

Children's homes inspection – Full

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| Inspection date | 02/08/2016 |
| Unique reference number | SC065684 |
| Type of inspection | Full |
| Provision subtype | Children's home |
| Registered provider | J & R Care Limited |
| Registered provider address | J & R Care, Ash House South, Ash Road, New Ash Green, Longfield, Kent DA3 8JF |

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| Responsible individual | Jane Parish |
| Registered manager | Post vacant |
| Inspectors | Stephen Collett John Pledger |

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| Inspection date | 02/08/2016 |
| Previous inspection judgement | Requires improvement |
| 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 |

SC065684

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- Leaders and managers have taken effective action to address the shortfalls identified at the last full inspection. They learn from mistakes and strive for continuous improvement.
- As a result of introducing robust monitoring systems, the quality of care provided to young people has improved.
- There is a proactive response from managers and staff when young people go missing. Agreed protocols are followed, and the strategies identified in young people's risk assessments are fully implemented.
- Over time, staff develop positive, nurturing relationships with young people. As a result, young people have increased levels of self-esteem and emotional well-being.
- Young people's psychological needs are monitored, and specialist counselling is made available to help them to overcome past trauma.
- Most young people engage well in education, which is provided by the organisation at the on-site school.
- A restorative approach is taken to maintaining positive peer relationships and addressing negative behaviours. There is a robust response to any sign of bullying among the group.
- Staff provide high levels of support to young people moving from the home to semi-independence. Consequently, many of the young people who have been in long-term placements make successful transitions to adult life.
- Leaders and managers work effectively with other agencies and strongly challenge professionals perceived not to be acting in the young person's best interests.
- Some shortfalls were identified, particularly in relation to the home's three-month assessment model, impact risk assessments, case files and the standard of record keeping.

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 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'. The registered persons must comply within the given timescales.

| Requirement | Due date |
|---|-----------|
| <p>6: The quality and purpose of care standard</p> <p>In order to meet the quality and purpose of care standard, with specific reference to assessing the likely impact of new admissions to the home, the registered person must ensure—</p> <p>(3)(b) that the care meets the child's needs.</p> | 30/9/2016 |
| <p>13: The leadership and management standard</p> <p>In order to meet the leadership and management standard, with specific reference to the three-month assessment period for new admissions, the registered person must—</p> <p>(2)(h) use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home.</p> | 30/9/2016 |
| <p>The registered person must prepare and implement a policy which provides for records to be kept of an allegation of abuse or neglect, and the action taken in response; specifically, to ensure that records are kept of the action taken in response to a child disclosing historic abuse. (Regulation 34(2)(d))</p> | 30/9/2016 |
| <p>The registered person must maintain records ('case records') for each child which include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child; specifically, to ensure that case records contain the placing authority's placement plan, and that reports pertaining to restraint and missing episodes are detailed and accurate. (Regulation 36(1)(a))</p> | 30/9/2016 |

Recommendations

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

- Ensure that the home provides a homely, domestic environment. In particular, ensure that interior decoration is maintained to a high standard. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- The relevant officer within the local authority should be informed promptly of all allegations that come to an employer's attention. Specifically, to ensure that accurate information is provided to the relevant officer. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 44, paragraph 9.18)
- Ensure that staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs. In particular, ensure that staff receive training in recording and report writing, and assessment skills. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.11)

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home is privately run and provides care and accommodation for no more than six young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Education is provided in an adjacent building.

Recent inspection history

| Inspection date | Inspection type | Inspection judgement |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 08/07/2015 | Full | Requires improvement |
| 24/03/2015 | Interim | Improved effectiveness |
| 13/05/2014 | Full | Adequate |
| 11/03/2014 | Interim | Inadequate progress |

