

SC014650

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The staff at this home look after up to four children who display difficult behaviours and have learning difficulties, and who are often at risk of self-harm, substance misuse and sexual exploitation.

The manager was registered in November 2019.

Visit dates: 27 to 28 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 6 February 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Sustained effectiveness

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

The children benefit from positive relationships with a core group of staff who are well known to them. Inspectors observed warm nurturing relationships between the children and the staff. The children speak positively about these relationships. They can approach staff if they have any worries, and they feel listened to.

During the lockdown period, regular phone and video calls took place between the children and key people in their lives. As a result, the children have maintained relationships that are important for their sense of identity. Parents are positive about the open communication with the home during this time.

The staff found creative ways to occupy the children during the COVID-19 lockdown period. This included playing board games, having movie nights and improving the garden. The children spoke positively of this time, feeling that they had 'plenty to do'. The staff describe a range of benefits in spending more time with the children, including strengthened relationships with them.

Education for the children continued during the lockdown period. The home's own school continued to provide work or to teach the children in bubbles. Since September the children have been able to return to education settings. Close liaison has continued between the staff and education providers to ensure that the children receive support and encouragement to promote their education.

The children receive sanctions for unwanted behaviours. However, not all these sanctions offer opportunities for a restorative way to put things right. In one example, a child is paying back a fine over a period of over six months with no alternatives to reduce this or work towards resolving this sooner.

The safety of children

The core staff understand the children's needs. They follow strategies that help to reduce risk and work collaboratively with the children's network of professionals. However, for staff who are less familiar with the children this is not consistent. In one example, a senior staff member from another home and an agency worker failed to follow risk management plans, which resulted in two children leaving the home at night. On this occasion, the staff failed to take effective action, despite the known risks of the children leaving the home.

There are ongoing safeguarding concerns relating to the children in this home and other nearby homes within the organisation. There are some good examples of effective contextual safeguarding, where home managers have worked together and succeeded in addressing some risky behaviours between the children. However, relationships between some of the children remain concerning. While specialist support for one child has been identified, this is not yet in place.

During the lockdown period, there was a significant reduction in risk-taking behaviour. The children engaged positively with staff without the influence of other children outside of the home. The wider organisation has planned a risk management meeting to include the nearby home managers, to review the strategies to reduce the risk of the children meeting up and engaging in dangerous behaviours.

The staff have knowledge of the local risk areas. These have been woven into the children's individual plans. However, the location assessment fails to include this intelligence, which is intrinsic to the safeguarding of children.

Leaders and managers

The registered manager is child focused. Staff departures have provided him with the opportunity to recruit a team of like-minded individuals. The staff speak positively about the support they receive from the registered manager and the children find him approachable and readily available.

Managerial monitoring has highlighted the need for staff reporting and recording to be accurate and more frequently updated. Together with the deputy home manager, the registered manager has developed a plan to address this with SMART targets and clear actions to address further shortfalls should they arise.

The registered manager finds the independent reports useful to inform practice improvements. However, due to the virtual way of working during the lockdown period, the opportunity to discuss the findings of the independent visitor during the visit has been eroded. Consequently, some of the information in the reports is inaccurate. The registered manager has plans in place to increase communication with the independent visitor to address this.

The home's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been thorough. Clear risk management strategies are in place. Appropriate checks occur when visitors come to the home and frequent reviews are undertaken to continue to meet the current guidance. These measures contribute to ensuring that the children remain safe and healthy.

The previous recommendations have been met.

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— take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(vi))	13/12/2020
The registered person must review the appropriateness and suitability of the location of the premises used for the purposes of the children's home at least once in each calendar year taking into account the requirement in regulation 12(2)(c) (the protection of children standard). (Regulation 46 (1))	13/12/2020

Recommendations

- Regulation 19(2) details sanctions that are prohibited in behaviour management. Any sanctions used to address poor behaviour should be restorative in nature, to help children recognise the impact of their behaviour on themselves, other children, the staff caring for them and the wider community. In some cases it will be important for children to make reparation in some form to anyone hurt by their behaviour and the staff in the home should be skilled to support the child to understand this and carry it out. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', pages 46-47, paragraph 9.38)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC014650

Registered provider: My Choice Children's Homes Ltd

Registered provider address: My Choice Children's Homes Ltd, Unit 3a, Mill Green Business Estate, Mill Green Road, Haywards Heath RH16 1XQ

Responsible individual: Dawn Ives

Registered manager: Tom Chilton

Inspectors

Sarah Olliver, Social Care Inspector
Matt Nicholls, Social Care Inspector

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