

Children's homes – Interim inspection

Inspection date	06/03/2017
Unique reference number	1183936
Type of inspection	Interim
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Acorn Homes (UK) Ltd
Registered provider address	424 Margate Road, Ramsgate CT12 6SJ

Responsible individual	David Knowles
Registered manager	Post vacant
Inspector	Angus MacKay

Inspection date	06/03/2017
Previous inspection judgement	Good
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
<p>The effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection</p> <p>This home was judged good at the full inspection. At this interim inspection, Ofsted judges that it has improved effectiveness.</p> <p>The acting manager was not present during this inspection. However, she did make contact to discuss her application to register as manager of this setting. The acting manager has been a registered manager for another setting and has commenced the registration process for this children's home. Staff in the home say that she has been inspirational since commencing employment, and has focused them on building positive relationships with the children and improving recording on their interventions, including risk assessments, care plans, notifications and complaints.</p> <p>Since the last inspection the acting manager has made significant progress in addressing requirements and recommendations. The registered provider ensures that an independent person visits the home at least monthly to monitor and report on the functioning of the home. The acting manager uses these highly detailed and analytical reports to aid staff progress. The independent visitor reports recognise and reinforce progress in the home. For example, staff relationships with children have improved, and the staff's improved use of sanctions and rewards has led to a reduction in the number of serious incidents. In addition, the independent visitor highlights areas for improvement and provides helpful analysis of data to aid staff in this process. The acting manager is using this critical analysis of the service to aid her progress and improve outcomes for children.</p> <p>Following the last inspection, the management team revised the statement of purpose and sent a copy to HMCI. The revised statement has some incomplete comments, still contains some unhelpful repetition, and has incomplete information on staff experience and qualifications. Also, it does not clearly explain how to access a copy of the behaviour management policy. The statement of purpose does outline how staff seek to provide individualised care to meet the quality standards for children in their care.</p> <p>The acting manager has appointed two new members of staff since the last inspection. Managers completed relevant checks on the new appointees prior to appointment, including their right to work in this country, and recorded this information on the staff file. The good application of safe recruitment guidelines ensures the selection of appropriate and competent staff. The acting manager has</p>	

most of the information required in Schedule 4, Children's Homes Regulations, recorded on the front sheet of their staff file. However, there are two minor omissions that were discussed during the inspection.

The acting manager has reviewed the staff approach to reporting serious incidents to Ofsted and to relevant others. The independent visitor has aided in this process by checking that staff are complying with the required reporting procedures. This has resulted in some discussions with Ofsted about which incidents staff should report, and the quality of that reporting. The acting manager has drafted and implemented clearer guidelines for staff, and has instructed senior staff in this revised reporting protocol. Due to the short time between inspections there have been some minor issues relating to staff successfully using the new guidelines. The management team is now ensuring that staff report relevant matters in a timely manner. However, on occasions the reports have lacked all of the information required to evidence that all parties have taken appropriate actions. The manager has continued to focus on improving the quality and consistency in the reporting of incidents through ongoing training and the use of feedback from the independent visitor.

The acting manager has modified the personal risk assessment process in the home. She has ensured that all risk assessments are current, regularly reviewed and accurately reflect the current risk. She has clearly linked key-worker sessions to risk assessments that evidence staff interactions, to aid children to reduce risk. The new format provides suitable guidance regarding staff actions with children, and links to other guides such as positive handling plans. The risk assessments are effective guides to staff actions. However, they do not provide actual targets to aid staff tracking of progress, and to enable children to see how successfully they are reducing risk.

The acting manager has reviewed and revised the recording and investigation of complaints. She has produced clear guidance for staff in how to address complaints, and in particular how to record them. The independent visitor identified some gaps in previous recording and in staff familiarity with the new system. The new format is comprehensive, transparent and inclusive, and provides a clear record of each complaint, including its resolution. However, at least one complaint made prior to this new procedure has an incomplete record which does not include the outcome or date of resolution of the complaint.

Children and staff have positive, warm and caring relationships. Children feel safe in the home and say that it is better than other places they have lived in. One child said, 'The staff here are nice and welcoming. I feel at home here and can relax. I feel safe and can trust the staff and can talk to them.' The staff team has significantly improved the atmosphere and ambience in the home. Children are engaged in changes and have a sense of ownership in the home. One child said that their only problem in the home was when others caused damage, saying, 'I like living here. I am only annoyed when others cause damage. Why would you damage your own home? I tell them not to and they stop.'

The acting manager has reviewed and revised the staff procedure for when children go missing. She has also analysed absences from the home, including looking at the offer of return interviews, and their uptake. She has sought information from those conducting the interviews and used this in her analysis of reasons for absences. This has allowed her to initiate strategy meetings to improve joint planning at an early stage. Where social workers have not conducted return interviews the management team has escalated its concerns within local authorities, successfully addressing the lack of support to children. Staff also actively search for children who go missing, and put in place effective safeguarding measures with local transport services. This has resulted in a reduction in the number and length of absences from the home, thus improving the safety of children. One child said, 'I did not feel comfortable or safe in my last place so I just went missing. Being on the street seemed safer to me. Here it is much nicer. It is homely and I am relaxed so I do not want to run away.'