Inspection judgements

| | Judgement grade |
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| <p>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are</p> | <p>Good</p> |
| <p>Care staff were observed to be attentive and nurturing in their interactions with young people. One young person, who had only been at the home for a short period, had clearly begun to build positive attachments with staff. He stated, 'I like the staff. They know what they are doing, and I want to stay here until I am 18.' Young people have many opportunities to express their views on how they are cared for, including regular one-to-one meetings with the registered person. As they become more settled, they play a greater role in the care planning process, particularly in relation to transition to semi-independence. Over the last year, three young people who lived at the home for substantial periods successfully moved to new accommodation while making good progress in their chosen careers and college studies.</p> <p>Over time, young people who remain at the home for long periods develop positive relationships with staff and begin to increase their sense of security and consistency. This provides them with opportunities to address the impact of past traumatic experiences, and leaves them more prepared for adult life. However, over the last nine months, the home has introduced a three-month assessment model. This is used by managers to assess whether it would be appropriate to offer a young person a long-term placement. This has resulted in a high number of short-term placements in recent months. This has the potential to undermine the sense of stability and consistency experienced by young people in long-term placements. Some young people spoken to during the inspection were not fully aware that they were being assessed or what had to happen for them to remain at the home. This was resulting in anxiety for some young people, who clearly wanted to remain at the home on a long-term basis.</p> <p>All young people have a place at the organisation's on-site school. Attendance by the current group of young people has been excellent. This is a significant achievement for most of them, who previously had negative experiences in education and failed to engage with teaching staff. Other young people, who have left the home in recent weeks, often failed to achieve good school attendance, largely as a result of going missing from the home. Most had still been at the assessment phase of their placement, and managers had taken the decision that they could not look after them on a long-term basis.</p> <p>The healthcare needs of young people are fully met. A healthy, balanced diet is provided, and young people are encouraged to engage in a range of activities that offer opportunities to take exercise. Regular visits to the home are undertaken by a</p> | |

looked after children's nurse, who provides advice and guidance on maintaining a healthy lifestyle and how to access more specialist support services. Timely referrals are made to drug and alcohol workers for those young people who are vulnerable in this respect. Care is taken to ensure that young people attend all healthcare appointments, and those attending specialist provision are given the support needed to overcome their anxieties. An effective new system for recording the administration of medication has been introduced. This is well implemented in practice, and demonstrates the vigilance of staff when they suspect that a young person may not be taking their medication as prescribed.

Young people's mental health needs are prioritised. As part of the initial assessment process, a psychotherapist commissioned by the home compiles a report containing recommendations for promoting the young person's psychological development and emotional well-being. The recommendations are used to inform the care planning process and can form the basis for further individual therapeutic work with the young person. Psychological reports have not been completed for all young people admitted for assessment. This is often the case when new admissions regularly go missing from the home and placements are terminated before the end of the three-month assessment period. Other young people have engaged more positively with the psychotherapist and have begun to attend counselling for the first time.

Staff encourage young people to resolve any conflicts that arise in the group through discussion and restorative approaches. On school days, group meetings take place after lessons. This provides young people with the opportunity to reflect on their day, say how they are feeling and resolve any disputes. The meeting also allows staff to reiterate their expectations in terms of positive behaviour and maintaining boundaries. Young people benefit from receiving a consistent message about group living arrangements, which enhances their overall sense of well-being. Staff demonstrate appropriate affection towards the young people, and celebrate their achievements and special occasions. During the inspection, many of the young people were planning, with staff, how they would celebrate their peer's forthcoming birthday.

Managers and staff work sensitively and effectively with parents and carers, despite often facing challenging situations. This has a positive outcome in terms of agreeing family contact arrangements, and supporting young people when these cause anxiety. One social worker complimented the ability of leaders and managers to support both the young person and the parent sensitively, following a serious breakdown in their relationship.

Overall, the house provides young people with a comfortable, welcoming environment. Some communal areas of the home, particularly those adjacent to the staircase and first-floor landing, need redecorating. One room on the ground floor has recently been made into a games room in an effort to engage some young people in more indoor activities to divert them from going missing. Plans for

a separate games room in the grounds of the home are soon to be implemented.

