



Acorn Park



Acorn Park Children's Home Inspection Report

June 2017



SC435322

Registered provider: Acorn Norfolk Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The children's home and school is owned by a private organisation and is registered to provide accommodation for 40 children who have special educational needs and/or learning disabilities. There is a school on the site, which is registered with the Department for Education to cater for children and young people aged from 6 to 19 years.

Inspection dates: 7 to 8 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: 13 July 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: Requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because

- A new registered manager and responsible individual have made a number of

positive changes. This has improved the quality of care for the children, improved partnerships with parents and inspired renewed confidence in professionals and placing authorities.

- The children make consistently good progress at the home across all areas of their development.
- Attendance and engagement in school are good.
- The staff are well led and well supported.
- The records that support practice are monitored robustly.
- The staff and healthcare professionals manage the children’s healthcare needs capably and unobtrusively.
- Robust safeguarding arrangements are embedded and established in practice. All of the staff have received training and are familiar with the procedures to ensure that the children are safeguarded effectively.
- The staff actively promote equality of opportunity for the children.
- The long-term placements are successful in providing security and routine for the children.
- Monitoring arrangements are well developed and coordinated to provide an additional safeguard for the children and to drive continual improvement.
- Feedback from parents and external professionals is good.

The children’s home’s areas for development

- A significant number of staff have not attained a relevant level 3 qualification within the required timeframe.
- On two occasions, there have been failures to notify Ofsted about significant events in the home.
- The clarity of handwritten records and the depth of information recording in regard to pre-employment checks needs to be improved.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
13/07/2016	Full	Requires improvement

18/05/2016	Full	Inadequate
17/02/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
23/09/2015	Full	Requires improvement

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
The registered person must ensure that an individual who works in the home in a care role has the appropriate qualification, the level 3 diploma for residential childcare (England) ('the level 3 diploma'), or a qualification which the registered person considers to be equivalent to the level 3 diploma, by the relevant date. (Regulation 32(4)(5))	04/12/2017
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40(4)(e))	04/07/2016

Recommendations

- 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 is with particular regard to ensuring that checks relating to the reasons for staff ceasing prior employment with children or vulnerable adults are explored effectively.
- Ensure that staff are familiar with the home's policies on record keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective, and clear recording. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)
This is with particular regard to ensuring that records are clear and understandable.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Each child living at this home makes consistent and positive progress. Attendance and engagement in education are good. The staff work extremely well to provide a service that combines care and education seamlessly. The staff provide care that is bespoke and responsive to the unique needs of the children. This has enabled children who previously could not attend education to succeed. Absences from education are occasional. The staff provide a flexible approach, such as taking literacy games to the residential provision for a child who is unsettled by changes to the morning routine. Children achieve Asdan personal development certificates and level 2 functional skills in English and mathematics. The education curriculum includes a number of practical activities that are fun and develop children's interests. A small animal care provision is being developed in the grounds for vocational animal care. The children benefit from education that is tailored to their needs, abilities and interests.

Children ride bikes, fly kites, swim, trampoline and enjoy being in the play barn. The children use the extensive grounds and benefit from a wide range of activities that develops their interests and skills. Extra-curricular activity planners are shared with parents so that they know what their children are doing. This provides a point of reference for parents when they speak to their children.

Parents and carers are welcomed to the home, and many travel from a distance. The home provides accommodation for visiting parents, where they can spend quality time with their child in a house that is on the school site. Staff also support the children to visit their family homes, supporting family relationships.

The manager has made substantial efforts to meet and reassure the parents of new children and of the existing children. Feedback gained from parents has significantly improved. A family member, who had previously raised concerns about the service, stated, 'Things are much better.' Overall, parents have an increased confidence in the provision.

The manager has engaged an advocate who visits the home regularly. She is known as 'Mrs Grumbles'. The children have made good use of their time with her to express their worries. The visitor makes herself known to the new children and is recognised by all of the children. She supports children who experience barriers to communicating to share their views, thus providing them with an external adult and an additional safeguard. The number of complaints has reduced. There were 20 complaints between January 2016 and July 2016. Since that time, there have been no external complaints. There have been four 'grumbles' from children. This demonstrates that the children have a voice in the home.

