

SC008485

Registered provider: Choices Home for Children Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is privately owned. It is registered to provide care for up to five children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

The manager was appointed in July 2024 and has submitted her application to register with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 May 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious and widespread failures that mean children are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and the care and experiences of children are poor.

Date of last inspection: 26 September 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
26/09/2023	Full	Requires improvement to be good
09/08/2023	Full	Inadequate
30/05/2023	Full	Inadequate
12/01/2023	Full	Requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Significant shortfalls in the safeguarding practices and leadership and management of the home have negatively impacted on the safety and well-being of some children. Consequently, children's experiences are varied, and their progress is limited.

Two children have experienced immediate moves from the home due to concerns that their needs could not be met safely alongside the needs of other children living in the home. This does not help children to feel cared for, and exposes them to additional risks and instability in their lives.

Staff do not complete direct work with children in a timely way following significant incidents. This does not provide children with opportunities to develop their awareness of issues that are affecting them or support them to make safer choices. This was a requirement at the last inspection and has been restated.

Children are making progress with their education. The manager has worked with placing authorities and virtual schools to secure appropriate educational placements for each child. Children who have not been in education for prolonged periods prior to living at the home say that they are now enjoying school.

Children say that they like living in the home. They are supported to develop positive relationships with core staff and are helped to engage in activities and spend time with people who are important to them.

Since the last inspection, action has been taken to improve the décor and furnishings in the home to provide a welcoming space for children. Children's bedrooms are personalised to reflect their tastes.

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

Significant shortfalls in safeguarding practices have led to some children being exposed to, and experiencing, harm. Leaders and managers failed to take adequate action following an allegation of harm between children. Dynamics between children have not been managed safely, risks have not been minimised, and shortfalls in staff practice have not been addressed.

Leaders and managers have failed to fully consider children's needs prior to them moving in to the home. Consequently, one child moved in to the home despite the manager being absent and staff not having the necessary skills or experience to meet their needs. This poor planning compromised the safety and welfare of all children living at the home.

Risk management in the home is not robust. Children's risk management plans are not individualised and do not include clear strategies for staff to follow to keep children safe.

Despite one child displaying self-injurious behaviours, their plans did not include appropriate safeguarding guidance for staff to follow until the child's emotional health had significantly declined, at which point, a safety plan was implemented. The failure to ensure that staff had access to strategies to manage risks led to children's safety being significantly compromised. This was a requirement at the last inspection and has been restated.

Significant shortfalls in the management of medication for one child left them exposed to serious harm. Leaders and managers failed to ensure that staff had the skills and experience to understand and support the child's complex health needs. Consequently, the child experienced several hospital admissions, due to inadequate staff practice.

Staff do not understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children. Staff failed to identify that a child had been missing from home until the following day. The child's risk management plan was not followed, and leaders and managers failed to take appropriate action to minimise risks.

Door alarms are used on all children's bedroom doors despite there not being identified safeguarding risks for all children. The use of the door alarms is not kept under review to ensure that they are only used when required to keep children safe. When there are identified risks for children, shortfalls in staff practice have meant that door alarms have not been used effectively, which have led to significant safeguarding incidents occurring in the home.

Practices of recording phone calls into and from the home significantly restrict the privacy of children, employees, and other stakeholders. There is no clear rationale for this surveillance measure, and it has not been shared with or agreed by children, their parents, or placing authorities.

Staff only hold children as a last resort to keep them safe. The manager has good oversight of this practice and has provided a clear evaluation of the incident, following discussions with children and staff. However, the manager does not have effective oversight of other aspects of children's care, such as room searches or direct work. This limits opportunities to ensure that children are safeguarded and to identify any learning to improve the quality of care provided to children.

Serious incidents involving children have not been notified to Ofsted as required by regulation. This reduces the regulator's oversight of practice in the home.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The manager has led the home since before the last inspection. However, significant shortfalls in the leadership and management of the home have negatively impacted on children's experiences and compromised the quality of care that children receive.

Oversight of incidents, plans, and records by leaders and managers is not robust. Records lack detail, wording is misleading, and evaluation does not always consider the effectiveness of staff practice. Lessons for improvement have been considered but have not been followed up. This reduces opportunities to identify learning and to develop practice in the home. The recording shortfalls had not been identified prior to being raised by the inspector.

Team meetings take place regularly and provide staff with the opportunity to discuss the development of the home and to reflect on the progress that children make. However, meetings do not include research and development. This is a missed opportunity to further develop practice in the home. It was a requirement at the last inspection and has been restated.

Staff are provided with individual supervision sessions. However, opportunities to address practice concerns have been missed. Consequently, staff are not consistently supported to reflect on or develop their practice. The manager has not received adequate supervision to ensure that there is effective oversight of her practice.

