

SC008485

Registered provider: Choices Home For Children Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is registered to provide care for six children who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and/or physical disabilities. The home forms part of a small social care company.

Inspection dates: 5 to 6 September 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 **requires improvement to be good**

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 28 February 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: Sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- Young people benefit from receiving individualised care from a consistent and caring staff team.
- Staff are highly skilled at developing positive and nurturing relationships with young people, who consequently invest in the home.
- Staff spend time getting to know young people and have a detailed understanding of their needs and behaviour.
- Staff work effectively in partnership with professional stakeholders and families.
- Most young people become increasingly safe.
- Staff support young people to manage their emotions and behaviour. As a result, incidents of restraint and missing reduce.
- Young people attend and engage well with their schools and colleges, including those who have previously dis-engaged from education.
- Young people benefit from living in a homely and child-centred environment.
- Staff advocate robustly for young people.

The children's home's areas for development:

- The manager is new in post and is developing his monitoring and reviewing of the home. There are shortfalls which he has not yet addressed – in particular, regarding the maintenance of clear case records, up-to-date children looked after records and up-to-date and accurate risk assessments, and in ensuring Ofsted is notified of all significant events.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
28/02/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
02/08/2016	Full	Outstanding
04/02/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
18/06/2015	Full	Good

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 protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. In particular, the standard in paragraph 1 requires the registered person to ensure— 2(a) that staff— (i) assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child. (Regulation 12(2)(i)) In particular, ensuring that risk assessments are accurate and up to date	06/10/2017
The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— (a) helps children aspire to fulfil their potential: and (b) promotes their welfare. (2) In particular, the standard in paragraph 1 requires the registered person to— (h) use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13(1)(2)(h))	06/10/2017
The registered provider must notify HMCI without delay of any incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40(4)(e))	06/10/2017
The registered person must maintain records for each child which— (a) include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child; (b) are kept up to date; and (c) are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (2) Case records must be kept— (d) in a secure place after the child has ceased to be accommodated in the home. (Regulation 36(1)(a)(b)(c) and (2)(d))	06/10/2017

Recommendations

- 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. In particular, that the registered manager records their evaluation in an impact risk assessment. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.4)
- Staff should be familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Information about the child must always be recorded in a way that will be helpful to the child. In particular, that staff record all actions they take to safeguard young people and promote their welfare. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)
- The use of external agency staff can be a positive choice to complement the skills and experiences of the permanent workforce. Any external agency staff should meet the requirements in regulation 32(4) regarding mandatory qualifications and the registered person should consider their skills, qualifications and any induction necessary before they commence work in the home. In particular, that a record is kept of the agency staff's induction to the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.16)
- Children should be provided with appropriate furniture, such as a lockable cabinet or drawers to securely store personal items, including personal information. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 16, paragraph 3.19)
- The independent return interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting. ('Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care', page 14, paragraph 32)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Most young people's outcomes are positive. Some young people have lived in the home for a number of years and are making excellent progress. Their outcomes are exceptional over a sustained period of time across all areas of their development. The home has experienced a period of upheaval and young people's emotional resilience has enabled them to manage this well. One young person said, 'I feel 100% safe here. I have loads of bonds with staff. The new manager is fair and everyone knows what is happening now.'

Staff provide consistent and nurturing care for young people. This results in young people developing positive relationships with staff, which they maintain once they move

on. Young people speak freely about the positive bonds that they have with staff and the ease with which they can discuss 'anything'. Staff are passionate about promoting young people's views. They do this regardless of the opposition they encounter. One social worker said:

'I have to say this is one of the best residential units I have come across. Staff are very child-centred and I feel always go that extra mile for the young person. Staff are excellent in updating me and are always available to discuss any issues that arise. I am always made to feel welcome and have a very good relationship with staff. During reviews staff ensure that the young person's wishes and feelings are always heard and challenge the local authority appropriately should they feel any decision made is not in the best interest of the young person.... As a result of the support provided by the homes, both my young people are making excellent progress and will achieve positive outcomes when leaving care.'

Staff's positive role-modelling supports young people to develop problem-solving approaches to situations themselves. For example, during the inspection one young person was having problems with his moped breaking down, and he contacted staff for support and told them he would be calling the garage himself. Young people are well prepared for adult life. They develop practical skills such as cooking, doing their own laundry and keeping their rooms clean and tidy. Staff support them to develop positive friendships and to re-establish contact with their family. This means they are practically and emotionally prepared to move on to semi-independent living. Staff support young people well when their endings are unplanned. Three young people have left the home in an unplanned way since the last inspection, on two occasions because staff were unable to meet their specific complex needs. Staff provided practical and emotional support for the young people to ensure they did not feel rejected over the period of transition to their new placement. For example, staff supported the care of a young person in hospital for a month before they were able to move to an appropriate specialist placement.

Young people make good progress in attending and engaging with education. For some young people this represents significant progress from their starting point. A young person said to me: 'I have managed to stay at school! This is a first for me.' Staff promote contact with young people's families where that is safe and in their best interests, including supporting contact for young people who are living a long way from home. Parents value the support that staff offer them to maintain relationships with their children. One parent commented, 'The home is fantastic. Staff communicate well with me. They pick us up from the train station and provide us with food. My child has settled in there and is clean and well fed.'