The accommodation has radically improved, having been refurbished and repainted. The houses are modern and well equipped. Each house is highly individualised, providing the right level of stimulus for the children. A rolling programme of decoration means that all of the houses are fresh, clean and well furnished. There are two sensory rooms. The extensive grounds are routinely maintained. Some of the fencing has been removed inside the perimeter of the grounds to provide a more open feel to the site. Soft furnishings have been chosen to provide a tactile and comfortable environment. This

provides children with easy access to the outside areas, and living accommodation that is comfortable and stimulating.

The staff and the deputy managers have excellent relationships with the children. Interactions are strong and positive. Observations of staff practice with the children show a collaborative and mutually supportive approach. This is enhanced further by targeted support: 50% of the children use a speech and language therapist to support their communication needs. A number of supporting communication aids include picture exchange systems, iPads and sign language. Social stories developed by the therapists help to support children to understand their routines, and reduce their anxiety. This has enabled children to attend appointments with the dentist and to manage other changes.

The children's health needs have good oversight by a registered general nurse. Two nurses provide daily support to the staff and the children. This ensures that the children's physical health is monitored carefully. The nurses provide healthcare plans for children who have specific health needs. The administration of medication is carefully audited. This ensures that mistakes and errors are captured and that the staff are accountable.

There is an emphasis on healthy eating. The main meals are provided at school. Caterers make the children's known favourite meals, using lighter ingredients. Staff cook with the children in each house and ensure that menu options are nutritionally balanced and reflect children's tastes and preferences. This builds life skills and teaches children about healthy options.

The transition planning for future placements and adult placements is very good. The manager has secured an adult placement for one child within the adult services owned by the organisation. This means that planning and preparation for the move are well under way, alongside a provisional further education placement. Another child is being supported to move out of the home to a foster placement. All of the staff are included in assisting the planning and progress of the new placement. A child who is new to the home was described by the social worker as having an, 'amazing transition'. As the education staff knew him, they supported and spent evenings with the care support staff. This facilitated the best possible transition and helped the child through the adjustment to the residential environment, minimising the stress to that child.

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

The staff know the children extremely well. A comprehensive understanding of children's behavioural triggers has been used to reduce the number of negative behavioural incidents. Staff follow dynamic risk assessments that are tailored to each child. These are up to date, reflect recent behaviours and dovetail to other documentation compiled by the staff. The risk assessments guide staff in how to manage complex behaviours linked to children's autistic spectrum disorders. The risk assessments have been developed from observations of children and analysis of the records. This has resulted in planned interventions that minimise children's distress and help children to build stable routines.

The use of restrictive physical holds has been carefully scrutinised by the management team. This scrutiny identifies patterns and underlying triggers, such as stress factors or illness. This helps the staff to understand the behaviour of children who are unable to communicate their own needs verbally. The positive trend is that, over the course of one year, the number of these holds has continued to reduce each month and has reached a record low. Each hold is reviewed and cross-referenced with the positive handling plan and the child's risk assessment. Children are spoken to about the need for the hold. This is recorded in a full debriefing discussion. Staff are asked to reflect on their practice. The robust oversight of the records ensures that physical interventions reflect the guidance in the children's positive handling plans. Staff are expected to be reflective and accountable for their decision-making in regard to this. This safeguards children and promotes their respect and dignity.

The children very rarely leave the home without the staff. During the last year there have been two short-duration incidents. The last one was recorded extremely well. The staff have looked at the influencing factors to reduce the likelihood of further incidents. One child came to the service with a history of prolific running away and subsequent risk. A number of preventative actions have successfully reduced the incidence of running away. Following one incident, there were three management debriefings, a meeting with parents and changes to the immediate environment. This shows how the home prevents the children from taking unnecessary risks that are elevated by their specific vulnerabilities and lack of danger awareness.

