

2572812

Registered provider: Acorn Homes (UK) Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home provides care for up to five children with social and emotional difficulties. The home is run by a private organisation that operates several registered children's homes. At the time of this inspection, three children were living in the home.

The home has not had a registered manager since 1 July 2024. A new manager was appointed on 11 November 2024 but has yet to make an application to register with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 January 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 3 October 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
03/10/2023	Full	Good
27/09/2022	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Staff have a detailed understanding of children's needs and backgrounds. Staff recognise and celebrate the uniqueness of the children living in the home and the support they provide is naturally adjusted to reflect this.

Children have good relationships with staff and identify them as the main adults they would approach with any concerns or worries. The staff develop positive relationships with children's families and other people who are important to them.

Children are making good progress from their starting points. Children's health, emotional and educational needs are fully understood, and staff work to ensure these needs are met. Staff work in partnership with relevant professionals to ensure a holistic approach is taken to meet the children's needs. When there have been concerns around children's health or educational needs, staff have been instrumental in getting partner agencies together to ensure effective planning for children. They are dedicated and persistent when advocating for children.

When children are not enrolled in education, staff ensure that they receive appropriate support, such as regular tuition, to ensure steady progress. One tutor praised staff in their efforts to ensure that the child is prepared and ready to engage in learning.

Children's views are regularly sought through natural discussions and planned meetings. Children feel their wishes and views are listened to and acted on. A real strength of staff is the meaningful discussions they have with children. These discussions give children the time needed to explore their feelings, while also providing staff with opportunities to offer advice and guidance.

Children engage in a range of activities that reflect their individual interests. This looks different for every child in the home, depending on their needs and preferences. Staff are responsive when children identify activities they want to try, resulting in children being able to have new experiences and discovering things they are good at. Children's successes are recognised and praised by staff. This helps them to develop a sense of pride in their achievements.

The importance of preparing children for adulthood is fully recognised by staff. All the children are making great strides in developing independence skills. One child is currently being supported to work through a tailored independence plan, and another has taken on some responsibility for their meal planning and food budget. Through this support, children develop the life skills needed to prepare them for future independent living.

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

Staff have a solid understanding of both the collective and individual risks for children living in the home. Staff ensure that each child has a robust individual risk assessment in place. This sets out the agreed steps required from staff when safeguarding issues arise. Consequently, staff mitigate risks and keep children safe. One parent said, 'I sleep a little better at night knowing they [the child] are in a safe environment.'

Staff are skilled in de-escalation techniques. As a result, there has only been one occasion when staff have needed to use physical intervention. This physical intervention was proportionate. Reflective discussions were held with staff and children following the incident. Additional reflective time has also been provided in team meetings to help identify possible lessons learned.

On the rare occasions when children have made allegations against staff, these have been appropriately responded to and well managed. Immediate safeguarding measures are taken to ensure children's safety. The manager quickly submits safeguarding referrals appropriately to the appropriate professionals, and consultations are held with safeguarding agencies to support the organisation's investigation of any allegation.

Staff are fair and consistent in the boundaries they set for children. They balance this with a nurturing approach to the care they provide. Praise and positive incentives are used to support children to understand the behaviour that is expected from them. Children describe staff as being committed to their roles. When support provided conflicts with what children want, children recognise that staff are keeping their safety and best interests at the forefront of decision-making.

Staff know the steps required of them when children go missing from the home. They act quickly and responsively to ensure the child's safe return. Staff are guided on what to do by individual plans in place for when children go missing. These include a photo of the child as well as a record of known contacts and places they may be. However, on one occasion, there was a delay in reporting a child missing and staff did not follow the protocol in place for that child.