Young people benefit from living in a homely environment. They have personalised their rooms and contribute to decisions about how the communal space is used. Young people feel comfortable in the home and they do not lock their bedroom doors, except at night. However, young people do not have the necessary lockable cabinets they need in order to store any personal items or documents. This would maintain their privacy and support their growing independence as they move towards adulthood.

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

Staff are highly skilled in identifying and understanding young people's risk-taking behaviour. Some young people have lived in the home for a number of years, but their risk assessments do not reflect the significant reduction in their risk-taking or evaluate how their increased safety and independence have led to a change in how they can safely behave in the home. As a result, some young people's care is not consistent with their risk assessments. This does not protect young people or staff.

Staff usually manage risk-taking behaviour well. They understand what to do when young people are missing and, because they know the young people well, know where to look for them and which family and friends to contact. Staff always look for young people when they are missing, even when they have returned to their placing authority far from the location of the home. They make young people welcome when they return to the home, and are skilled in supporting young people who have placed themselves at risk of, or experienced, sexual exploitation. One young person said, 'They are doing direct work with me and are helping me with the investigation process – supporting me through it.' Staff work effectively with the police and local child sexual exploitation services to reduce the risks to young people. Staff consistently ensure that young people are offered an independent return interview. However, changes to the way the local authority provides this service have led to delays in the interviews being completed. This is not helpful in gaining an understanding of the causes and events that occurred when young people are missing in order to inform strategic planning.

Leaders and managers provide specific training so that staff are able to understand and manage self-harming behaviours. This training, alongside their detailed understanding of young people's needs, means staff are able to respond effectively to serious self-harm incidents. This safeguards young people. Staff report that leaders and managers support them well following such incidents, recognising the emotional impact of the work.

Staff provide consistent boundaries for young people. This means that young people feel safe. This has not always been the case. As one young person said, 'It feels better – we get managed better – the previous manager ... some were his favourites and he would give in to anything. The new manager is not like that; if he says something he sticks to it and it is better.'

Staff are skilled in de-escalation techniques. When restraint is necessary staff support young people to understand why it has been necessary and to develop alternative strategies to manage their behaviour. As a result, there has been a reduction in the use of restraint. One young person said, 'I have learned to control myself, I'm more chilled. I have learned to walk away – they do direct work with me, I have learned what happens when you lose your temper and the effects.'

Leaders and managers respond robustly to complaints. Young people know how to complain. There have been three complaints since the last inspection, and young people are satisfied with the outcomes of those. Leaders and managers have learned from the issues raised. The responsible individual has responded promptly to shortfalls in practice, including making referrals to the designated officer. This protects young people and demonstrates that staff listen to them.

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

There have been significant changes in the management of the home. The current manager has been in post for a month. He has a wealth of experience and the necessary skills to fulfil the role. The organisation appointed a new responsible individual two months ago and she is in the process of introducing more robust organisational systems and is a clear presence in the home. One young person said, '...we all like her – we can talk to her about anything'. This is particularly important given the upheaval there has been in the home in the last few months. The previous registered manager left their post and there was an interim manager for one month before the appointment of the new manager. The responsible individual and staff team have worked hard to support young people through this difficult period. Two young people have left the home during this period and those that remain have returned to achieving positive progress.

A young person was admitted into the home without a full evaluation by leaders and managers regarding the impact of the young person's behaviour on the existing group. The young person had recent high-risk behaviours, including arson, which were not evaluated in the impact risk assessment. This risk-taking behaviour subsequently led to the placement ending prematurely. This does not promote young people's welfare.

The interim and current manager have excellent knowledge of young people's plans. This helps to mitigate the fact that some young people do not have up-to-date children looked after care plans in the home. Staff are proactive in advocating on young people's behalf and in ensuring that they are able to progress in line with their plans. They support young people to make sure their wishes and feelings are at the centre of those plans.

The new manager is in the process of developing review and monitoring systems. There has been progress with the requirements made at the last inspection in relation to the recording of restraint, the completion of the visitor's book and ensuring that the independent visitor reports are sent to Ofsted monthly. However, there are some shortfalls. There is no development plan in place for the home, and staff have not notified Ofsted of all significant events which have occurred in the home. This prevents Ofsted from monitoring patterns and trends in the home as they occur. Leaders and managers use robust checking of agency staff who work in the home. However, there is no record of how agency staff are inducted into the home so that they are prepared to meet young people's needs. Staff do not ensure that case records are clear and useful now and in the future, with important details regarding their support and advocacy for young people not recorded. The storage of case records when young people have left the home is chaotic. This is not useful for ensuring that all appropriate records are stored, or for ensuring future access if young people wish to see their records. The new manager has the capacity to address these issues as he develops his role.

Staff report feeling well supported by the new manager and responsible individual. They welcome the positive developmental opportunities which their leadership brings, and feel that the home is now stable. Staff receive regular formal and informal supervision, which supports them in working collaboratively to provide consistency and stability for young people.

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 differences 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 whom 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: SC008485

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Choices Home For Children Limited

Registered provider address: Choices Home for Children Limited, 31 Wellington Road, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 7ED

Responsible individual: Pamela Burden

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Rebecca Quested, social care regulatory inspector

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