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| | Judgement grade |
| How well children and young people are helped and protected | Good |
| <p>Managers and staff are focused on keeping young people safe and protecting them from harm. They communicate effectively with placing authorities and other relevant agencies when planning how best to achieve this. In recent months, the actions taken by staff have resulted in some young people becoming safer, while others have continued to engage in high-risk behaviour, such as going missing, which compromises their safety. This mixed picture can be partly attributed to limited planning during the admissions process.</p> <p>The particular vulnerabilities of each young person are clearly identified, and staff are familiar with these. They are reflected in young people's individual risk assessments, which are detailed and provide staff with clear strategies for responding to particular behaviours. In addition, risk assessments identify potential triggers for unsafe behaviours and alert staff to possible changes in the young person's demeanour which could be a warning sign.</p> <p>There is a robust, coordinated response to young people who go missing from the home. Staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed for each young person and implement these effectively. They actively search for young people and know the areas that each young person may abscond to, their likely mode of transport and the associates who they may contact. A social worker commented, 'Staff worked closely with me to reduce his going missing, and were very aware of any new risks associated with his absconding. Often, staff who locate missing young people successfully persuade them to return to the home. However, the overall number of 'missing' episodes in recent months has been high. This has sometimes resulted in placements being terminated, as leaders and managers come to the conclusion that they are unable to keep a young person safe due to their continued absence from the home.</p> <p>Other young people have responded more positively to the support and guidance provided to help them to break the pattern of going missing. This has resulted in one young person, recently admitted to the home, becoming safer and less likely to be sexually exploited. The social worker with responsibility for investigating historic concerns for the young person said, 'Staff work closely with us. They have appropriate boundaries in place, and she returns to the home. This makes her safer than she was.'</p> <p>There is some inconsistency in the standard of recording information pertaining to 'missing' episodes. For example, some records fully record the circumstances of a young person's return to the home while other reports have sections, such as</p> | |

'reasons given for absconding/actions taken', which have not been completed. Similarly, the verbal feedback given by independent professionals undertaking return home interviews with young people is not always recorded. Consequently, there is the potential for relevant information, which could be used to protect young people more effectively, to be lost.

Young people spoken to during the inspection confirmed that they felt secure at the home. One said, 'This is my best home, so far. I feel safe here.' In some cases, this sense of security has enabled young people to begin talking about past abusive experiences. This has raised staff awareness of the risk of young people being sexually exploited, and they have appropriately shared the information with relevant professionals. However, the inconsistency in the standard of recording previously referred to means that, in another case, it cannot be evidenced that a young person's social worker was informed when the young person provided additional information relating to known historic abuse.

A consistent approach is maintained to promoting positive behaviour. Staff prioritise the use of incentives over sanctions and praise young people for making appropriate choices. Managers take a proactive approach to behaviour management and respond quickly to changing circumstances. Earlier this year, when the young people were being particularly challenging, managers temporarily increased staffing levels at night. Physical restraint is used appropriately and in accordance with the legislative framework. Robust monitoring by the registered person identifies incidents when the use of physical restraint was questionable and addresses practice issues with the staff concerned. However, as with other records, sufficient detail is not always provided. One restraint record failed to make clear whether a young person had been restrained on the staircase. Discussion with the registered person verified that this was not the case.

There is a strong response to any indications that a young person may be bullying others or is being bullied. Managers ensure that bullying is discussed regularly within the group and that individual discussions take place with young people during key-work sessions. Consultation also takes place with a voluntary sector agency to ensure that best practice is maintained in terms of identifying and minimising bullying. A restorative approach is taken to supporting young people to resolve any conflicts that arise. As a result of these measures, young people say that, when bullying does arise, it is dealt with effectively.

Effective communication takes place with the designated person in the local authority when allegations are made against staff. This includes consultation, when concerns have not yet been substantiated. Managers ensure that recommendations made by the designated person are implemented, and they undertake internal investigations when advised to do so. The designated person stated that, in one such investigation report, the record of the views of the staff member concerned had been completed by the manager rather than by the staff member. As a result, the quality of the internal investigation, on this occasion, was not sufficient.

Recruitment procedures are thorough and minimise the potential for unsuitable adults to be employed at the home. One member of staff said that the process had given them 'a realistic idea of the role that I would be undertaking'. During the inspection, the registered person was observed advising the deputy manager that a new member of staff would not be able to commence duties until a third reference had been received, despite all the other checks being satisfactory. This demonstrates a strong commitment to safer recruitment practices.

