

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

This is a privately owned children's home which provides care and accommodation for up to four young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Inspection dates: 20 to 21 September 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account inadequate

How well children and young people are helped and protected inadequate

The effectiveness of leaders and managers inadequate

There are serious and widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded.

Date of last inspection: 11 January 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: Good

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is inadequate because:

- Staff do not follow appropriate procedures when safeguarding concerns arise.
- Staff have failed to address difficult behaviours, and, as a result, young people

continue to place themselves at risk.

- Preparation for young people moving into the home is poor. Leaders and managers do not ensure that the staff have all the necessary skills to meet young people's needs.
- Leaders and managers have not effectively led and managed staff.
- Inadequate monitoring systems have not identified areas of concern.
- Investigations into concerns about staff practice do not effectively explore all the relevant issues.

The children's home's strengths:

- The senior management team has begun to address the concerns regarding practice.
- Support for young people who leave the home is effective.
- The time staff spend with young people on a one-to-one basis is used well to help young people to think and to reflect.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/01/2017	Full	Good
25/08/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
18/02/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
18/08/2015	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
In order to meet the care planning standard the registered person is required to— 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; that arrangements are in place to— ensure the effective induction of each child into the home; that each child's relevant plans are followed. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b)(2)(a)(b)(i)(c))	31/10/17
In order to meet the positive relationships standard the registered person is required to ensure that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust; 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— de-escalate confrontations with or between children, or potentially violent behaviour by children. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c)(2)(a)(xi))	31/10/17
In order to meet the protection of children standard the registered person is required to ensure 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— have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting	31/10/17

children that are assigned to them by the registered person; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies; that the effectiveness of the home's child protection policies is monitored regularly. (Regulation 12 (2)(a)(iii)(v)(vi)(vii)(e))	
In order to meet the leadership and management standard the registered person is required to enable, inspire and lead 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— ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of 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; use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (2)(a)(b)(2)(c)(f)(h)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that they regularly monitor and assess the impact that training has on the quality of care provided.	31/10/17
If the registered provider is an organisation, the organisation must ensure that the responsible individual undertakes such continuing professional development as is necessary to ensure that the responsible individual has the skills needed for supervising the management of the home. (Regulation 29(2)) In particular, the registered provider must ensure that leaders and managers have the necessary skills to monitor the quality and effectiveness of investigations into staff practice.	31/10/17
In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff— (5)(a) seek to involve each child's placing authority effectively in the child's care, in accordance with the child's relevant plans; (d) seek to develop and maintain effective professional relationships with such persons, bodies or organisations as the registered person considers appropriate having regard to the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the children's home is to provide care and accommodation.	31/10/17

Recommendations

- Many children placed in homes may undergo a difficult transition and what should be simple aspects of their care take on a substantial significance in this context. Staff should provide a nurturing environment that is welcoming, supportive, and which provides appropriate boundaries in relation to their behaviour. Homes must also meet children's basic day to day needs and physical necessities. Staff should seek to meet the child's basic needs in the way that a good parent would, recognising that many children in residential care have experienced environments where these needs have not been consistently met – doing so is an important aspect of demonstrating that the staff care for the child and value them as an individual. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.7)
In particular, managers should ensure that the staff help young people keep their bedrooms clean and tidy. The staff should ensure that they maintain an environment which supports young people to stop smoking.

- Any child who has been restrained should be given the opportunity to express their feelings about their experience of the restraint as soon as is practicable, ideally within 24 hours of the restraint incident, taking the age of the child and the circumstances of the restraint into account. In some cases children may need longer to work through their feelings, so a record that the child has talked about their feelings should be made no longer than 5 days after the incident of restraint (regulation 35(3)(c)). Children should be encouraged to add their views and comments to the record of restraint. Children should be offered the opportunity to access an advocacy support to help them with this (Regulation 7(2)(b)(iii)). ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 50, paragraph 9.60)
In particular, managers should ensure that electronic recording systems do not prevent young people's comments from being logged.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Young people's progress and experiences are poor. Staff have failed to manage young people's behaviours effectively. Leaders and managers have failed to effectively monitor, and to respond quickly to, issues that arise.

The management of changes to the group of young people has been ineffectual. Poor planning did not allow for the staff to prepare for one young person's arrival. In another instance, the compatibility assessment record was completed after a young person moved in. This assessment did not demonstrate how all the known issues had been considered. The staff do not, therefore, have sufficient time to prepare for the arrival of young people in the home, to reflect on their needs or consider how the young person might affect the care that staff provide to all. The staff were particularly concerned

that, after a long period with a settled group of young people, they had not properly considered the challenges that a new group of young people would present. Managers do not provide specific training when required. At the time of inspection, one training need had remained unmet for over two months.