There have been four recorded bullying incidents in the last year, and these do not amount to any serious incidents. The records show that the staff are vigilant and that the children are able to approach staff and say when they feel that there are tensions in the group. The records show good follow-up work and resolution. This helps the children to live alongside one another peacefully. There are currently no children in the home at risk of child sexual exploitation or of radicalisation. The training undertaken by staff includes these elements and ensures that the staff remain vigilant to the children's vulnerabilities in these areas.

The staff have all had specific safeguarding training for children who have learning difficulties. The staff understand their roles and responsibilities in providing safe and professional practice. Staff understand how to whistle-blow. This has resulted in several allegations about staff being investigated and referred to the designated officer. Two of these allegations were not notified as required. This did not have an impact on children's safety or well-being. However, lack of notification does not give Ofsted timely information about the events in the home and the subsequent follow-up. The investigations carried out by the manager demonstrate a robust chronology, probing investigation and good learning outcomes. This ensures that the staff are accountable, provide appropriate role models and maintain professional conduct.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

A suitably experienced manager has been in post since April 2016. She is registered with Ofsted. She holds a level 4 qualification in residential childcare and a postgraduate diploma in management. She has considerable experience as both a registered manager and a senior manager, overseeing a range of residential children's homes. She receives support from two deputy managers.

Since the last inspection, the management team has grown in stature, confidence and, consequently, impact. The team maintains its professional development through regular learning opportunities and attending a range of relevant training sessions. The stability of the management team is a significant factor in the progress that the service has made.

The management team prioritises the needs of children. The team has a good understanding of the plans for children. A social worker said, 'They have turned the child's life around.' He elaborated, 'They were flexible. They understood him. They understood his behaviour. They understood how to control his behaviour. They understood how to deal with him. That provided the foundation to enable [the child] to meet the potential within himself.'

The staff challenge placing authorities when they feel that plans are not in the child's best interests. These challenges are effective and result in improvements to the experiences of children and their families.

The children make progress because of the support that they receive. Families and professionals report progress across a range of areas. These include improved behaviour, communication and lower anxiety. A parent said, 'Her behaviour has really improved. They have managed to get to the point where she can enjoy each day.' Another stated, 'When I was there last week, she took her iPad and she pointed out to me, "I want ripping". I was so excited, and I ran and told them [staff] and we quickly ran to go and get the paper. I was thrilled. These steps may seem small to other people, but to me they are colossal.'

The staff report that they are well managed. They report significant improvements in the quality of the service. They feel that the service is better structured and that this is reflected in the managerial support that they receive. All of the staff have received training in relation to safeguarding. The majority of the staff have had training in safeguarding children who have disabilities.

While the staffing stability has improved since the last inspection, there is still a reliance on agency staff to cover gaps in the rota. The management team recognises this as an area for development and is implementing a new recruitment strategy to mitigate against this. In addition, a significant number of staff have not attained the relevant level 3 qualification within the required timeframe.

Some records are handwritten, lack clarity and are difficult to understand. Recruitment records are generally sufficient. However, the process for establishing the reason that staff have left any previous post where they have worked with children or vulnerable

adults should be strengthened.

Feedback from external professionals and families is positive overall. A parent said, 'They have my complete confidence. I can rest easy knowing that she is in good hands.' A social worker said, 'I cannot fault them with what they have been doing.'

Monitoring arrangements are good. Leaders and managers seek the views of key stakeholders. They seek the thoughts and opinions of staff, families and professionals. An independent person visits the home each month. These visits are of a sufficient length and depth to assess the quality of the service. The management team's monitoring report is a much-improved document. There is a culture of audit and quality assurance emerging in the service and this has had a demonstrable impact on the quality of the service. If sustained, this approach has the potential to drive further improvement with success and pace.

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 difference 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 who 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: SC435322

Provision sub-type: Residential special school

Registered provider: Acorn Norfolk Limited

Registered provider address: 1 Merchants Place, River Street, Bolton BL2 1BX

Responsible individual: Jennifer Gill

Registered manager: Samantha Millward

Inspectors

Deirdra Keating, social care inspector

Ashley Hinson, social care inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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