

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC407169
Inspector	Stella Lovie
Type of inspection	Interim
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Choices Home for Children Limited
Registered person address	16 Douglas Road Hazel Grove Stockport Cheshire SK7 4JE
Responsible individual	Susan Mackay
Registered manager	Linda Darbyshire
Date of last inspection	10/07/2014

Inspection date	03/12/2014
Previous inspection	adequate
Enforcement action since last inspection	none

This inspection

This home was judged adequate at the last full inspection. At this interim inspection Ofsted judge that it has **improved effectiveness**.

The home was last inspected in July 2014. It was judged to be adequate. Four recommendations were identified to improve practice in relation to supervision of staff, pathway planning, timely notification of significant incidents and more comprehensive independent visitor reports. Most of these recommendations have been addressed at the point of this interim inspection. This demonstrates commitment to learning from inspection with a view to improving the service provided.

Young people come to the home with already established high levels of risk-taking behaviours such as going missing, with attendant serious sexual exploitation concerns. Staff work closely with those young people to keep them safe, together with other relevant agencies. Young people benefit from regular one-to-one sessions with staff that enable them to make sense of their histories and develop confidence in themselves and their abilities. As one young person confirmed: 'I like it here. They've really helped me. They do their best to keep me safe – it's like their voices are in my head now when I'm running away. I think about things more now like when I'm getting on the train to go back to my home town. I'm pleased they haven't given up on me. They've taught me more about how to take care of myself. They have supported me through things with the police.'

Young people engage well with their education. They are encouraged to gain skills for their future independence. Relevant young people now have pathway plans in place to promote this within a structured approach. Young people are active in the management of their health. They seek information, and engage constructively with specialist services to further their understanding. They are able to build trusting relationships with a range of external helping professionals. This means that they know their rights and responsibilities in areas such as sexual health, substance abuse and respectful relationships. However, some young people are still at an early

stage of using that information to change their risk taking behaviours. That said, interventions by the home and specialist services are beginning to have some success with the young people in relation to awareness of the risks around sexual exploitation. Staff reinforce those key messages in the context of daily life in the home.

The home is able to evidence that they achieve good communication and partnership working with the police and other professionals tasked with helping young people at risk of sexual exploitation. As one police officer commented: 'The working relationship between care home management, staff and police is good. Staff have always made every effort to share information with all relevant agencies. In my opinion management have made every effort to safeguard the young person.' Where appropriate, this includes careful consideration with placing authorities about the suitability of young people's placements in the home. The manager is assertive in calling for strategy meetings when needed. These meetings are well-attended and consider all the issues of concern. They generate clear and robust plans of action, including complex abuse meetings within placing authorities where required. This helps to ensure a focussed approach to dealing with the alleged perpetrators of the abuse. The home makes a professional contribution to these meetings so that all relevant information is considered. This helps to safeguard the young people involved.

The manager has arranged for additional staffing resources to be put into the home, with a consequent recent marked reduction in the level of episodes of young people going missing. This is due to high levels of supervision by staff who are able to establish positive relationships with the young people. As one parent said: 'The home has basically saved her life. I know she's absconded but the difference in her is huge. The home has kept her away from the dangerous group of people she used to spend time with. Staff have allowed her to get her head together and start to learn what is normal. I think they've shown her stability and that she is learning that there are other ways of living. She is starting to question some of the things she was doing. She had thought that previous lifestyle was normal. I think she's bonded with a number of the staff. She hates them sometimes but that is when they are trying to keep her safe.' That said, return interviews of young people who have run away are not always conducted by an independent person. This means that opportunities are potentially missed to uncover information that can help protect young people from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in the home.

Monitoring arrangements are sufficiently thorough to ensure that the manager keeps a good oversight of the quality of care. Her quarterly reports are succinct and clear and contribute towards the home's improvement agenda. The independent visitor inspects the home at least monthly. Her reports are suitably evaluative and provide helpful advice about improvements needed. However, her reports have not been sent through to Ofsted in line with regulation. This inhibits the regulator in undertaking their scrutiny role.

The manager ensures that all serious events are notified to the appropriate authorities in a timely way. The reports are now clear and easy to read. She is appropriately assertive with placing authorities when she is concerned that young people are not getting the service they need. She works closely with other agencies to share concerns, and achieves a professional consensus about the best way to address those issues. This serves to promote young people's welfare. It demonstrates significant improvement in relation to previous concerns about the home's lack of effective partnership working. Good use is made of systematic questionnaires with placing authorities and other agencies. These evidence very positive feedback about the care given to the young people in the home.

Information about this children's home

This is a private children's home that provides care and accommodation for up to four young people with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
10/07/2014	Full	adequate
19/05/2014	Full	inadequate
10/02/2014	Interim	inadequate progress
06/11/2013	Full	adequate

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

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 Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
33 (2001)	ensure that the independent person produces a written report about a visit and provides a copy of the report to HMCI. (Regulation 33 (9) (a))	02/01/2015

Recommendations

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

- ensure that a written record or electronic record is kept by the home detailing the time and date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person (NMS 19.5)
- ensure that when a missing child is found, they are offered an independent return interview. The interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child returning to their care setting. This should be an in-depth

interview and is normally best carried out by an independent person (someone not involved in caring for the child) who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge.(Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, January 2014, para 31-32)

What inspection judgements mean

At the interim inspections we make a judgement on whether the home has improved in effectiveness, sustained effectiveness, or declined in effectiveness since the previous full inspection. This is in line with the *Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection*.

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The 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 relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the framework of inspection for children's homes.