

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 and run. It is registered to provide care for up to six children who may have EBD (social and emotional difficulties). Four children were being cared for in the home at the time of inspection.

The registered manager post has been vacant since 1 September 2021.

Inspection dates: 8 to 9 September 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
---	--

How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
---	---------------------------------

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

The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 7 July 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Enforcement action since last inspection:

On 15 July 2021, compliance notices were served against regulation 13, leadership and management and regulation 14, care planning.

During this inspection, progress in respect of the compliance notices was reviewed. The inspector found that the provider had met the regulation 13 and regulation 14 notice, as suitable progress had been made against the specified steps.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
07/07/2021	Full	Inadequate
11/02/2020	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
09/07/2019	Full	Good
06/02/2019	Full	Requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people requires improvement to be good

Since the last inspection, children's day-to-day experience of living in the home has improved, and no children have moved in or left the home. This has provided the children already living at the home with a level of stability and consistency that was previously lacking.

The stability in the home has also meant that staff have been able to focus on building positive relationships with the children and spending more time with them. Relationships between children and staff are warm and caring. This helps children to feel valued and gives them a feeling of belonging.

Children who were previously harming themselves and children who have a history of going missing from care are making good progress. There has been a significant reduction in children displaying behaviours which are of concern. Children's engagement with staff has increased and they have a greater sense of permanence.

Children's case records do not always contain the local authority care plans for each child. One child's local authority care plan and placement plan on file had not been updated since the child had moved into the home. The interim manager and responsible individual were not aware of this and therefore had not escalated it with the placing authority. As a result, staff do not have all the information they need to progress children's care plans.

Most children are not accessing educational provision. Although school placements have been identified for all children, there has been a delay in these being progressed. This means that children have not been able to start the academic year with their peers. They do not yet have the experience of learning in a formal school environment and have not yet established the routines they need to engage with education and to make progress.

Children's health needs are well understood by staff. Children are receiving the specialist health input they need to address their physical and emotional well-being. There is no evidence of emotional health input from the provider's commissioned psychologist as detailed in the home's statement of purpose. As a result, staff are not receiving information and guidance from their own psychologist to support them to meet the emotional needs of the children in their care.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

The quality of children's relationships with staff means that children are helped and cared for by staff who understand them and are able to respond to their individual needs.

However, there is a lack of rigour in the reviews of internal plans and assessments. Although these documents are reviewed regularly, some records are not updated. Historical information which is no longer relevant is not removed. Some of these documents contain standard information for staff about how they should respond to situations which is the same in each child's records. This standardised information does not reflect the individual needs of children. As a result, staff do not have a sufficiently good quality of written records to support good practice in their care of children.

Children's care records are held electronically. These are currently not easily accessible to children and the format of some records and language used does not help children to contribute to their care or understand what is being written about them. Children are not encouraged to read their case records. Monthly consultations with children are not recorded in a child-centred manner. There is no evidence that these are meaningful discussions which actively seek to understand and then act on the children's views, wishes and feelings and involve children in their care planning.

When children go missing, staff follow the agreed procedures to search for them to bring them home safely. Return home interviews are usually undertaken by the child's social worker or independent advocate. Staff do not routinely receive feedback from these interviews and do not seek this information. This is a missed opportunity to gain information which could contribute to reducing the risk of further missing-from-care incidents and keep children safe.

Staff have worked creatively with one child's social worker and family to agree a plan of family time which meets his needs. As a result, the child is more invested in the home and incidents of being missing from care have reduced significantly.

The use of consequences in the home is limited. However, these consequences are not always appropriate. In one incident, a child was required to pay for petrol when he failed to meet staff who drove to collect him in the community. As such, consequences do not assist children to constructively address behaviours and make positive decisions.

The rationale of staff when deciding to search children's rooms is not always evident. When children's rooms are searched while they are missing, records do not indicate if the child was informed of the search on their return. Staff are not routinely following the agreed practice in the home which states that room searches are conducted by two members of staff. As a result, staff are not always working in a way which is open and transparent and which protects children's rights to privacy unless there is a clearly assessed risk of not doing so.

