

SC014650

Registered provider: My Choice Children's Homes Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

Staff at this home look after up to four children whose needs include difficult behaviours and learning difficulties, and who are often at risk of self-harm, substance misuse and sexual exploitation. There has been no registered manager since 18 December 2018.

Inspection dates: 14 to 15 May 2019

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: 17 January 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
17/01/2019	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
10/05/2018	Full	Requires improvement to be good
09/01/2018	Full	Good
20/09/2017	Full	Inadequate

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; (Regulation 12(1)(i)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that all aspects of practice are risk assessed appropriately, especially where staff are working alone with children. The registered person must also ensure that risk assessments completed about children's care are quickly reviewed and, where appropriate, updated, if there is a significant change to a child's circumstances.	28/06/2019
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— use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13(1)(a)(b)(2)(h)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that they regularly reflect on incidents with staff so that any learning can be used to improve practice.	28/06/2019

Recommendations

- The registered person must challenge (under regulation 5(c)) any placing authority who asks them to accept a child in the absence of a complete and current relevant plan, as the expectation that a placement of a child without the necessary information would go ahead (in circumstances other than an emergency) is inadequate in relation to their role. It is essential that homes understand what will be required of them before they accept responsibility for a child's placement, to avoid disruption and instability for the child in future and for other children in the home. For non-looked-after children, the home should ensure they have sufficient information from the child's 'placing authority' (usually their parents/carers) and other relevant agencies to effectively assess whether they can meet the child's needs before agreeing to the placement. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', pages 56-57, paragraph 11.15)

In particular, the registered person should ensure that all of the actions they take to review the suitability of the placement are fully recorded in the impact assessment completed prior to a child's admission.

- 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. The use of agency staff should be carefully monitored and reviewed to ensure children receive continuity of care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.16)

In particular, the registered person should ensure that staff consistently record the induction of agency staff.

- The registered person should oversee the welfare of the children in their care through observation and engagement with: each child; the home's staff; each child's family/carers where appropriate; and professionals involved in the care or protection of each child including their social worker, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), teachers, clinicians and other health professionals etc. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', pages 54-55, paragraph 10.23)

In particular, the registered person should engage with staff and children to explore why they consider staffing levels do not always meet children's needs and take any relevant action thereafter.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Leaders and managers support children to move in well. One child and her mother said that they had a lot of support when the child moved in. This helped the child to settle and quickly make friends.

Children's progress is improving. Children recognise the progress that they are making. For example, one child is now thinking about her behaviour and is developing aspirations for the future.

Impact assessments are in place for each child. However, records of all sources of information, obtained to inform a decision about placement suitability, are not documented. This is a missed opportunity to record the range of questions that the staff check to see whether they can meet a child's needs.

Staff keep in mind how they can help children to develop a healthy lifestyle. The staff help children to attend appointments and provide a varied diet which reflects children's likes and dislikes. The staff work well with children's therapists and encourage children to take part in physical activity. The manager monitors how staff administer medication as part of her daily checks. There are plans to complete competency checks of the staff's medication management skills in the next few weeks.

Children are encouraged to enjoy themselves and to develop hobbies and individual interests. The staff find and suggest groups that children might like to join and plan well in advance for holiday periods. Staff have already begun to plan for the summer break.

Support for children to speak to, and to see, their families and friends is thoughtfully organised and supported. A parent said that the staff have helpfully supported her to have time with her daughter and speak to her often on the telephone.

Education is promoted and encouraged. The environment in the home is being developed to increase educational discussions and to encourage children to read. The staff support education placements well. They help children to remain in school, support local authorities to find the right placement and challenge the appropriateness of a child's education placement if this is not working. Leaders and managers have identified that children's daily planners do not link well to a child's educational goals, especially when the child is not in school. They are working to improve this.

Children's views are respected and valued. Children say that they like and can talk to some adults who care for them. The staff are aware that children feel more comfortable with some staff and are working together to foster children having better relationships with a wider group of staff. Leaders and managers have also changed how children's meeting minutes are recorded so that children know how their suggestions are being responded to.

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

The staff work well with the relevant safeguarding agencies to protect and promote children's safety and well-being. Staff were praised by a local authority group (MEOG) that focuses on children who go missing for their work on managing a child who frequently runs away.

A well-rounded knowledge of safeguarding supports the staff to identify and respond to concerns appropriately. Recently, staff have managed concerns about radicalisation and inappropriate relationships well. Their actions have increased children's safety and their support has helped children to develop a better awareness of the risks that they sometimes put themselves in.

Behaviour management is an area of improvement. Recently, children's goals have been reviewed so that these are aligned to their current needs. Plans to include more spontaneous rewards for children are also being developed. Earlier this year, there was a further increase in the number of times staff found it challenging to manage children's behaviour. This corresponded with a time period when the staff team was implementing more consistent boundaries with children.

Over time, greater consistency in staff responses to children is having positive effects. There has been a decrease in restraints over the last few months and sanctions have not been given for some time. The staff are using restorative justice more effectively and leaders and managers are focusing on reducing the criminalisation of children.

The quality of plans to support children's behaviour, however, are not consistently updated. One child's care plan was not up to date. Some children's risk assessments were not reviewed within the organisation's given timescales or quickly updated following an incident.

One-to-one discussions that the staff have with children are not regularly recorded. These discussions do not always link appropriately to events which staff identify that they should speak to children about. One child said that the staff speak to her a lot about the things that she finds difficult, but records of these discussions were not available.

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

Leaders and managers have successfully improved the quality of services over the last six months. There is a manager in place who is currently applying for registration with Ofsted. Leaders and managers know the children well, support the staff to find ways to help children to make progress and look for ways to improve children's care. For example, they are reviewing how well they promote equality and tolerance in the home.

There is currently a reduced leadership team in the home. However, senior managers from the organisation have prioritised support and provided additional and regular

support, as well as continuing to keep a focus on developing and improving care.

Supervision is now more regular and meets staff's needs better. More frequent team meetings are taking place and additional opportunities for the staff team to meet to develop better team working have occurred. The staff speak positively about the changes and support that they have received in the last few months.

Leaders and managers are careful to ensure that there is sufficient staff caring for children and staffing does not change too often wherever possible. They have worked hard to fill any vacancies and used known agency and bank staff who have worked at the home for some time to increase consistency. However, some of the staff and children say that there are not enough staff on duty at times. Leaders and managers have not explored these views with staff and children.

How well leaders and managers monitor practice has improved, but needs further development. Some important issues and records are not consistently monitored effectively. Leaders and managers do not rigorously check that children's records and risk assessments are up to date.

Opportunities to reflect and learn from incidents are not regularly adopted, which inhibit the ability of leaders and managers to continuously review and improve practice. For example, an incident earlier in the year did not result in a review of the organisation's lone working policy. The policy does not address some of the challenges or situations that staff could be presented with.

Agency staff are inducted when they come to work at the home, but this information is not recorded on the organisation's induction form. There is, therefore, no record of exactly what induction was provided to an individual to refer to if concerns arise.

Staff develop appropriate relationships with other agencies. They challenge other professionals if they think decisions are not in a child's best interests. The link teacher from a college said that they 'cannot fault' how the staff team supports the college and the child.

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: SC014650

Provision sub-type: children's home

Registered provider: My Choice Children's Homes Ltd

Registered provider address: Unit 3a, Mill Green Business Estate, Mill Green Road,
Haywards Heath RH16 1XQ

Responsible individual: Dawn Ives

Registered manager: Claire Griffin

Inspector

Ruth Coler, social care inspector

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