The home is a warm and comfortable environment for children to live in. The children have nice bedrooms and are encouraged to personalise their rooms when moving in. Children's views on decor in the communal areas are also considered, with one child saying they were consulted about the kitchen refurbishment. A lock was put on the kitchen door as an interim safeguard. Although only locked late at night, this takes away from the homely feel the staff are trying to create. It has since been identified that this lock is no longer needed, and while there are plans for it to be removed, it remained in place at the time of the inspection.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

There has been a change of manager since the last inspection. After the registered manager left in July 2024, there was a period of 15 weeks when the home was without a manager. A new manager was appointed by the organisation in November 2024 but at the time of the inspection had yet to submit an application to register with Ofsted.

Senior managers make good use of external monitoring, using this to scrutinise, improve and drive progress in the home. However, only one internal review of the home's progress has been completed by managers since the last inspection.

Senior leaders do not always ensure good management of records. Some documents had been incorrectly archived and some records were missing. Some outdated records, including risk management plans, were held on the children's files. This meant it was not easy to find important accurate and up-to-date information.

A decision was made by senior managers to move two children into the home when the home was without a manager. While senior and interim management support was available, the absence of a full-time manager had not been considered in the admission assessment for one of the children. Interim arrangements for management oversight, while supportive during stable periods at the home, were not effective at times of unrest. During this time, the lack of a permanent manager had a negative effect. Children and staff commented on how this affected children's sense of safety and staff's confidence when managing challenging situations.

The new manager has a clear vision for the home. They have quickly established a good understanding of the children's needs and have been proactive in their efforts to form relationships with children, their families and partner professionals. Despite not having been in post for very long, the manager has already identified and begun to implement improvements. While not yet fully embedded, these improvements are starting to be of benefit to both children and staff.

The manager is setting clear benchmarks for staff to follow. Children say the home is more settled since the new manager has been in post and staff say the manager is having a positive effect on staff retention and morale.

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, The 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
<p>The registered provider must appoint a person to manage the children's home if—</p> <p>there is no registered manager in respect of the home; and the registered provider—</p> <p>is not, or does not intend to be, in day-to-day charge of the home. (Regulation 27 (1)(a)(b)(iii))</p> <p>In particular, the manager should apply to register with Ofsted.</p>	11 February 2025
<p>The registered person must ensure that—</p> <p>children can access all appropriate areas of the children's home's premises; and any limitation placed on a child's privacy or access to any area of the home's premises—</p> <p>is intended to safeguard each child accommodated in the home; is necessary and proportionate; is kept under review and, if necessary, revised; and allows children as much freedom as is possible when balanced against the need to protect them and keep them safe. (Regulation 21 (b)(c)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv))</p> <p>In particular, review the use of the lock on the kitchen door.</p>	24 January 2025
<p>The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children ("a quality of care review") at least once every 6 months.</p> <p>In order to complete a quality of care review the registered person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating—</p> <p>the quality of care provided for children;</p>	24 January 2025

the feedback and opinions of children about the children's home, its facilities and the quality of care they receive in it and;

any actions that the registered person considers necessary in order to improve or maintain the quality of care provided for children.

After completing a quality of care review, the registered person must produce a written report about the quality of care review and the actions which the registered person intends to take as a result of the quality of care review ("the quality of care review report").

The registered person must—

supply to HMCI a copy of the quality of care review report within 28 days of the date on which the quality of care review is completed and;

make a copy of the quality of care review report available on request to a placing authority, if the placing authority is not the parent of a child accommodated in the home.

The system referred to in paragraph (2) must provide for ascertaining and considering the opinions of children, their parents, placing authorities and staff.

(Regulation 45 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c) (3) (4)(a)(b) (5))

Recommendations

- The registered person should make clear to staff the procedures to be followed when a child is missing or away from the home without permission. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.28)
- The registered person should ensure that all children's case records are stored securely and are accessible while the children remain in the home. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.28)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, 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: 2572812

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Acorn Homes (UK) Ltd

Registered provider address: Unit 73 and 74 Maple Leaf Business Park, Manston, Ramsgate CT12 5GD

Responsible individual: Sophie Wood

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Kerry Howarth, Social Care Inspector

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