

Children's homes inspection - Full

Inspection date	28/05/2015
Unique reference number	SC029865
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	My Choice Children's Homes Limited
Registered person address	Unit 3a, Mill Green Business Estate, Mill Green Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 1XQ

Responsible individual	Mr Peter Kazmarski
Registered manager	Ms Eva McNeil
Inspector	Mr Stephen Collett

Inspection date	28/05/2015
Previous inspection judgement	N/A
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
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	Good

SC029865

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- Young people receive good quality care based on their individual needs, delivered by a stable, committed and skilled staff team. Young people enjoy good relationships with the staff, and begin to form positive attachments. This provides them with a sense of security and stability
- Young people receive the support and encouragement they need to engage with their education provision, and make steady progress. Staff advocate strongly for young people who require additional support or specialist services to achieve their educational potential and address their mental health needs.
- The importance of hearing young peoples' views is recognised and acted upon. Effective young people's meetings and individual key-work sessions provide opportunities for young people to express their views.
- Staff maintain excellent communication with parents and families where appropriate, and this results in well planned and supportive contact arrangements.
- Policies and procedures for keeping young people safe and protected are understood and implemented in practice. Young people who remain at the home on a long term basis become increasingly safe, as they begin to address behaviours that are detrimental to their welfare.
- Consistent behaviour management strategies implemented by staff are effective, and support young people to manage their anger and anxieties appropriately.
- Strong leadership and management ensure that young peoples' needs are prioritised. The quality of care is regularly monitored and the Registered Manager has good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home.
- Child protection concerns are managed well and in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children Board protocols. Effective communication is maintained with the Local Authority Designated Officer.

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

Recommendations

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

Ensure young people receive personalised care which meets their needs and promotes their welfare; specifically, ensure young people have the opportunity to de-brief when the behaviour of other young people has a negative impact on their well-being. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 14, paragraph 3.2)

Ensure that when a child returns to the home after being missing or away from the home without permission, the responsible authority provide an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview; specifically, ensure formalised arrangements are in place with each placing authority which specify who will conduct the return home interview. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 45, paragraph 9.30)

Ensure effective care planning contributes towards the success of placements; in particular, ensure young people's placement plans contain targets and goals that are specific and relevant to the young person's current circumstances. (The Guide to the Quality Standards, page 56, paragraph 11.2)

Full report

Information about this children's home

This is a privately owned children's home, registered for four children and young people who have emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The home provides care for young people who present with challenging behaviour which may encompass self-harm, mental health issues and substance misuse. The home also cares for young people who may be on the autistic spectrum, or at risk of sexual exploitation.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
13/01/2015	CH - Full	Good
07/08/2014	CH - Interim	improved effectiveness
20/02/2014	CH - Interim	Satisfactory Progress

Inspection Judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	good
Young people enjoy positive day-to-day experiences as a result of the care they receive. They benefit from establishing good relationships with staff and over time begin to form strong attachments. Young people who remain for extended periods develop an increased sense of security and stability and make good progress in all aspects of their lives. Staff have a thorough understanding of the young people's needs, and respond quickly to their changing circumstances. An Independent Reviewing Officer stated that staff 'think outside the box' when considering how individual needs can best be met'. Staff provide young people with clear and consistent boundaries, and those who remain in placement in the longer term, benefit from the security this brings. As a result young people are familiar with the consequences of demonstrating challenging and unsafe behaviour, and learn to manage their emotions and anger more effectively. Some young people have made excellent progress in reducing the frequency and severity of negative behaviours. All young people have appropriate educational provision and most young people make good progress towards taking their GCSE examinations. Staff show an interest in young peoples' achievements and offer them support and encouragement to complete revision. Young people who are new to the home and attend the providers own school, quickly establish a routine and begin to engage in educational activities they have previously refused. When young people struggle with school attendance, leaders and managers take a pro-active approach to liaising with education professionals to find solutions. The organisations head teacher monitors young peoples' progress, and where this could be improved, ensures professionals are working together to identify suitable provision to meet individual needs. The Registered Manager also takes steps to ensure that when young people experience difficulties in their education setting, problems are resolved effectively. Young people generally enjoy good health, and are encouraged to live a healthy lifestyle. Some young people have made significant progress in reducing their level and frequency of substance misuse. Young people maintain a healthy diet and are engaged in setting menus and preparing meals. A range of activities are offered which provide good opportunities to take exercise and integrate into the local community.	

