

SC029865

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 home is privately owned. It provides care for up to four children who experience social and/or emotional difficulties. At the time of the inspection, three children were living in the home.

The manager registered with Ofsted on 19 October 2023.

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 October 2024 and 7 and 8 January 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 12 December 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
12/12/2023	Full	Good
07/02/2023	Full	Good
12/01/2022	Full	Good
13/08/2019	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Staff have good relationships with children and provide individualised care. This helps children to develop trust and grow in confidence. Children know that staff care for them, and this helps them to talk to staff about difficult, personal issues. Children's views inform their care planning and decisions are made with them whenever possible.

Children are supported to stay in touch with the people who are important to them, even when they live some distance away. The manager and staff invest considerable effort in working with children's families and develop positive relationships with them. Children are also encouraged to have friends over to the home to visit. One professional said, 'The manager and staff are supporting [name of child] to have a much more normal life. I love the fact that her friends visit... It is excellent that she feels comfortable enough to call the home her home.'

Children are engaging better with formal education and are making progress in relation to their starting points. Staff are committed to supporting children to attend school. Morning routines are clear and designed with the input of children, who share what works best for them. This helps children to engage better in their learning.

Staff support children to be healthier. They help children to attend health appointments, and they work with other agencies to ensure that children have access to emotional support at a time and pace that is right for them. Staff carry out work with children about the dangers of vaping and illegal drugs.

One child has recently moved out of the home. Staff and managers had little notice of their move. However, the registered manager and staff supported the child well and engaged with other professionals appropriately. Leaders are carefully considering when would be the right time for another child to move in.

Feedback from professionals is positive about the communication with staff, the progress that children make and the support that they receive.

Staff help children to develop their independence skills and balance this with the need to keep children safe. The home is generally welcoming and well presented. However, staff do not consistently ensure that children's bedrooms are tidy and clean. For example, there was a stain on the side of one child's bed sheet and a hole in another child's desk. This detracts from an otherwise homely feel.

Alarms are used on some doors, including children's bedroom doors. This approach is routinely used for all children as soon as they move in. Although their use is agreed with children's social workers and is risk assessed, the assessments are not always sufficiently detailed or individualised nor are they always reviewed frequently enough. Consequently, children may be subject to the use of these measures unnecessarily.

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

Children have trusted staff who they talk to, including when something is worrying them. Staff work with children to support them to be safer online and when using internet-enabled devices and mobile phones. Managers liaise with social workers to consider how best to support children in these areas.

Staff are aware of the risks of exploitation, and they work with children to help them to understand these concerns. As a result, children are more accepting of boundaries around their free time and access to mobile phones.

There have been several occasions when children have gone missing, although these incidents have reduced overall. Staff generally respond well and follow children's plans. However, on a small number of occasions, there has been a lack of clarity about whether staff should search for children further afield. It is also unclear how staff should balance their responsibilities for other children with the need to search for the child who is missing. Finally, it is not always clear who is responsible for making decisions and coordinating the response when children are missing. The impact of these shortfalls is reduced by the other strategies that staff employ. The responsible individual has acknowledged this issue and is planning to review the company policies with all the organisation's registered managers.

Children become safer due to the help that they receive from staff. Staff understand the reasons for children's behaviours and sensitively support them when they become upset or anxious or if they harm themselves.

Staff manage children's behaviour well. Restraint is used only when necessary and is proportionate. All staff are trained in restraint and understand de-escalation techniques. The provider has recently invested in a significant training programme for staff and has developed reflective practice groups alongside team meetings.

There have been no allegations or complaints about staff since the last inspection. If concerns about conduct arise, the local authority designated officer is consulted. Staff are clear about what to do should they have concerns about the conduct of another professional.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Generally, the home is calm, and managers have good oversight, although there was an unsettled period in October 2024. Children were not engaging in education and there were several serious incidents when children were missing from home. Leaders worked hard to learn from these issues, support children and staff and sustain improvements.

The home is managed by a suitably qualified registered manager. He is realistic about the challenges that the team has faced over the last year and remains passionate about

supporting children and his staff team. The leadership team has a clear vision and is committed to continuous improvement.

The manager is actively involved in children's day-to-day care and has developed strong relationships with children, who clearly trust him. He has good oversight of children's plans and understands their progress, advocating for them when this is required and celebrating their achievements.

Since the last inspection, managers have invested in significant training and support for staff and have recruited new staff. This has ensured increased staffing levels and better consistency of care. New staff feel well supported through their induction. All staff speak highly of managers and the guidance that they receive.

Leaders and staff engage well with a wide range of other professionals. Excellent and regular communication is cited by many professionals as a significant strength of this team, particularly the registered manager.

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
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))	5 February 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the home is a nurturing and supportive environment that meets children's needs. Children's homes will, in most cases, be homely. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- The registered person should ensure that any monitoring equipment has a written policy describing how this will support the safeguarding and well-being of those living and working in the home in accordance with Regulation 24. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 16, paragraph 3.16)

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: SC029865

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: My Choice Children's Homes Ltd

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

Responsible individual: Dawn Ives

Registered manager: Francis McCarogher

Inspector

Matt Hedges, Social Care Inspector

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