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

The registered manager's post is vacant. The previous registered manager resigned during the last inspection. A deputy manager from another of the provider's homes is acting as interim manager until a permanent manager is recruited.

The interim manager and responsible individual are working closely together to address the failings in practice identified at the last inspection. As a result, some documentation in relation to the admission of children and children's care planning has been amended to support improvements in practice. These changes are in their infancy and the impact on practice has yet to be evidenced as no children have been admitted to the home in the reporting period.

Appropriate line management arrangements are now in place which mean that staff are being supervised by managers with the skills and experience to do so and in a way which does not breach the confidentiality of children. Staff are not being supervised with the frequency detailed in the home's supervision policy. Some waking night staff have no recorded supervisions. One new member of staff has only had one supervision since joining the organisation three months ago. This means that staff are not being provided with the level of support and oversight they need to undertake their roles effectively.

The interim manager and responsible individual ensure that serious incidents involving children are addressed promptly and appropriate actions are taken to safeguard children. Where appropriate, information is shared with the local authority designated officer. However, the interim manager has not ensured that all serious incidents are notified to Ofsted. As a result, there is a lack of independent oversight of wider safeguarding practice in the home by the regulator. These omissions have not been identified by the responsible individual.

The home has a core team of permanent staff who are committed and enthusiastic about their roles. Staff feel less stressed and morale has improved markedly since the last inspection. As a result, staff are better equipped to provide a good quality of care to children.

Required improvements in practice in relation to the recording of admissions and discharges of children was identified at the last inspection. These improvements have begun to be addressed but further work is needed to meet statutory requirements.

A programme of work has commenced to improve the physical environment of the home following recommendations made at the last inspection. Further improvements are needed to provide children with a good-quality living environment and a home which they can enjoy and be proud of.

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
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; and ensure that the records are kept up to date. (Regulation 37 (1) (2)(a)(b)) Specifically, that the registered person maintains a detailed record of the admission of children to the home as listed in schedule 4.	31 October 2021
The registered person must ensure that all employees— receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33 (4)(b)) Specifically, that the registered person should ensure that the frequency of supervision is in line with the home's policies and procedures.	31 October 2021
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; are kept up to date; and are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b)(c))	31 October 2021
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and	30 November 2021

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 staff help each child to access and contribute to the records kept by the registered person in relation to the child. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(f)) Specifically, the registered person should ensure that children can access their written records and that staff complete the records in such a way that children can understand what is written about them.	
The quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children’s home’s overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children; In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure that staff— provide personalised care that meets each child’s needs, as recorded in the child’s relevant plans, taking account of the child’s background. (Regulation 6 (1)(a) 2)(b)(iv)) Specifically, the registered person should ensure that each child’s written plans and assessments are individual to them and contain up-to-date information.	30 November 2021
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation; an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious; there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there;	31 October 2021

a child protection enquiry involving a child—
is instigated; or

concludes (in which case, the notification must include the
outcome of the child protection enquiry); or

there is any other incident relating to a child which the
registered person considers to be serious.
(Regulation 40 (4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(i)(ii) and (e))

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that all children's bedrooms have appropriate window coverings, the downstairs toilet door is fitted properly, the decor in children's bedroom is updated and damage repaired, and that the rusted items in the upstairs toilet are removed and broken floor tiles are replaced. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- The registered person should ensure that all sanctions imposed on children are subject to systems of regular scrutiny to ensure that their use is fair and proportionate. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.36)
- The registered person should ensure that children's bedrooms are only searched if the child has been informed or asked for their permission unless there is an immediate risk to the child's or another person's safety or well-being. Room searches should be completed by two members of staff in line with the home's policy. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 17, paragraph 3.20)
- The registered person should ensure that arrangements are in place with each placing local authority to receive information provided by return home interviews to assess risks and put arrangements in place to protect each child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30)
- The registered person should ensure that the information set out in the statement of purpose provides an accurate description of the role and level of input of the commissioned in-house psychologist. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.6)

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 CW5 7ED

Responsible individual: Simon Haddrell

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at reports.ofsted.gov.uk/.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: eepurl.com/iTrDn.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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

© Crown copyright 2021