

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	25/08/2016
Unique reference number	SC029865
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	My Choice Children's Homes Limited
Registered provider address	Unit 3a, Mill Green Business Estate, Mill Green Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 1XQ

Responsible individual	Peter Kazmarski
Registered manager	Post vacant
Inspector	Stephen Collett

Inspection date	25/08/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Good
Enforcement action since last inspection	One compliance notice was issued in December 2015
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Inadequate

SC029865

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- Leaders and managers have taken effective action to address the shortfalls identified at the last interim inspection and subsequent monitoring inspections. They learn from mistakes and strive for continuous improvement.
- Careful consideration is given to the impact that new admissions may have on group dynamics, using all relevant information to inform decision making.
- Excellent support is given to young people who are struggling to maintain attendance at their educational placement.
- Young people are able to access a range of specialist interventions to address their psychological and emotional well-being. Managers are proactive in engaging multidisciplinary support when young people are in crisis and not making anticipated progress.
- Young people receive personalised care from skilled staff. Staff demonstrate a commitment to meeting the needs of young people, despite often finding themselves in challenging situations.
- There is a robust response to young people who go missing. This includes ensuring that independent return home interviews are completed in a timely manner.
- There is a consistent approach to behaviour management which promotes a restorative approach. Young people engage in this, and it helps to ensure that positive peer relationships are maintained.
- A comprehensive training programme ensures that staff have the knowledge and skills to keep young people safe and meet their individual needs. A flexible approach ensures that training is delivered in response to the changing circumstances of young people.
- Managers have systems in place to monitor the quality of care being delivered. This ensures that any weaknesses are promptly identified.
- There has been no registered manager at the home for more than 26 weeks. Shortfalls were identified in relation to the management of allegations against staff and the quality of monitoring reports.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person(s) meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and '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 provider must appoint a person to manage the children's home if there is no registered manager in respect of the home. (Regulation 27(1)(a))	30/09/2016
Provide for liaison and cooperation with any local authority which is, or may be, making a child protection enquiry in relation to a child accommodated in the home. Specifically, ensure the designated person in the local authority is consulted when a child makes an allegation of abuse against a member of staff. (Regulation 34(2)(a))	30/09/2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- Make best use of information from independent and internal monitoring (including under regulations 44 and 45) to ensure continuous improvement.

Specifically, ensure that the information collected as part of the monitoring process is analysed, and the impact on children and young people is given consideration. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 55, paragraph 10.24)

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home caters for up to four young people who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home is privately owned. Young people are able to access the organisation's off-site school.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
18/12/2015	Interim	Declined effectiveness
28/05/2015	Full	Good
13/01/2015	Full	Good
07/08/2014	Interim	Improved effectiveness

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
Young people live in a settled, nurturing environment, and benefit from having positive, supportive relationships with staff. Over time, young people develop a sense of belonging and consistency in their lives. This enhances their ability to overcome the distress and anxiety associated with past traumatic events. One young person said, 'I feel I can achieve more here than in any other home I have been in'. Staff take a keen interest in young people's development and encourage them to do well. Consistent boundaries are maintained which young people perceive to be fair and appropriate. As their confidence develops, young people become more able to express their views and take a more active role in decision-making processes. Since being admitted to the home four months ago, one young person has significantly improved her communication skills when talking to adults. Her independent reviewing officer expressed admiration for how staff supported her to communicate at a recent review meeting. Another young person has taken an active role in agreeing the targets that need to be met before moving on. Excellent support is given to young people to help them to maintain their educational placements and meet their targets. When necessary, staff remain with a young person throughout the school day. In one case, this has enabled a young person to settle back into mainstream school following a period of refusing to attend. Most young people attend the organisation's school and have good attendance records. Managers and staff communicate effectively with professionals to secure appropriate provision for those young people whose circumstances make it unlikely that they would function well in a classroom setting. Leaders and managers have developed close links with two organisations that provide specialist support to vulnerable young people. This means that those who would benefit from therapeutic support and counselling are given timely support by qualified professionals. This has included family therapy, where appropriate. The manager ensures that all relevant professionals, particularly the young person's social worker, are consulted before any such work commences. An appropriate level of feedback on young people's progress is provided by these specialist services and is used to inform the care planning process. Consequently, care plans contain strategies and targets which are relevant to the specific needs of each young person. These are discussed with young people during focused key-work sessions.	

Young people are encouraged to develop their interests and hobbies, both at home and in the local community. This often provides young people with opportunities to take exercise and develop their social network. One young person is making good progress in her chosen sport of kick-boxing. Another spoke enthusiastically about the activities that she is planning to take part in during a forthcoming holiday with a member of staff. A healthy, nutritious diet is provided, and young people are given information relating to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. This includes smoking cessation, the dangers of alcohol and illegal substances, and promoting good sexual health. The system for recording and administering medication is robust and kept under review. This has resulted in a decision to access the services of a reputable dispensary in the near future.