Leaders and managers have failed to ensure that all staff have the skills and training to understand and meet children's individual needs. Several staff, including the manager, have not completed relevant training. This includes supporting children with complex trauma and bereavement, or ligature training, despite these being available from the provider.

The home's quality of care report is not completed in line with regulation. This is a missed opportunity to review and develop practice in the home. This was a requirement at the last inspection and has been restated.

Records of the hours worked in the home by the manager and staff are inaccurate. This limits management oversight and compromises children's safety, as there is a lack of transparency about who is working in the home.

The record of admission and discharges of all children from the home could not be provided. Consequently, there is a lack of accountability and clarity about children's time at the home and the arrangements for their care when they leave.

Leaders and managers have failed to take sufficient action to ensure that the requirements from the last inspection have been met. Four requirements have been restated.

Following this inspection, a case review was held where the decision was made to issue a notice of restriction of accommodation to prevent any other children from moving in to the home.

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— that staff— 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; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. (Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(i)(iii)(iv)(v)(b)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that— children's risk plans clearly identify all risks and vulnerabilities for children, and there are clear strategies for staff to follow to keep children safe; staff have the skills and experience to understand their responsibilities to safeguard children, and allegations are responded to appropriately; staff manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; and	16 June 2024

the home's day-to-day care, including the arrangements for supporting children throughout the night, is kept under review so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. This was a requirement at the last inspection and has been restated.	
*The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; ensure that the home has sufficient staff to provide care for each child; ensure that the home's workforce provides continuity of care to each child; understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home; demonstrate that practice in the home is informed and improved by taking into account and acting on— research and developments in relation to the ways in which the needs of children are best met; and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(i)(h)) The registered person must ensure that—	16 June 2024

concerns relating to staff practice are addressed and that staff are supported to improve their practice; all staff are trained to support and meet the individual needs of children; there are robust monitoring systems in place to enable effective oversight of staff practice in the home; they use monitoring and review systems to evaluate staff practice and identify shortfalls to improve the quality of the care delivered to children; and research and developments are brought into team meetings to further develop and support staff to improve the care delivered to children. This was a requirement at the last inspection and has been restated.	
*The registered person may only use devices for the monitoring or surveillance of children if— the monitoring or surveillance is for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child concerned, or other children; the child's placing authority consents in writing to the monitoring or surveillance; so far as reasonably practicable in the light of the child's age and understanding, the child is informed in advance of the intention to do the monitoring or surveillance; and the monitoring or surveillance is no more intrusive than necessary, having regard to the child's need for privacy. (Regulation 24 (1)(a)(b)(c)(d)) The registered person must ensure that all monitoring and surveillance in use is done so for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child concerned, or other children, and not routinely used for all children. The registered person must ensure that there is a policy for the use of monitoring and surveillance measures and consent to use such measures from children's placing authorities.	16 June 2024
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust;	28 June 2024

an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and positive responses to other children and adults. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— meet each child’s behavioural and emotional needs, as set out in the child’s relevant plans; help each child to develop socially aware behaviour; encourage each child to take responsibility for the child’s behaviour, in accordance with the child’s age and understanding; are provided with supervision and support to enable them to understand and manage their own feelings and responses to the behaviour and emotions of children, and to help children to do the same. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(x)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that direct work that is carried out with children includes topics that are specific to children’s individual needs. This was a requirement at the last inspection and has been restated.	
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children’s home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home’s statement of purpose. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a))	28 June 2024

This was a requirement at the last inspection and has been restated.	
The registered person must ensure that all employees— receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33 (4)(b)) Specifically, the registered provider must ensure that the manager receives meaningful and reflective practice-related supervision.	28 June 2024
Schedule 4 sets out the other information that the registered person must keep in relation to a children's home. The registered person must— maintain in the home the records in Schedule 4; ensure that the records are kept up to date. (Regulation 37 (1) (2)(a)(b)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that an up-to-date rota containing the hours worked in the home by both the staff and manager is maintained. The registered person must also ensure there is an accessible records of the following matters listed in Schedule 4— a record in the form of a register showing in respect of each child— the date of the child's admission to the home; the date on which the child ceased to be accommodated in the home; the child's address immediately before being accommodated in the home; the child's address on leaving the home; the child's placing authority; and the statutory provision (if any) under which the child is accommodated.	28 June 2024

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 (e))	28 June 2024
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. In order to complete a quality of care review the registered person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating— the quality of care provided for children; 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. (Regulation 45 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c)) This was a requirement at the last inspection and has been restated.	28 June 2024

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

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: SC008485

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Choices Home for Children Limited

Registered provider address: 31 Wellington Road, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 7ED

Responsible individual: Linda Heywood

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Kelly McCurdy, Social Care Inspector

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