The acting manager leads the staff team in their drive to engage all children in education. This process has included using innovative approaches to engage children and gradually reintegrate them into mainstream education. Where local authorities have not provided suitable education, staff in the home have consistently and stridently challenged social workers and education departments to improve the support for children in their care. The management team has been unflinching in its drive to improve educational access and outcomes for children in its care. This has included escalating concerns, with formal complaints to underperforming placing authorities.

Staff monitor children's engagement in education and set targets to track their progress. They produce monthly reports for social workers evidencing children's progress. Where children have in-house tuition, tutors provide updates on children's functional levels in key subjects and monitor attendance and engagement in sessions. Staff ensure that all children have a daily routine that includes education. Two children on home tuition actively sought their work and engaged positively throughout the inspection. Staff are diligent in working to ensure that children receive appropriate opportunities to improve their educational progress.

The management team has reviewed and revised its approach to monitoring health and safety in the home, including fire safety. Risk assessments now include the frequency of testing of fire safety equipment, and staff diligently record this information. Fire safety is enhanced by regular staff use and monitoring of fire drills, ensuring that all children and staff have practised evacuations of the building, including at night.

Staff are knowledgeable about the home's safeguarding policies and procedures, and implement them in practice. When children make complaints about incidents in the home, staff often discuss these with the local authority safeguarding team, and always with the designated officer if the complaints are against staff. Children say

that staff are clear to them about the limits of confidentiality in their conversations, and that they feel safe confiding in them. Staff have swiftly and appropriately referred disclosures on to the relevant safeguarding and social care teams. Staff provide good key working and documented support to children in their care, to aid them both in the short and long term following their disclosure about traumatic events.

The acting manager has comprehensively revised the staff approach to dealing with difficult behaviour. She has embedded a more positive approach, with rewards for positive behaviours, and reduced use of sanctions. When staff use sanctions they now refer to them as consequences and ensure that they are clearly and logically linked to the actual behaviour. Staff encourage children to set their own consequences, and to gain more control over their own behaviours. Simultaneously, the acting manager has reviewed the staff approach to serious incidents, which previously often led to restraint. The positive handling guides for children are now much more detailed, and the acting manager has designed them to structure staff interventions. They now provide staff with identified triggers to behaviour, detailed descriptions of how behaviours look and clear alternative actions at different stages in their interventions. During the inspection, staff put the revised process into use. They were more proactive, identifying possible triggers in advance and combating them before they occurred. The management team has revised the recording formats, providing effective interlinked records of each incident and subsequent debriefs. The recording system provides an excellent record of the actual techniques used at all stages including, if necessary, the restraint holds. The acting manager has encouraged staff to engage positively with children and use rewards and targets more consistently. The combination of all of these positive changes has resulted in a dramatic reduction in restraints and damage in the home, and an improvement in staff–children relationships.

The management team carefully controls admissions to the home. Managers consider the decision to accept or reject any referral, and record this on the excellently constructed and effective impact risk assessment tool. The management team identifies any known risks involved with new referrals, and assesses whether the team can meet the needs, or requires additional resources or training to do so. In particular, managers assess the impact on the existing group and their possible impact on the referral, and factor this into the decision-making process.

Information about this children's home

This is a privately run children's home offering care and accommodation for up to six children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. All children have en-suite bedrooms. Children have access to a health and well-being team which provides assessment, counselling and a range of therapeutic interventions.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
09/11/2016	Full	Good

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

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

- Revise risk assessments ensuring that they aid staff in identifying signs that children are at risk and give them a framework to support children in strategies to manage and reduce any risks. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 43, paragraph 9.10)
- Revise the statement of purpose and function, ensuring that it is child focused and indicates how the home provides individualised care to meet the quality standards for the children in its care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 14, paragraph 3.5)
In particular, remove unnecessary repetitions and include information on how to access the behaviour management policy.
- Ensure that staff encourage children to share any concern about their care or other matters as soon as they arise. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 23, paragraph 4.13)
In particular, ensure that staff record the outcomes from these concerns, when they are concluded and that they are familiar with the revised procedure.
- Ensure that staff have a system in place so that all serious events are notified, within 24 hours, to the appropriate people. The system should cover the action that should be followed if the event arises at the weekend or on a public holiday. Notification must include details of the action taken by the home's staff in response to the event. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 63, paragraph 14.13)
- Ensure that you keep appropriate records for staff in the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.8)
In particular, that you have the following information detailed in Schedule 4: (b) the person's sex; (f) whether the person works at the home full time or part time (whether paid or not) and if part time, the average number of hours worked per week.

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 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 who 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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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