Young people are welcomed to the home in a sensitive manner. One young person said, 'I was very sad when I came here, but staff helped me and I soon felt better.' Young people quickly develop the confidence to speak with staff about any fears and worries that they may have. They are treated with dignity and respect, even when they display challenging and confrontational behaviour. Staff are committed to meeting the needs of young people. One social worker said, 'Staff did not give up when the young person was at her most testing. This has been her longest placement, and staying here has made her safer.' The social worker was particularly impressed that managers met her request to employ waking night staff temporarily during a crisis period that the young person was experiencing. This is indicative of the commitment shown to maintaining stability for young people.

Staff work closely with social workers and family members, where appropriate, to plan and agree family contact arrangements. This results in contact being reliable and a positive experience for all concerned. The flexibility of staff ensures that issues such as supervision and transport do not impact negatively on the agreed arrangements. Many young people have experienced more positive relationships with family members as a result of well-planned contact meetings.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
A commitment to keeping young people safe and protecting them from harm underpins practice. The particular vulnerabilities of each young person are known to managers and staff, and effective action is taken to promote their well-being. Recently, when a young person's behaviour became increasingly unsafe, partly as a result of deteriorating mental health, swift action was taken to convene a multidisciplinary meeting. This provided an opportunity for professionals to agree support strategies to reduce the risk of the young person coming to harm. Young people say that they generally feel safe at the home, and that when they have any concerns they talk these through with staff. Effective action was taken	

when a young person informed staff that they felt uncomfortable regarding certain behaviours displayed by a peer. Sensitive discussions immediately took place with the young person concerned, and the associated risk assessments and strategies were updated to reflect the circumstances.

When completing individual risk assessments, staff take into account information provided by the placing authority. This helps to ensure that risk assessments are effective tools to protect young people. For example, one risk assessment identifies how a young person has previously put themselves at risk by using a specific social media website. Strategies for reducing risk are detailed and provide staff with clear guidance on how to respond to concerning behaviours. Risk assessments relating to fire are personalised, taking into account any issues that staff would need to consider when evacuating the building.

There is coordinated response to young people who go missing from the home. The frequency of young people going missing has dropped significantly since the interim inspection in December 2015. This is partly attributable to the fact that most of the young people in placement in December subsequently left, and managers have been more proactive in assessing the likely impact of the behaviour of new admissions on their peers.

When young people do go missing, staff actively search for them and communicate with their known associates in an effort to ensure that they are quickly located. Comprehensive records are kept of all 'missing' episodes, and staff are prompted to consider the possible reasons for the young person's absence. This encourages staff to reflect on the young person's circumstances and their practice in the home, and increases the likelihood of identifying the underlying reasons for the young person's behaviour. Managers and staff take action to ensure that independent return home interviews are conducted when a young person returns to the home. The new manager has a good understanding of the practice model adopted by the local organisation that undertakes the return home interviews and intends to share her knowledge with team members.

There has been an inconsistent response to managing allegations made against staff. In one case, consultation took place with the designated person in the local authority, and the recommendation to undertake an internal investigation was acted upon. In another case, no consultation took place with the designated person when a young person complained that a member of staff had injured her during a confrontational situation. Although managers did speak to the young person and member of staff concerned, not all those who witnessed the event were asked to make a statement. Records indicate that the young person did eventually confirm that she was content with the outcome of her complaint.

Clear behaviour management strategies are formulated for each young person. This ensures that they receive a consistent response when they fail to behave as expected. Restorative approaches are well embedded in practice, and this helps to

resolve conflicts that arise within the group of young people. One young person explained that this approach had led to her making a formal agreement with her peer and, although her peer had not always maintained this, she was prepared to keep trying. This demonstrates how young people learn to regulate their responses and work towards maintaining positive relationships. Young people said that staff quickly identify any signs of bullying and take action to prevent any further occurrence.

Staff receive regular training to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to respond effectively to child protection concerns. All staff spoken to were familiar with the procedures that they should follow, should they become aware of a young person being at risk of harm. They were able to give clear descriptions of what might alert them to a young person being sexually exploited and were able to identify particular locations where the risks to young people are high. A combination of the software installed on the home's internet devices and discussion and guidance given to young people in key-work sessions minimises the possibility of them becoming exploited online. The organisation nominates an 'e-safety champion' for each of its homes, although at the time of this inspection there was some uncertainty within the team as to who this is. This was accounted for by the fact that the manager is relatively new in post, and has not yet fully embraced the responsibilities that this role brings.

