

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

The home is registered to accommodate up to four young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. It is one of a number of children's homes owned by the same provider. Young people are able to access the organisation's off-site school.

Inspection dates: 15 to 16 November 2017

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 **good**

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 23 February 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- Young people's needs are quickly identified and met by a caring staff team.

- The staff take appropriate action to reduce the risk of harm to young people.
- Young people are encouraged to develop personal interests which support them to lead healthy lifestyles and develop improved emotional well-being.
- Good relationships with professionals and members of young people's families are developed and maintained effectively.
- Support for young people's contact with family and friends helps them to maintain these relationships when possible.
- Leadership and management are good. The registered manager has a clear vision for the home and is able to improve effectively the care provided and the support staff receive.

The children's home's areas for development:

- At times the numbers of staff on duty struggle to fully meet young people's needs.
- The safeguarding procedures the staff follow can inhibit referrals being made without delay.
- Some staff have not been present at fire evacuation tests at the frequency required in the home's policy.
- Not all staff have completed their level 3 diploma for residential childcare (England) in appropriate timescales.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
23/02/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
25/08/2016	Full	Good
18/12/2015	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
28/05/2015	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
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy which— (a) is intended to safeguard children accommodated in the children's home from abuse or neglect; and (b) sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect. (2) The procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect must, in particular— (c) provide for the prompt referral of an allegation about past abuse or neglect in relation to a child to the placing authority and, if different, the local authority in whose area the alleged abuse or neglect occurred; (f) describe how and to whom staff are to report, without delay, any concern about abuse or neglect of a child. (Regulation 34(2)) In particular, the registered person must review whether the organisation's internal procedures for alerting and discussing safeguarding concerns do not unnecessarily delay prompt referral to the relevant external safeguarding agencies.	12/01//18
The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. (2) The registered person may only— (a) employ an individual to work at the children's home; or (b) if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home, if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3). (3) The requirements are that— (a) the individual is of integrity and good character; (b) the individual has the appropriate experience, qualification and skills for the work that the individual is to perform; (c) the individual is mentally and physically fit for the purposes of the work that the individual is to perform; and (d) full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the	12/01//18

individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32(1)(2) (3)(d)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that any negative information about a person they are intending to employ is adequately investigated and informs their assessment of the person's suitability to work with the young people who live at the home.	
After consultation with the fire and rescue authority, the registered person must— (d) ensure, by means of fire drills and practices at suitable intervals, that persons working at the home and, so far as reasonably practicable, children are aware of the procedure to be followed in case of fire. (Regulation 25(d)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that the staff and young people take part in adequate numbers of fire drills each year.	12/01//18
For the purposes of paragraph (3)(b), an individual who works in the home in a care role has the appropriate qualification if, by the relevant date, the individual has attained— (a) the Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare (England) ("the Level 3 Diploma"); or (b) a qualification which the registered person considers to be equivalent to the Level 3 Diploma. The relevant date is— (a) in the case of an individual who starts working in a care role in a home after 1st April 2014, the date which falls 2 years after the date on which the individual started working in a care role in a home; (Regulation 32(5)(a)) In particular, ensure that staff are completing this qualification within the given timescales.	12/01/18

Recommendations

- The registered person must specify the procedures to be followed and the roles and responsibilities of staff when a child is missing from care or away from the home without permission and how staff should support the child on return to the home. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 34, paragraph 7.15)

In particular, the registered persons should ensure that plans for responding to instances of a young person going missing reflect the young person's particular needs, circumstances and risks.

- Regulations 35-39 detail the records that must be kept in children's homes. All children's case records (regulation 36) must be kept up to date and stored securely whilst they remain in the home. Case records must be kept up-to-date and signed and dated by the author of each entry. Children's case records must be kept for 75 years from the date of birth of the child, or if the child dies before the age of 18, for 15 years from the date of his or her death. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)

In particular, the registered person should ensure that each record made is signed and legible. A clear entry of who makes each entry should be available in all records kept by the home.