Health and safety checks are frequent. Fire safety equipment is serviced regularly, ensuring that it is fit for purpose. Young people live in a physically safe environment where their well-being is prioritised.

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| | Judgement grade |
| The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers | Good |

The registered manager post has been vacant since the end of May 2016. The home is currently being managed by an experienced deputy manager who holds the level 4 diploma in leadership and management for health and social care, and who is studying for the level 5 diploma. He was away during this inspection, but the registered person, who plays an active role in the day-to-day running of the home, was present throughout. The deputy manager intends to submit an application to Ofsted to become the registered manager. The registered person's commitment to the home has ensured that the effective management of the home has been maintained during the transitional period.

There has been a high turnover of staff since the last full inspection in July 2015, and there are currently three care staff vacancies. The shortfall in staffing is covered by using bank staff employed by the organisation. This ensures continuity of care for the young people. The majority of staff hold the level 3 diploma for residential childcare, and arrangements are being made for the remaining staff to access this course. During this inspection, several new members of staff were interviewed and were found to be skilled, competent and motivated to undertake the role.

Since the last full inspection, when an overall judgement of 'requires improvement' was made, leaders and managers have worked effectively to address most of the shortfalls identified. An updated quality of care monitoring process has been introduced, focusing on the requirements and recommendations made in the last full inspection report. Progress against identified actions has been reviewed in a timely manner. Significant events, such as physical restraints of young people, are monitored by managers, and an independent visitor maintains a suitable level of scrutiny in relation to practice in the home. Leaders and managers have demonstrated a willingness and determination to learn from mistakes and strive for continuous improvement.

The home's statement of purpose describes a three-month assessment period for new admissions to the home. The purpose of the assessment is to determine whether the home can offer a long-term placement for the young person. However, there is no clear distinction made between how the differing needs of young people in assessment and those residing long term will be met. This has the potential to cause instability among the group. Staff do not receive specific training to develop their assessment skills. In recent months, it has been decided that many of the young people admitted for assessment are not suitable for long-term placements. This has resulted in a high number of admissions and discharges.

Partly as a result of the assessment model, insufficient priority is given to assessing the likely impact of new admissions on the group before they are admitted to the home. This has resulted in young people with similar risks and vulnerabilities, particularly in terms of going missing, impacting negatively on one another's behaviour. Leaders and managers have recently identified the potential weakness in the three-month assessment model and introduced an initial two-week assessment to establish the likely impact of a new admission's behaviour on the other young people. However, more priority needs to be given to making child-centred decisions about who comes to live at the home before a new placement is actually made.

Leaders and managers ensure that care plans are updated to reflect the changing circumstances of young people. Information gathered during the assessment period is analysed and used to develop care plans, over time. This helps ensure the plans address the individual needs of young people. Realistic targets are agreed with young people, and progress against these is monitored. Some case records do not contain up-to-date copies of the local authority placement plan. Managers have notified the relevant social workers, but this has not yet had the required outcome.

Effective working relationships are maintained with the majority of professionals working with the home. A child protection social worker said, 'Effective sharing of information takes place, and managers are responsive if we feel that staff would benefit from additional training.' Leaders and managers are proactive when they perceive placing authorities not to be making decisions which are in the young person's best interests. They strongly challenge other professionals when appropriate, clearly setting out the reasons for their concern. In recent months, there has been some tension in the working relationship with police officers from the missing person's team, although good partnership working has been maintained with the local police community support officer. The registered person is committed to developing further positive relationships with all stakeholders.

Staff are able to access a good range of training opportunities, both online and classroom based. Recently, training has been delivered on working with young people who are on the autistic spectrum. This is particularly relevant to the current group of young people residing at the home, and demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that staff have the knowledge and skills to meet individual needs.

Currently, no training is being delivered in relation to report writing or record keeping. Staff would benefit from training in this area, as there are currently weaknesses in these aspects of their practice.

Regular supervision is provided in groups and on an individual basis. This provides staff with the opportunity to reflect on their practice, and to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. Daily staff handover meetings are a positive forum for staff to share information and consider the effectiveness of strategies for working with young people. This helps to ensure that the team works in a collaborative manner to provide consistent care for the young people.

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 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards

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