

Children's homes inspection - Full

Inspection date	03/11/2015
Unique reference number	SC472164
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Amegreen Children's Services Limited
Registered person address	2 Granary Court, Fair Oak Green, Stratfield Saye, READING, RG7 2DL

Responsible individual	Gary Carlin
Registered manager	Adam Law (acting)
Inspector	Chris Peel

Inspection date	03/11/2015
Previous inspection judgement	sustained effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
how well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
the impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good

SC472164

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- Since the last inspection a training programme has been instigated that has meant that staff are much better informed about the ethos of the home and methods employed to assist children and young people placed here. This has resulted in more reflective practice and consistent responses.
- There is an effective management team in place that has given strong leadership and support to staff, who feel valued and empowered. A cycle of training recruits who then leave has been turned around. The effect has been that children and young people receive care from a stable staff group who are developing experience and skills. Managers are also more able to focus on the needs of the young people than on those of new staff.
- Children and young people are able to make their views known, contribute to the running of the home (for example the new children's guide) and make a difference to their own experience of care. The manager and staff implement ideas presented unless it is impractical to do so, in which case explanations are given. 'If you wanted something to be done they would definitely do it' as one young person said.
- All young people have excellent school attendance records since coming to the home (a significant improvement for some) and are largely engaging in education and even enjoying the experience. Staff are very good at supporting those who are making transfers to new schools and promoting achievement.
- Staff help children and young people to develop age-appropriate self-care and independence skills. One young person said, 'they are hot on independence, cooking and cleaning and stuff we need to learn.'
- Engagement with the wider network for each young person is regular and effective. Weekly updates for and reports written for statutory reviews were described by one social worker as, 'well written, with lots of information and very professional'. The staff are also praised for keeping professionals informed of changes and incidents that have occurred, whilst 'reinforcing the positives'. Children and young people therefore have a team around them that knows their current situation and is able to work together for their benefit.

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 with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
7 The children's views, wishes and feelings standard In order to meet the children's views, wishes and feelings standard the registered person is required to: ensure that an explanation is given to each child as soon as reasonably practicable after the child's arrival about how to make a complaint and what advocacy support is available. (Regulation 7 (2)(d)(ii-iii))	04 Dec 15
12 The protection of children standard In order to meet the protection of children standard the registered person is required to: ensure that the premises used for the purposes of the home are maintained so as to protect each child from avoidable hazards to the child's health – including garden equipment. (Regulation 12 (2)(d))	04 Dec 15
Monitoring and surveillance should be no more intrusive than necessary, having regard to the child's need for privacy, and therefore be regularly reviewed. (Regulation 24 (1)(d))	04 Dec 15
The registered person must ensure that a record is made within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint; within 48 hours that the user has been spoken to about the measure; and signed the record to confirm it is accurate; and within 5 days an addition is made to the record that the child has been spoken to about the measure; in particular records must show that these timescales have been adhered to. (Regulation 35 (3)(a-c))	04 Dec 15

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account

of the following recommendation(s):

- children should be able to see the results of their views being listened to and acted upon, in particular that key work sessions record agenda items they raise and have actions and plans drawn up. (Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations 4.11, page 22)
- the recording format for incidents of physical restraint should only include purposes that regulation 20 allows (Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations 9.48, page 48)
- 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, in particular ensure that such transition plans are well documented in writing. (Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations 11.9, page 57)

Full report

Information about this children's home

This privately owned service accommodates up to four children or young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

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 organisations own horses.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
22/07/2015	CH - Interim	sustained effectiveness
25/03/2015	CH - Full	Good
14/01/2015	CH - Interim	sustained effectiveness
11/11/2013	CH - Full	Good

Inspection Judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	good
The home's statement of purpose and children's guide are much improved following recent revisions, which have involved young people. They provide the basis for the care and support offered. Staff referred to them in conversations, demonstrating they are 'live' documents. Young people knew of the guide but had not necessarily read it. Therefore, some are aware of how to make a complaint or how contact an advocate but newer residents did not. Provision of the children's guide does not of itself fulfil the obligation to ensure young person are aware of these matters. The manager has gone to some lengths to liaise with local authorities to ensure an advocacy service is available and one young person has taken up the opportunity. There are various means for children and young people to make their views known, including a 'wishes and feelings' box, house meetings and key work sessions. Records of the latter show that a range of issues are tackled but do not indicate which ones are raised by the young person in the agenda or routinely set out actions and plans arising from the meeting. Children and young people report that ideas and suggestions made are taken up unless there is a good reason that is explained to them. Some requests are for the provision of equipment or activities and there can be some unhappiness if they are not granted. However, this is part of learning that demonstrating an interest in an activity over time is important before expensive items are purchased. Through this sustained interest is actively promoted. Currently, young people are attending St John's Ambulance, football and basketball training, horse riding and drama club; they enjoy shopping trips, swimming and going fishing. The home has its own stables and opportunities to interact with the animals has a beneficial effect for many children. All young people have made progress, even in the short time they may have been living in the home. Examples given by professionals and families include the ability to make friends, a reduction in aggressive behaviours, successful transfer of schools (especially for one young person who had previously been excluded and not been in education), increasing tolerance and containment of previously chaotic behaviours. There is concern that for individual children some unsafe behaviour is persistent or that progress has plateaued but professionals still express appreciation for how staff have worked with the issues. The designated teacher from the school most young people attend was very	

complimentary about how staff had helped prepare the new pupils over the summer and continue to support schooling. As a result all children and young people are in full-time education and have 100% attendance since the beginning of the academic year. All are demonstrating progress, although some find it hard to maintain the level of peers.