- In addition to the requirements of this standard, the registered person has specific responsibilities under regulation 34 to prepare and implement policies setting out: arrangements for the safeguarding of children from abuse or neglect; clear procedures for referring child protection concerns to the placing authority or local authority where the home is situated if appropriate; and specific procedures to prevent children going missing and take action if they do. The policy on protection of children from abuse and neglect should include arrangements in relation to dealing with allegations involving staff in the home, e-safety and to counter risks of self-harm and suicide. All policies should be reviewed regularly and revised where appropriate. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 44, paragraph 9.19)

In particular, the registered person should review their safeguarding procedure to ensure that it provides a clear threshold for referrals relating to staff concerns.

- As outlined in 10.1, the registered person should plan staffing levels to ensure that they meet the needs of children and can respond flexibly to unexpected events or opportunities. Staffing structures should promote continuity of care from the child's perspective. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.15)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Young people's attachments to the staff team build steadily over time and support their progress. Some young people were very positive about living here. Two young people gave the staff 10 out of 10 for the support they provide. When young people were less positive about the care they receive the staff worked to improve their relationships and

provide consistent and appropriate boundaries as agreed with professionals who support the young person.

Plans for young people to move into the home are managed well. Relevant impact assessments are in place before a young person comes to live here and staff visit the young person to involve them in the decisions made. Impact assessments are devised which show how the staff will meet the young person's needs as well as considering how the young person might affect, and be affected by, others who live here. One social worker was impressed with the level of change for one young person since moving in. She said, 'It has been remarkable what change has occurred.'

Appropriate contact with young people's families is promoted well. A social worker confirmed that the staff went the 'extra mile' to make sure that contact was positive for the young person and his family, and said that she had seen that families were made to feel really welcome at the home and any concerns the staff notice are communicated quickly. Young people are also supported to have sleepovers with friends.

Young people's views are sought and inform decisions about the daily routines of the home as well as their care. Young people are clear about the avenues they have if they wish to complain or seek the help of an advocate. They are encouraged to talk about their aspirations for their future and any concerns they have about their care. Young people are assisted to understand how their behaviours affect others around them, for example by apologising to neighbours for the level of noise they have made late at night

Education is promoted and young people's achievements celebrated. The staff build good links with schools that help young people to remain at school or return if they have been excluded. The staff keep under review how well a young person is doing and work with the school on any plans they have to support a young person to achieve better if their engagement decreases. Three young people are preparing for GCSEs. At times the availability of a laptop for personal study is limited because there is only one which young people can use. The manager commenced a review of this issue during the inspection and confirmed that it would be resolved as soon as possible. She contacted the organisation's head office and wrote to relevant social workers to consider what can be done.

Good health is promoted. The staff support young people to be involved in activities which support them to manage their emotions and encourage them to develop a healthy lifestyle. For example, some of the young people at the home are involved in judo, football and rugby clubs. Emotional support is well organised and responds quickly to changes that young people need. One young person said that they had quickly become more positive about managing their difficult behaviours because of the support staff and therapy services provided to her.

Medication administration is managed appropriately. Managers regularly review practice and they are considering reviewing the medication form used, to support clearer recording and have less likelihood of errors.

Young people are successfully helped to move out of the home. Staff supported a young

person to move out of the home to live independently by assisting her to prepare for this move and by providing support to her in the community for several weeks after she had moved out. This has assisted her to continue to manage this change effectively. She is doing well at her job and has maintained good relationships with family and friends.

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

The staff are well prepared to recognise and refer concerns appropriately and to help young people to keep themselves safe. Managers have increased the staff's awareness of safeguarding procedures and increased the systems in place for the staff to discuss and monitor safeguarding practice. In one instance, three members of staff did not follow procedures appropriately. Managers subsequently developed improvement plans, and clear consequences for the staff concerned were put in place and are being monitored appropriately.

Safeguarding referrals are managed effectively. Each concern is recorded appropriately and immediate action is taken to reduce levels of risk and behaviours of concern. At the time of inspection there has been an increased level of concern relating to child sexual exploitation.

Appropriate measures have been taken to protect young people and the staff have worked with the relevant agencies to develop plans.

The organisation's safeguarding procedures require referrals to be discussed internally prior to any referral to outside agencies. This leads to unnecessary delay in referrals being made to the relevant outside safeguarding agencies when it is clear that a safeguarding referral is necessary.

Thresholds for making referrals about staff practice to designated officers are not clearly agreed with the local authority. This has led to confusion about what information should and should not be gathered prior to any consultation with the local authority.

