

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	17/11/2016
Unique reference number	SC472164
Type of inspection	Full
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	17/11/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Improved 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	Good
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good

SC472164

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- The provider has adopted a specific approach to childcare, which is firmly rooted in a researched model. Leaders and managers have invested in training staff and employing specialist workers to ensure that it is implemented well. Staff are able to articulate how the approach informs their practice, while assessments and other documentation record its implementation. Children and young people thus benefit from consistent and skilled practice.
- Children and young people are able to make their views known. They contribute to the running of the home through house meetings, key-worker sessions and a 'wishes and feelings box'. They believe that the manager and staff take notice of their concerns and suggestions and so can make a difference to their own experience of care.
- The manager and staff invest in young people's progress, making strenuous efforts to find appropriate education placements, supporting attendance and helping young people to enjoy learning. Staff are very good at promoting achievement and supporting those who are making transfers to new schools.
- Young people benefit from the efforts that staff put into their wider development, including their appreciation of other cultures, improving their socialising with peers and increasing their level of independence skills.
- There is a strong ethos of promoting positive behaviour. Rewards are tailored to meet the interests of each child and the behaviour that is being encouraged, and this works.
- The manager and staff welcome new admissions with care and sensitivity. When there is time to make full introductions, they establish a rapport before the young person enters the home.
- Staff form trusting relationships with young people in which difficult issues relating to their experiences and current problems are explored.
- The home has several photographic displays of children and activities that they have participated in, adding to the homely appearance. One professional commented, 'If I was a child being looked after, this is the kind of home I would like to live in.'

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
Monitoring and surveillance should be no more intrusive than necessary, having regard to the child's need for privacy (Regulation 24(1)(d)), and therefore should be regularly reviewed.	18/01/2017

Recommendations

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

- 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 children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 57, paragraph 11.9). In particular, they should ensure that such transition plans are well documented in writing.
- The registered person should only accept placements for children where they are satisfied that the home can respond effectively to the child's assessed needs as recorded in the child's relevant plans and where they have fully considered the impact that the placement will have on the existing group of children. ('Guide to children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.4) The impact risk assessment should be adequately recorded.
- Everyone working at the home must understand their roles and responsibilities and what they are authorised to decide on their own initiative. There should be clear lines of accountability. ('Guide to children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.20). This specifically relates to guidance on the use of personal mobile phones.

Full report

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. It has access to equine therapy with the organisation's own horses.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
25/04/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
03/11/2015	Full	Good
22/07/2015	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
25/03/2015	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The staff warmly welcome young people, family and professionals to the home. Framed photographic displays, which are regularly changed, and well-decorated rooms add to the homely feel that they have created. For newly admitted young people, the welcome starts before they arrive. One professional described how the manager built a rapport with a young person while he was still in his previous placement: 'He made quite a big effort to find out what the young person wanted, like how he wanted to decorate his room and what his interests were.' Soon after admission, the young person had his room looking as he wanted it and he began attending local clubs. Not all admissions have been successful, however. The process has suffered when it has been rushed, and the manager and staff have hoped that a new placement would help to achieve change rather than having clear assessments and plans in place from the start. Although impact risk assessments have been introduced, these have either not been undertaken or are too generic, missing significant information about the particular young person. The assessments have therefore not been a tool to help to identify potential issues or ways in which staff might address them. Young people's wishes and feelings are evidenced in well-recorded key-worker sessions, which detail the issues that young people want to raise as well as the actions arising from them and other matters. The children's guide tells young people how to complain and about advocates; some case files demonstrate that key workers remind them periodically. Young people are also encouraged to express their own views to other agencies, through emails and talking to professionals who make decisions about their lives. One has been able to state clearly his wishes regarding his care plan, which the placing authority has taken into consideration. The manager and staff offer a high level of support for young people's education, including finding appropriate placements, liaising well with teachers and encouraging attendance. The majority of young people engage better with their schooling and they are achieving, despite this being a difficult area for some. Staff are keen to develop young people's wider knowledge and experience. Examples of ways in which this is achieved include successful cultural evenings, outings and attendance at local clubs. Some rewards given to young people are in the form of special trips that tie in to their particular interests or have a connection to behaviour that is being encouraged. A recent example was a visit to a London	

theatre, which was thoroughly enjoyed.

Staff also assist young people to develop their independence skills, from making their own drinks, through making a sandwich to cooking a meal for everyone, and from sorting dirty clothing to doing their own laundry. Often, young people have previously been reluctant to undertake these chores, but some are now also doing so when they visit their families.

Staff encourage young people's well-being through a varied and healthy diet and management of health conditions. Exercise is promoted through local walks and cycle rides, attendance at sports clubs and playing football and basketball in the garden.