A professional described how the house is 'in a lovely setting, its location and presentation. It is clearly laid out to meet needs, is well maintained, with staff who are welcoming and helpful. Yet, young people who have been used to living in families have found it difficult to adjust to being in a children's home. One commented 'It's not a homely place, more like a school kind of thing' adding 'but we can still have fun'.

Since the last inspection one young person has moved to another of the provider's homes. Records indicate he made significant progress while here and that the transfer was agreed by him and the placing authority. Unfortunately they do not also evidence planning for the move or how the young person was prepared for it.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement
The home provides a safe environment for children and young people. A trampoline in an unsafe condition at the last review has been removed but the requirement that health and safety checks include garden play equipment has not been followed through. Young people were divided as to how appropriate incidents of physical intervention were; one said restraints made things worse but another commented 'staff won't just do it; when they do it makes it safer and you calm down. They make sure you are OK afterwards.' Records indicate that incidents are necessary and proportionate. The manager makes written comments for each and the Responsible Individual gives an overview for those the manager has been involved in. Children and young people are invited to make their own comments in the log, and that for sanctions, and often do. Dates of when records are made and comments added are not routinely included so it is not easy to see if timescales required by regulations are complied with. In addition, the recording format for physical interventions includes options of 'preventing a criminal act' and 'absconding' as a reason for them having been undertaken. No incident had either as the only category but the format does not make it clear that the only acceptable purposes for restraint in a children's home is to prevent injury or serious damage to property.	

Medication is stored and administered correctly with clear records made. One young person is self-medicating and another managing a health condition with increasing success.

Children and young people are closely supervised and only allowed time outside the home without staff when assessed to be safe. Those recently admitted have found this restrictive and say it does not help them develop. Some professionals think decisions made have erred on the side of caution and work could have been done to help young people understand the reasons for precaution. As it is, opportunities to socialise have increased over time with young people attending clubs and having free time to go shopping or meet friends.

A risk averse culture is more evident in the use of door alarms; the home's statement of purpose says 'it *may* be appropriate to monitor exit and entry from a child's bedroom outside of normal waking hours with the use of a silent alarm' [our italics] however, they are routinely applied to every young person. Appropriate permissions are obtained but no review is made to ensure use of this intrusive measure is proportionate to known risks.

Children and young people feel safe, and report that bullying is not a problem. Sometimes a couple of them can pair up and then be 'mean' to another child but staff are aware and address the issue with all parties.

Recruitment records demonstrate that appropriate safeguarding procedures are followed to establish, as far as possible, that those employed pose no risk. New staff have an induction programme that includes all mandatory training and familiarisation with the home's policy and procedures. On-going training, supervision and annual appraisal provide opportunities for continuing development to ensure staff have the skills and ability to help and protect the children the home caters for.

The manager and staff have a detailed understanding of each young person and a rapport has built up with most. This allows for conflicts and other difficult issues to be tackled within a trusted relationship. Not every young person is open to this but patience and perseverance is gradually bringing down barriers. Therapy has not begun for all young people but is in hand...

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
The manager has introduced several changes and brought his own style to the role since becoming acting manager in June 2015. Staff are very positive about these and indeed of the new management team, particularly the level of support offered.	

This includes regular and helpful supervision and the manager coming into the home when there are potential or actual difficulties. Children and young people have benefited as this has contributed to a consistency of approach and benchmarked standards expected when having to deal with challenging situations.

One member of staff said, 'I've never worked in a company that has been as supportive as they have here.'

The manager has a good understanding of the home's strengths and weaknesses but overlooked some important areas. These include being sufficiently familiar with The Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations and ensuring all requirements from the last inspection have been addressed. Specifically, undertaking impact risk assessments for potential admissions and instigating regular health and safety checks that include play equipment. These are the subject of requirements but have not resulted in immediate risks to young people in the home.

Strengths include staff having a much better understanding of the ethos of the home following the introduction of regular and frequent training sessions on developmental trauma. As a result children and young people have a reliably consistent approach being taken, a strength further enhanced by a stable staff team. Turnover is much improved which, as one member of the management team commented, 'means there is more concentration on young people.' The team describe themselves as being resilient enough to be open to challenge and to learning from each other regardless of position.

New admissions have been made and for the first time the home has two female residents, which has changed dynamics. Designating separate bathrooms for boys and girls is an obvious physical adaptation but consideration of previous histories and potential behavioural issues have been at least as important. Children and young people are therefore being kept safe and having their needs met well.

Placement planning is thorough and team meetings provide a forum for current issues and developments to be discussed. Both positive and negative comments are encouraged by the manager so that a balanced picture is formed of each young person.

A new assessment format is being introduced. Only one young person's has been fully completed but demonstrates areas of progress and those requiring greater attention. It is a detailed approach, requiring considerable observational and analytical skills that are being developed rather than embedded in practice as yet. Oversight by the provider's staff development consultant (who also leads training) gives quality assurance to the process.

Files are in good order with all relevant paperwork present. There is evidence of local authorities being chased for documentation and of staff then responding to actions identified in them. Reports are presented to statutory reviews and notes taken at them ensuring information is shared within the team and the wider network as promptly as possible.

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection*.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of looked after children is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place, however, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

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 who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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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