The staff acknowledge and recognise positive aspects of young people's behaviours. The underlying reasons for young people's difficult behaviours are explored with them and young people are involved in plans to support them to change. Staff help young people to learn about risks they may face. For example, the staff watch TV documentaries about child sexual abuse and discuss the content with young people. One young person undertook a project about the risks of child sexual exploitation and displayed this in the home.

Risk assessment is undertaken well. Individual risk assessments are quickly updated following a change in risk and reflect individual issues for young people. The home's location assessment is well written and monitored appropriately; relevant agencies are asked for their views. Managers were therefore able to prioritise local risks for young people and provide staff with helpful guidance.

Clear plans support the staff to prevent young people from going missing, look for them if

they are missing and work effectively with other agencies to find them. Decisions about when restraint is necessary in order to protect a young person's well-being should they attempt to go missing are not taken lightly, but will be taken to prevent serious harm. Detail within each young person's risk assessment for if they go missing does not fully take account of their individual needs. For example, on each plan it is clear that the staff will not follow young people if they board a train. This practice does not take into account the individual circumstances of the event or the differing risks for each young person. It is a lost opportunity to ensure that every effort is made to prevent young people from going missing.

Recruitment practice varies in quality. On one recruitment file there is no evidence that managers followed up questions regarding a member of staff's health. This person's file did not demonstrate that information in a reference was conclusively reviewed so that no question about their suitability remained unanswered.

The home's environment is maintained well. Staff quickly note and rectify any wear and tear. Fire checks and records are mostly up to date and clear that fire prevention equipment was checked regularly and any issues dealt with speedily. However, the organisation's policy for the staff and young people to attend at least four fire drills in a year has not been met; a member of staff had not attended a fire drill since last year.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leadership and management are effective, focused on young people's needs and nurture and they challenge staff practice. The manager regularly reviews the statement of purpose and identifies areas for improvement. One recent change relates to reviewing how the statement describes the therapeutic nature of the home. The manager confirms that this remains something they are working to achieve. It is not, as described in the statement, something which is fully embedded in staff practice, although it is being developed.

The independent visitor's reports are used to monitor and improve the quality of care provided. The reports lack evidence that, whenever possible, the independent person seeks young people's views. When young people's views are noted in reports, these provide helpful insight into how young people consider their care is being provided. The organisation is planning with the independent visitor how young people's views can be a more regular feature of the visit. The organisation and the independent visitor are reviewing how her visits can better incorporate families' and professionals' views of the services provided. These will then be used to inform the provider's six-monthly reviews of the care they provide and how this has had an impact on young people's experiences and progress.

The organisation generally provides a sufficient number of staff who know the young people well and can meet their needs. However, the level of attention and care that young people currently require because of their varied needs and increased levels of risk makes it difficult for the staff to fully support all of their needs. Young people were clear that if another young person misbehaves, the staff's attention on that young person can

make them feel left out and increase the likelihood that they will join in the misbehaviour.

The staff are clear about how their training has improved their practice. One member of staff said that training on self-harm had enabled her to better understand why this occurred and therefore improve how she could respond to a young person. Another member of staff said that safeguarding training had increased her knowledge and helped her to continually keep this in mind.

The staff are undertaking the level 3 diploma for residential childcare (England) qualification, but not all the staff have completed the qualification in appropriate timescales. Staff were unclear about when they had to complete their qualification and this has affected the priority they gave to this training.

Supervision is frequent and meets the staff's needs. The staff report that managers support them well. They can discuss concerns and issues, particularly with the registered manager whom they consider to be supportive but able to challenge their practice if necessary. Supervision records are clear and demonstrated that supervision is regular and appropriate. Managers encourage the staff to come with a prepared agenda, which is fully taken into consideration during the meeting. Identified actions are followed up at each subsequent supervision session. Records of staff's skills, and any areas for improvement, are reviewed but the records are not always signed by both parties. This means that it is not clear that both agree that it is an accurate record of their meeting.

Strong links with relevant professionals positively support holistic care of young people. Social workers and education professionals are positive about the way in which the staff work with them. They confirm that the staff are always available, liaise professionally with them about the young person's needs and provide well-written reports which assist decisions being made.

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: SC029865

Provision sub-type: Children's home

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: Peter Kazmarski

Registered manager: Sandra Whyte

Inspector

Ruth Coler, social care inspector

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