Staff are vigilant in respect of young people's mental health needs, and quickly identify any behaviour and mood changes that cause concern. Timely referrals are made to specialist services and leaders and managers ensure the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service intervenes when young peoples' safety and well-being is at risk. The home works in accordance with the statement of purpose and accesses therapeutic interventions for young people based on their needs assessment. Particularly strong links have been established with a local clinical psychology practice, and this ensures young people can access support during periods of change, such as transition.

Young people report they feel listened to by staff, and have an influence over the way the home operates. One young person stated 'staff are amazing – they know straight away if something is wrong with you'. Regular young peoples' meetings take place, where significant events, such as staff changes or new admissions, are discussed. Young people fully engage in setting the agenda for these meetings, and monitoring by the Registered Manager ensures they receive feedback. Regular key-work sessions provide them with the opportunity to express their views to a familiar and trusted member of staff.

The young people's guide to the home provides easy to read information about the home, how to complain and how to access the support of an advocate or contact external support services. Young people have easy access to the guide, which means those who are new to the home, and cannot recall all the information they receive on admission, have a reference point if needed. There have been no complaints about the home since the last inspection.

Young people make good progress in developing their independence skills, taking into account their abilities and starting point on admission. They become more familiar with the risks associated with unsafe relationships, and take steps to protect themselves when away from the home, such as maintaining regular contact with staff. On a practical level, young people learn to cook, budget and travel independently.

Young people make particularly good progress in developing positive relationships with family members where appropriate, and the support they are given results in sustainable and stable contact arrangements. This has a positive impact on young people's sense of identity and well-being. Managers and staff are skilled in developing good working relationships with parents and former carers. This ensures that young people's needs during contact are understood by all concerned.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
Leaders and managers take effective action to minimise the risk of young people being exposed to harm. Staff are familiar with the risks and vulnerabilities of individual young people. Risk assessments and associated strategies are subject to regular reviews and are updated in response to young people's changing circumstances. Leaders and managers take a pro-active approach to obtaining all relevant information relating to new referrals and their need for protection. Where referral information fails to identify the level of risk, such as self-harming behaviours, leaders and managers respond quickly and put measures in place to manage the situation. Young people report they feel safe in the home, and they can identify staff they would speak to if they had concerns. Staff are vigilant to any signs of bullying and challenge young people effectively. Consequently, young people and professionals both express the view that bullying is not an issue. Managers and staff have the skills to identify young people's vulnerabilities, and are vigilant to the signs of sexual exploitation. Strategies are then implemented to protect young people. Consequently most young people reduce their level of unsafe behaviour as they become settled in the home. This includes reducing substance misuse, violent behaviour and going missing. Some young people who are new to the home quickly reduce the risk of becoming sexually exploited due to the strategies and procedures that are implemented to keep them safe. The home effectively manages known risks by evaluating relevant information and updating risk assessments following significant events. However, inadequate referral information recently resulted in a young person being admitted who had substantial mental health difficulties. The young person required a level of support that the home's statement of purpose does not allow for. Leaders and managers quickly identified the concerns and put measures in place to manage the situation in the short term, while liaising with the placing authority to secure alternative provision for the young person. This situation had a negative impact on a longer term resident who witnessed some distressing scenes. The young person was able to speak to staff about their anxieties, but a formalised support and de-brief session, following the new admissions departure, was not provided.	

There are robust policies and procedures for responding to young people who go missing. These guide staff on what actions to take to help locate the young person. Staff are familiar with these and this ensures a consistent response to any incident. Risk assessments acknowledge individual vulnerabilities and contain strategies for staff to follow if they are concerned a young person might leave the home without authorisation.

When young people do leave the home without authorisation, staff either follow them or search for them if their whereabouts is unknown. Comprehensive records are kept of missing episodes, and clearly identify any known intelligence and actions taken in response. Staff liaise with the Police and placing authorities to maximise the chances of the young person's early return to the home.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of missing episodes over the last year with only three incidents in the last five months. This is a result of effective planning and working together with social workers and families to meet young people's needs and keep them safe.

The Registered Manager communicates effectively with local authorities regarding missing procedures, and obtains the relevant protocols. However, formalised agreements are not in place for who will conduct return home interviews in the future should these become necessary.

Staff provide young people with consistent boundaries, and the expectations regarding acceptable behaviour are clear. An incentive scheme is in place which promotes and rewards positive behaviour, and this minimises the need to impose sanctions. There have been no sanctions since the last inspection. The use of physical restraint is also minimal, with two incidents occurring since the last inspection. Restraint is only used as a last resort, when it is appropriate to do so, and the Registered Manager monitors the records of such incidents. Following a restraint, young people have the opportunity to discuss this with a member of staff and have their views recorded.

