

SC472164

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 four children or young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. There are three 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. Children and young people have access to equine therapy with the organisation's own horses.

Inspection dates: 1 to 2 June 2017

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 **good**

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

Date of last inspection: 17 November 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- The manager and staff have a strong ethos of working in the best interests of

children and young people, extending, for example, to the provision of additional resources and staffing to ensure good endings to difficult placements.

- The provider has developed excellent tools to assess children and young people's areas of strength and needs, which contribute to clear placement plans. These tools show progress over time, from the first assessment to the most recent one.
- The provider owns horses and many children and young people benefit from interacting with them – from the pleasure of riding through to undertaking equine therapy. It has successfully increased children and young people's confidence, development of empathy and ability to take responsibility.
- Despite the behavioural difficulties described in this report, the manager and staff go to great lengths to help children be safe and to promote their life chances.

The children's home's areas for development

- The process for assessing whether children and young people who are referred to the home are suitable for admission.
- Appraising how well staff members understand the home's specific approach to working with children and young people to address any gaps in knowledge.
- Documenting the work undertaken with children and young people, especially when preparing them to move on from the home.
- Developing aims and objectives for children and young people to return to families or foster care, when this is possible.
- Regarding young people who self-harm, providing guidance in policy for staff that allows for knowledge of the young person to inform decision-making – rather than being prescriptive about actions to be taken.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
17/11/2016	Full	Good
25/04/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
03/11/2015	Full	Good
22/07/2015	Interim	Sustained 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 quality and purpose of care standard the registered person is required to: Ensure that staff understand and apply the home's statement of purpose. (Regulation 6 (2)(i)) In particular, the specific models of work employed.	31/07/2017
The registered person must ensure that the independent person carrying out visits to the home only inspects a child's case records if the child's placing authority consents. (Regulation 44 (2)(b))	31/07/2017

Recommendations

- Each child should have permission for staff to administer first aid from a person with parental responsibility for them recorded in their relevant plan. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 35, paragraph 7.14)
- The registered person must specify the procedures to be followed when a child is missing from care or away from the home without permission, and how staff should support the child on return to the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.28) This includes requesting an independent return home interview.
- Any child who has been restrained should be given the opportunity express their feelings about their experience of the restraint as soon as is practicable. Children should be encouraged to add their views and comments to the record of restraint. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 49, paragraph 9.60)
- The registered person should only accept placements for children when they are satisfied that the home can respond effectively to the child's assessed needs as recorded in the child's relevant plans and when they have fully considered the impact that the placement will have on the existing group of children. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56,

paragraph 11.4) The impact risk assessment should address all known needs and be adequately recorded.

- The registered person should work with the placing authority to ensure that each child's transition is planned and help each child to prepare for leaving both practically and emotionally. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 57, paragraph 11.9) In particular, ensure that transition plans and their implementation are well documented.
- The registered person is responsible for maintaining good employment practice. They must ensure that recruitment of staff safeguards children and minimises potential risks to them. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1) This includes obtaining evidence of candidates' knowledge and understanding of safeguarding practice at the interview stage.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people are looked after effectively by staff who know their best interests. Nevertheless, children expressed varying levels of dissatisfaction about living in the home, which contrasts with positive comments made in previous inspections. This is primarily as a result of an unsettled period for the home with children undermining relationships, at least partly due to peer pressure. Viewed over the longer term, children and young people are happy and feel safe living here. Observations made during the inspection indicated that they were comfortable in the company of staff and enjoyed activities they were involved in together.

Current issues for children and young people include rules being too stringent, particularly levels of supervision by staff, and the distance the home is from amenities. One young person commented, 'I'm used to being two minutes away from a train station and being able to walk to shops,' and 'I don't need adults around me all the time; I can make my own decisions.' Staff do help adolescents manage their desire for greater autonomy, and balance this against young people's ability to take responsible decisions. The behaviour of most children in recent months has necessitated staff reigning in freedoms to keep them safe.

When young people demonstrate that they can manage a level of independence, the provider will often move them to another home in the organisation where staff promote this further. Young people aspire to achieve this move; they and the provider see this as a successful outcome to work towards. However, one professional questioned whether the home is as 'good at moving children on to other outcomes'. The statement of purpose affirms that 'some of our children and young people can return to a family living environment' and comments on it 'being a source of great satisfaction'. However, a strongly stated aim to help children move on to foster care or return to family when possible would give the provider a clearer focus for this work.

The home's statement of purpose includes references to the understanding of

developmental trauma to underpin the work staff undertake. Staff are coached in their approach to children and in managing specific issues through individual supervision, team meetings and group consultation with a Systems-Centered practitioner. However, not all staff could describe what impact this has on their practice.

The provider owns horses that are stabled a short drive from the home. Some young people take a very active role in caring for them and have developed considerable skill in riding, and caring for the animals. Confidence and a sense of achievement have grown from seeing that they have attained show standards of horsemanship and earned the praise of those who are professionally employed in the field. One young person spoke of her care of one of the horses and wondered about how it was getting on, illustrating the level of responsibility she took and that she had the capacity to hold the horse in mind while not with it. This is a significant step in building relationships.

Staff also encourage children and young people to develop and follow other pastimes. These have included basketball, bird watching and sea cadets. Bedrooms illustrate the different interests of their occupants and are individualised by the children and young people.

The home has undergone considerable wear and tear, including deliberate damage, some of which was evident at the time of the inspection. However, there is an effective programme of maintenance, and repairs were taking place so that the house retains a homely atmosphere.