The home routinely deploys door alarms to detect movement of young people at night. Risk assessments have been introduced, but they are not always completed or fully justify the use of the alarms. Significant information was omitted in one instance and, in another, a reduction in risks documented elsewhere was not taken into account. Staff asked one young person whether he minded having an alarm, and his reply that he liked it because he knew staff would come if he needed help was taken as showing compliance with his wishes. However, the young person has been able to find sleeping-in staff himself if needed. The indiscriminating use of this surveillance thus risks institutionalising children, is occasionally a response to the anxieties of the manager and staff rather than actual risk and can give children the message that they cannot be trusted even when their behaviour is safe.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
Staff forge nurturing relationships with young people and are mindful of the need to work with them in a way that is based on the approach adopted by the home. This allows young people to develop within a consistent framework. One professional observed, 'Young people know what is happening. They are helped when troubled, and they don't replicate home life.' Staff think carefully about how best to meet young people's needs and to do so safely. An example is a child demonstrating a desire for physical touch by initiating play fights with staff. Rather than engage in contact that was not easily controlled, staff agreed to offer him head massages that he now enjoys. Professionals and family members believe that key workers have played a significant role in helping young people to make progress. This is particularly in	

areas of managing feelings, facing challenges, accepting boundaries, reducing risky behaviour and being able to relate well to adults. This has allowed some young people to move on to other provision appropriately or to return home.

The manager and staff concentrate on giving incentives for desirable behaviour, with rewards that may result from 'star' charts or when young people's efforts are particularly noteworthy. The rewards are personalised so that young people feel that staff have taken an interest in them as well as their behaviour.

Young people have responded well to this approach and, as a result, sanctions and physical interventions are less frequent. For some, the reduction is remarkable. One example is a decline in restraints from approximately 40 a month at the start of a placement to one or two in the same period more recently.

Staff respond well when young people go missing, making contact with them by phone when possible and trying to call them from different numbers when calls from the home's phone are not answered. Protocols are followed so that the relevant people are kept informed of developments.

In an attempt to encourage one young person to get in touch, one member of staff gave their personal number to a missing person so she could text rather than call. This well-meaning action crossed a professional boundary. The home does not have a policy that addresses this issue, so the member of staff did not have official guidance. Following this coming to light during the inspection, the provider has taken action to rectify this and to purchase mobile phones for use in similar circumstances.

Staff are able to explain what they would do to safeguard young people if they became aware of a child protection issue, including if they were concerned about the actions of a colleague or manager. Staff showed that they understand reporting and recording, and appropriate steps to ensure the immediate safety of a young person.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good
The requirement made at the last inspection, to record measures of control, discipline or restraint in a way that captures the timing of actions taken, has been met with a new format that prompts the required information. The manager monitors these meticulously and his comments are designed to refine the skills of	

staff to better meet young people's needs.

The recommendation that the home should identify and engage with others who play a part in the care of children has led to the manager promoting the role of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board among staff. They now know more about the role of the board and subsequently have sought information and undertaken online training that it provides.

However, action taken in response to the findings of previous inspections has yet to embed in the practice of the home. Impact risk assessments and assessments for the use of door alarms have not been used to good effect, and when young people move from the home the details are not well recorded.

Staff work with young people to prepare emotionally for moving from the home, as documented in key-work records. However, there is far less information about the practical arrangements. Professionals and others expressed surprise at the swiftness of a transfer within the organisation, although it was agreed with the social worker. As this followed meetings in which caution was expressed about a proposed move taking place some months ahead, liaison should have been better.

Staff complete strength and difficulties questionnaires at the time of young people's health assessments, but placing authorities do not share the results. This means that the home loses the opportunity to consider useful information when planning care.

In other respects, communication with young people's wider care networks is very good, especially with families, schools and social workers. The manager and staff challenge other agencies if they do not make provision or documentation available in a timely fashion. Evidence of this was printed and put on young people's files during the inspection.

The manager is unstinting in his efforts for child and adolescent needs and strengths (CANS) assessments, which include placement plans, behaviour management plans and individual risk assessments as 'live documents' that reflect young people's current situations and are signed and shared as appropriate. The CANS assessments identify areas of improvement and goals that young people have achieved as well as those that need continuing work. Charts clearly show where progress has been made and where regression may have taken place. An audit system ensures that case files are up to date and in good order. This means that staff have ready access to information that is current and of a remarkable quality.

Key workers' recording of their sessions with young people has developed to be of an excellent standard, with a clear record of the issues, views and suggestions of each young person.

Staff feel well supported, with the manager and his deputy seen as having complementary skills and approaches, 'so they cover everything' as one commented. Another professional described the manager's style, consulting others

but taking responsibility for decisions, saying, 'He listens to the group and then makes a decision, and his decisions are wise.'

Supervision and appraisals take place in accordance with the home's workforce plan and are regarded by staff as helpful and responsive to the emotional impact of the work and professional development. Team meetings are thought of as productive occasions, helping the group to discuss how best to meet particular young people's needs and learn together. More than one member of staff commented on how their understanding of the home's theoretical approach has been enhanced by these meetings, including the therapeutic consultant's input to them. Helpful minutes complement the discussion.

Staff turnover is low, and the manager and other staff often cover for leave when necessary, in addition to the use of bank workers and occasionally of agency staff, all of whom the young people know well. The result is that young people benefit from a stable staff team that is developing its skills and improving standards on a continuous basis. Staff enjoy their work and, rightly, believe that they make a demonstrable difference to the lives of young people, with one going as far as to say, 'I wish I had been brought up here.'

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 children looked after 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 that 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 that 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 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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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