Staff are familiar with the risks to young people associated with the internet and social media. Access to these sites is risk assessed on an individual basis, and restricted or monitored as a result. Young people who are at particular risk of sexual exploitation through this media are identified, and are given guidance and support on how they can keep themselves safe.

Child protection concerns are promptly referred to the placing authority and local safeguarding team. Records are kept of all actions taken, and demonstrate that the home communicates with the relevant authorities until the outcome is known. Placement plans are amended to ensure that young people are supported during any investigation that is undertaken. This includes referrals to specialist support services where appropriate.

Concerns regarding staff practice are referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and where necessary thoroughly investigated internally.. A recent investigation into the professional conduct of a member of staff resulted in disciplinary procedures being implemented and steps taken to ensure young peoples' safety. The LADO reported that she is confident that the senior management team manage concerns effectively, and that regular communication takes place about safeguarding issues.

Robust recruitment arrangements minimise the risk of unsafe adults being employed. Background checks are undertaken, and a robust interview process ensures the organisation obtains a detailed account of the applicant's career history. The performance of new staff is monitored throughout their induction period to further ensure they have the necessary skills to communicate with young people and protect them from harm.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
An experienced Registered Manager who has been in post for nearly three years, manages the home well. She holds the level four diploma in leadership and management in health and social care. The complex needs of young people are well understood, and under the leadership of the Registered Manager staff work collaboratively to ensure these are prioritised. During a team meeting the Registered Manager was observed to motivate staff and encouraged them to consider new and creative approaches to supporting young people. This positive approach to caring for young people is not always evident in the young people's placement plans. The goals and targets young people are working towards are often generalised in these plans, and are not specific to the issues young people are currently dealing with. Despite this shortfall in the standard of written plans, young people continue to make good progress as a result of the care they receive. The home is set in a residential neighbourhood, close to all amenities and many recreational facilities. The location has been risk assessed, and managers and staff are familiar with all potential hazards to young people in the vicinity. Young people occupy a spacious well maintained house that is comfortably furnished, and has an enclosed garden area. Regular health and safety checks are maintained, and the Registered Manager takes prompt action to resolve any shortfalls. Consequently, young people live in a safe physical environment.	

Recommendations made by the external independent visitor are reviewed and appropriate action taken. A system is in place for collecting stakeholder feedback, and leaders and managers consistently make efforts to increase the level of response, but with varied success. In addition, a recently implemented template for the internal monitoring reports seeks to ensure that the views of young people in the monitoring process receive greater priority.

Staff report that they feel well supported and express confidence in the Registered Manager's leadership. They receive regular supervision with an annual appraisal of their performance. New staff receive regular feedback on how they are progressing through the induction period. The organisation provides a comprehensive training programme for staff, and all mandatory training, such as safeguarding and health and safety, has either been completed or planned.

When the particular needs of young people require staff to have specialist knowledge and skills, leaders and managers act promptly to ensure appropriate training is delivered. The Registered Manager has recently secured training and support, for staff working with young people who engage in self-harming behaviours

The Registered Manager and staff maintain good working relationships with external professionals. Regular communication with the Police, Youth Offending Officers and placing social workers results in a multi-disciplinary approach to keeping young people safe. Highly effective communication also takes place with parents and extended family members, ensuring that the care planning process results in consistency of care for young people.

When leaders and managers have concerns that young people are not receiving an effective service from external agencies, they seek to progress matters through challenge and dialogue with the professionals concerned. This has ensured that young peoples' educational needs are regularly reviewed and that specialist provision is made for young people experiencing mental health difficulties.

The Registered Manager is fully engaged in the referral process and takes account of the likely impact of new admissions on current residents. An administrative system is being introduced which will require the Registered Manager to provide a written evaluation of why a new referral may, or may not, be appropriate, as an additional safeguard. The impact of this is yet to be evaluated. An Independent Reviewing Officer expressed the view during the inspection that leaders and managers always consider the potential impact new admissions may have on those already in placement.

Leaders and managers are familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the home, and identify where improvements can be made. The importance of maintaining a full and consistent staff team is recognised, and action is taken to

ensure the home is sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of young people, in line with the statement of purpose. The Registered Manager demonstrates a positive attitude towards regulatory inspection and a commitment to strive for continuous improvement.

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 the *Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards*.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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