Recent behavioural difficulties and dynamics in the house have led to children and young people not making progress, either educationally or socially. For some, there has been a plateauing over a considerable period, and for others a regression so that hard-won improvements have slipped back. The manager and staff are very aware of this and have worked hard with placing authorities and other agencies to reverse the trend. This includes addressing the issue of peer pressure, rewarding positive behaviour, setting clear consequences for unacceptable conduct and involving children and young people in constructive activities.

Key-worker sessions are focused on children and young people's issues, and records illustrate that their voice is heard and acted on. The best of these records include agenda items that children raise, actions and outcomes, which staff follow up in later sessions and which are signed by young people. However, not all recording is of this standard and some records have not been written up for several weeks.

A comment box for children and young people to use to express their views has been destroyed on more than one occasion. House meetings have not been held regularly due to dynamics within the home turning these into occasions that heightened young people's attempts to work against staff, rather than constructive events. Young people's comments are sought following measures of control being implemented. These are recorded regarding sanctions but not physical interventions.

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

The manager and staff have found challenging behaviour, including damage to property, assaults on staff and absconding, difficult to manage, especially preventing settled

children and young people becoming involved through peer pressure. There has been a high level of police involvement with young people; nevertheless, professionals, including the police, regard the actions of staff as appropriate and taken with the safety and security of young people as the focus of all interventions.

Staff seek to establish positive relationships with young people and use these as the basis to create change. These have been disrupted during the period when the influence of peers held greater sway, but effective action has been taken to re-establish the beneficial influence of adult relationships. One professional spoke of how staff had used their understanding of a young person to 'pre-empt his meltdowns...he recognises that staff have helped him to have fewer holds and more rewards'.

Impact risk assessments, undertaken when a young person is admitted to the home, are completed in retrospect rather than used as a tool to decide if the referral is suitable or how identified risks can be ameliorated. This has led to some risks being missed and no clear strategy formulated to address them.

One such risk was a history of allegations made about staff, and the young person did make subsequent accusations. These were appropriately reported, investigated and found to be unsubstantiated. However, a recommendation made by the independent investigator to improve childcare practice has not been promptly followed up.

The number of missing episodes has increased since the last inspection. Staff have taken steps to avoid such risk-taking and to try keep young people safe while they are absent. The home's policy has been followed in each case, but it does not include reference to the responsibility of the placing authority to arrange independent return to care interviews and some staff were not aware of this requirement.

Inter-agency working to help and protect children and young people is exemplified by collaboration with other professionals to reduce the number of unnecessary emergency responses to 999 calls made by a young person to disrupt her placement. This demonstrated the level of confidence placed in the home's manager and staff to assess the situation and make appropriate decisions to best support the young person.

When strenuous efforts to reduce levels of absconding did not have the desired effect, managers worked with the placing authority to end the placement as positively as possible. This step was taken to prevent the impact on other young people escalating further. Officers in the local authority were very grateful for the assistance given to them by managers to find a more appropriate placement.

Records of significant incidents are clear, demonstrating control measures are proportionate. The manager's comments reflect on practice and implications for young people, leading to learning about what interventions are likely to be most effective in achieving change.

Safer recruitment practice is good, although questions asked at interview do not illicit a candidate's knowledge or experience of safeguarding practice. Although this is addressed early on in induction training, it means that the provider has not assessed a potential employee's capacity in this crucial area at the selection stage.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The staff team has been stretched in terms of managing sustained challenging behaviour and covering shifts in recent months, but the team feels very well supported by their manager in meeting these pressures. He has led by example in dealing with difficult situations, in undertaking shifts and in maintaining the home's ethos.

Upholding the high levels of professional practice when, as several staff members commented, 'continually firefighting', has come at the expense of maintaining records. As a result, some documentation, such as key-worker sessions for those young people who have taken up the most staff time, is not of the standard it should be, and there are no case records that cover the arrangements made to assist a young person move on from the home. Evidence about the excellent work done in this respect has come verbally, including from other professionals. However, this is unlikely to be available to other people, including the young person herself should she wish to find out what happened in the future.

Key workers and the clinical consultant to the home make extensive and very thorough assessments that identify the skills and strengths children and young people have, as well as areas where these are lacking and there are particular needs. Over time, staff build up a very detailed knowledge that allows them to formulate tailored approaches to assist children. Placement plans translate these assessments into clear strategies and methods of work. Plans are generally comprehensive, but do not always reflect actions from statutory reviews or personal education plans; one did not address the issue of a young person's self-harming behaviour, as is advised by the home's policy.

The policy on counteracting self-harm directs staff as to what they should do to prevent occurrences, including the removal of potential implements, but does not allow for experience that indicates such action might exacerbate the situation. Specific training has informed the team's actual practice better, and staff were able to give examples of how they have applied it.

The home has relied on consents given by parents to local authorities to give first aid to children and young people, but these do not confer permission to staff. There is therefore no written authorisation on file for emergency treatment from someone with parental authority.

The manager and staff engage with wider networks well. The focus is on achieving the best outcomes for children and young people, even if circumstances are difficult. A compelling example is continuing to work with a young person after the manager had given notice on her placement. The provider allocated additional resources to enable the young person to have positive experiences, while keeping her and others safe. They moved her in a way that actively demonstrated care and concern rather than rejection. A professional described the manager and a senior manager giving a 'personal touch, not often seen', adding that there was a 'marked difference between this provider' and others in how placements had ended.

Staff maintain files well, with evidence that documentation and decisions from other agencies are followed up when they have not been produced in a timely way. Some of the home's own paperwork has been late in being filed, with, for example, some key-worker sessions not recorded for several weeks. This means that staff do not always have the most up-to-date information to work from.

The manager continues to work towards a level 5 qualification, but is getting closer to the deadline for this to be completed.

Although children's permission is sought for the regulation 44 independent person to view their files, permission from placing authorities remains outstanding.

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: SC472164

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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