Staff have failed to develop strong relationships with young people. The staff's relationships with young people vary and have become strained by the events of the last few months. On a one-to-one basis the staff have meaningful conversations with young people, which young people respond to well, using this time to speak about their feelings. Equally, the staff use this time to help young people to reflect on their behaviours and to consider alternative ways of acting. These discussions are well recorded and provide a helpful insight into the difficulties and issues that young people are experiencing. Young people and a parent said that there are staff whom young people like and will seek out if they wanted to discuss a concern.

The home is a spacious, well-appointed, pleasant environment which the provider plans to refurbish to ensure that all areas are in a good condition of repair. Nevertheless, the staff have not ensured that young people's bedrooms are maintained in a suitable condition. One young person's bedroom was extremely messy and unclean, yet staff focused on cleaning the bedroom of a young person who had moved out that day. This does not demonstrate that the staff recognise the importance of a young person's bedroom being a nurturing environment which helps them to develop and increase their sense of self-worth.

Young people are provided with a well-balanced diet and are encouraged to undertake physical activities. Health needs are kept under review, and, while young people sometimes decline appointments, the staff continue to offer these. Although smoking cessation is promoted, the staff do not always ensure that the environment supports this. For example, there is a large canister full of cigarette ends by the front door.

Staff have not maintained settled routines which enable young people to go to school on a regular basis. Some young people's engagement with their education has decreased in recent months. Nonetheless, the staff continue to make good links with education providers and attend meetings to support young people's attendance and attainment. Recent changes have increased emphasis on staff developing daily routines which will support young people to attend school.

Developing independence skills is promoted. However, in one instance, a young person's plan showed little evidence that the programme successfully supports his ability to develop healthy eating habits and to learn how to cook on a budget. The staff are reviewing this programme.

Support for the previous group of young people who moved out of the home was well organised and thoughtful. The staff work hard to ensure that young people experience a positive ending to living here.

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

The staff have not immediately dealt with unsafe practice or reported concerns to senior managers. In one instance, a young person's potentially harmful behaviour was not identified or addressed as a safeguarding matter. The implementation of safeguarding procedures is ineffective. They provide the staff with ambiguous guidance.

Ineffective behaviour management has resulted in increased levels of challenging and aggressive behaviours. Staff have not ensured that the introduction of new young people to the group did not adversely impact on group dynamics. From July 2017, there have been six notifications to Ofsted of incidents relating to serious concerns about young people's welfare. Concerns include:

- increases in self-injurious behaviours, challenging behaviours and aggression
- poor social, emotional and educational progress by young people
- damage to the property and young people's belongings
- greater involvement with the police and the criminalisation of young people
- repeated assaults on staff.

Restraint practice is satisfactorily managed. While restraints have increased, these remain minimal, with only 11 incidents of restraint since January 2017. Clear records demonstrate that young people are asked for their view but the computer system does not allow for the entry to remain open. This prevents young people's comments from being added when they have had time to reflect. This reduces the manager's ability to review and learn from young people's comments.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Leaders and managers have not shown that they have all the necessary skills and qualities to meet young people's needs and to effectively lead the staff team. They have not acted swiftly to support staff to manage young people's behaviour effectively. They have not monitored and reviewed practice and have failed to identify and address poor practice. Management investigations into concerns about staff practice are not comprehensive and do not consider all relevant aspects.

Systems for supporting staff do not meet the needs of individual members of staff or the team as a whole. Supervision does not occur in line with the organisation's policies. In some instances, there are two- to three-month gaps when supervision has not taken place. The recommendation at the last inspection, that managers use supervision to assist the staff to reflect on their practice, is not met. One supervision record stated that a member of staff needed to change the strategies used with the new group of young people but did not explore why this was necessary or the strategies that they might try. In addition, staff team meetings have not been held regularly. The last recorded meeting was in July 2017. The lack of staff support provided decreases the

ability of staff to communicate well and develop consistent practice. Several members of staff acknowledged that these are areas for improvement.

The quality of relationships between staff and managers with other professionals has deteriorated. Social workers said that, recently, they have found that the staff do not work in cooperation with them and that communication regarding significant information about young people is poor.

A comprehensive basic training programme is in place. However, concerns remain about the impact that training has on the quality of care provided, and how this is monitored effectively.

Managers have improved the reward systems within the home so that young people receive more frequent positive reinforcement, and acknowledgement, of their positive behaviours. The requirement made at the last inspection is met. Senior managers very recently strengthened the management arrangements. The staff said that this has improved their support and they feel more involved in the decisions made. Plans for the staff to receive external support on working together effectively, and more consistent support from staff from the organisation's other homes, have been put in place.

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: Peter Kazmarski

Registered manager: Toni-Elizabeth Corke

Inspector

Ruth Coler, social care inspector

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