is clear that this relies on well-rounded knowledge of the child by the worker and a high degree of trust in the staff from the child. This creativity extends to activities arranged. One professional said of the staff: 'they are really not like any I've met in other homes; they are always thinking of different things to do, like going out foraging.'

Staff have been proactive in helping a child to reduce prescriptions, ensuring that he is not unnecessarily medicated, and the manager is making representations to take this further. This demonstrates attention to children's particular circumstances and a willingness to pursue their best interests. As a professional commented, 'staff go out of their way, never fail to attend meetings and certainly "go the extra mile".'

Professionals commented on how quickly staff members made themselves aware of children's backgrounds and were familiar with their individual characters, likes and dislikes. One said: 'at the first (looked after children's) review, staff already knew a lot about the child and had integrated this at that early stage.' It helped the child to settle quickly, shown by eating and sleeping well, which the professional said 'surprised me, as I thought he would struggle with the transition.'

The manager and staff establish positive relationships with parents and former carers. This facilitates cooperation over the care of children, as far as it is possible to achieve.

Staff provide a high degree of supervision, based on the needs of the children, but also help children to understand risks for themselves, such as road traffic and what to do if needing help in a public place, for example lifeguards and receptionists at a swimming pool. Children are given periods without adult supervision, such as in a shop, which helps them to take responsibility for themselves with minimal risk.

Safer recruitment practice is thorough, including investigating gaps in employment and following up references verbally. This helps to ensure that unsuitable people are not employed to work at the home. Since the last inspection, the provider has strengthened the interview process by adapting a question to address safeguarding issues.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Staff have made a considerable effort to lift standards in line with the manager's expectations. This is evident in how staff talk about their work, which aligns with the provider's ethos and model of working. It is also evident in the majority of key-worker session records. These follow a new format that prompts for an agenda, issues from previous session, a record of discussion and outcomes. The narrative of each shows that authors have sought and understood the views of children but do not demonstrate that key workers regularly discuss care plans with them.

Risk assessments for the use of door alarms show that staff no longer rely on them to monitor the movement of children at night. The risks are regarded as low, and alarms are not currently in use.

The manager has spent considerable time on shift, including a recent holiday for both children. They described having a very enjoyable time and benefited from the manager's knowledge and leadership. It exemplified the comment of one professional, who said that the manager 'is a good role model' and added that 'he has a lot of managerial catching up to do.' He continues to work towards a level 5 qualification, but progress is slow and the deadline for this to be completed is getting closer.

All requirements and recommendations from the last inspection have been adequately addressed, other than the omissions noted in the home's workforce plan.

Although the manager has not revised the home's development plan, which the last inspection report noted was not sufficiently forward looking, there is significant evidence that the provider is looking to improve provision. This is included in the review of care under regulation 45 and an action plan for the whole organisation. These cover strategic issues, such as arrangements for the management of the home, and operational matters, including revising the children's guide. Currently the guide is a lengthy document that children say they 'can't be bothered to read'.

Case files are up to date and contain necessary paperwork, including documentation from placing authorities. The exception of a behaviour management plan for one child was rectified during the inspection.

Not all documents identify the author or are signed by the relevant people. There is no process for children, social workers or parents (where relevant) to indicate that they have seen and agree with placement plans, behaviour management plans or risk assessments. Children rarely sign key-worker records, nor is an explanation given if they decline or staff believe that it is inappropriate to ask.

Placement plans and the provider's 'Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessments' provide all staff with the most insightful and detailed knowledge of young

people, their backgrounds and current issues. These lead to clear strategies and tasks being undertaken. The assessments demonstrate progress over time, comparing findings from previous versions, and chart progress since the first one that was undertaken. It has proved a valuable tool for at least one social worker, too.

The manager and staff engage well with children's wider networks, obtaining and sharing pertinent information and seeking and providing advice so that parents, carers, other professionals and they themselves have a sound understanding of children on which to base aims and plans.

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 difference 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: SC472139

Provision sub-type: 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(s)

Chris Peel, social care inspector

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