Safe recruitment procedures ensure that the potential for unsuitable adults being employed at the home is minimised. Any gaps in a candidate's employment history are checked and recorded in detail. A thorough interview process, which young people contribute to, explores candidates' motivation to work with vulnerable young people and their potential to act as positive role models.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Inadequate
The home has not had a registered manager since March 2016, and during this time the deputy manager has taken on the role of acting manager. The deputy manager did not apply for registration with Ofsted. A permanent manager was appointed in June 2016. At the time of this inspection, Ofsted had not received an application from the new manager to become registered. Effectively, the home has had no registered manager for more than 26 weeks, and on this basis the impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers is judged to be inadequate. During this transitional period, the deputy manager has been well supported by senior managers within the organisation. He has taken effective action to address the concerns identified at the interim inspection of December 2015, when the home was judged to have declined in effectiveness. All of the requirements set at this inspection and those subsequently made at monitoring inspections have been	

fully addressed. The deputy manager ensured that the new permanent manager received a well-planned, comprehensive handover of responsibilities. Consequently, the manager is familiar with the shortfalls identified in December 2015 and how these have been resolved. The manager is suitably experienced and holds the level 3 diploma for residential childcare. Since taking on the role of manager, she has enrolled on the level 5 diploma course in leadership and management for residential childcare.

The home has experienced a high turnover of staff since the last full inspection in May 2015. Currently, there is a settled staff team, but there are still two vacancies for care staff. This staff shortage is managed effectively by permanent staff working additional hours or the use of regular agency staff. This minimises the potential for young people to experience inconsistency in the care that they receive. The organisation is actively recruiting to fill the current vacancies. All staff either hold the level 3 diploma for residential childcare or are working towards this. New staff undertake a comprehensive induction programme which both allows them the time to familiarise themselves with the individual needs of the young people and prepares them for the role.

Effective monitoring of the quality of care being delivered has contributed towards the raising of standards in recent months. The manager completes monthly monitoring reports which record data and provide an opportunity for stakeholder feedback to be obtained. This information is not always fully utilised to evaluate and analyse how matters arising in the home impact on the quality of care. For example, some reports record that several staff have left the home, but does not reflect on how this may have affected young people. This shortfall is repeated in the quality of the care reports that are submitted to the regulator every six months.

The majority of significant events, such as physical restraints of young people, sanctions and serious incidents, are subject to managerial scrutiny. This enables managers to identify weaknesses and areas for development. Through this process, senior managers have recently identified that senior staff from one of the organisation's nearby homes should be more readily available to offer support during serious incidents. They have also identified that there is no expectation that home managers will monitor the quality and frequency of independent return home interviews when young people go missing. These matters are now being addressed. This demonstrates senior managers' commitment to learning from practice and working towards continuous improvement.

The frequency of young people demonstrating antisocial behaviour in the local community has been significantly reduced, although the regulator has received a complaint from one neighbour in recent weeks. The issues behind this complaint were examined during this inspection. Managers and staff have taken steps to ensure that the underlying causes of a young person's behaviour are addressed through a multi-agency approach to meeting her needs. Managers have also met

with the neighbour to explain the circumstances, listen to concerns and promote an ongoing dialogue to ensure the early resolution of any further difficulties.

Improvements in the care delivered to young people, and the reduction in unsafe and anti-social behaviours, can be attributed to leaders and managers taking a more child-centred approach to accepting new admissions. There is a far greater emphasis on ensuring the safety and stability of the group environment. This has been achieved by undertaking impact assessments prior to a new young person being offered a placement. Detailed information is collected during the referral process, and this is used to assess how group dynamics will be affected by a new admission. This has ensured that the group of young people is more stable and that they are less likely to influence one another negatively. The deputy manager has taken a holistic approach to the introduction of impact assessments, ensuring that the views of staff are carefully considered before any final decision is made about the suitability of a new young person coming into the home.

Leaders and managers now take a robust approach to engaging other professionals who are perceived not to have met their responsibilities for young people. They have been successful in ensuring that relevant professionals contribute towards the care planning process when young people are not making progress. Effective challenge is made when placing authorities fail to provide the required paperwork.

The organisation provides a comprehensive training programme for staff. This has a strong focus on developing the knowledge and skills required to keep young people safe. It also ensures that staff have a greater understanding of the underlying reasons for young people's emotional distress and associated challenging behaviour. A proactive approach is taken to ensuring that staff are trained to meet the individual needs of young people. Concerns for one young person's emotional and psychological well-being have recently resulted in all training related to adolescent mental health being bought forward.

Staff receive effective supervision on a regular basis. This is focused on the needs of young people, professional development and team dynamics. It provides staff with an opportunity to reflect on their own practice and to identify how they can contribute to making the home a safe, settled environment where young people can thrive.

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of looked after children is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place, however, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, 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 who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance, 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It inspects services for looked after children and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2016