

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC407169
Inspector	Stella Lovie
Type of inspection	Full
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	19/05/2014

Inspection date	10/07/2014
------------------------	------------

Previous inspection	inadequate
Enforcement action since last inspection	Two compliance notices were issued on 9 June 2014. A monitoring visit took place on 10 July 2014 and both compliance notices had been complied with.

This inspection	
Overall effectiveness	adequate
Outcomes for children and young people	adequate
Quality of care	good
Keeping children and young people safe	adequate
Leadership and management	adequate

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	adequate
-------------------	-----------------

The home was last inspected in May 2014. It received an overall effectiveness judgement of inadequate, with significant shortfalls identified in both safeguarding and management. This followed a previous judgement of inadequate progress in February 2014. Concerns were sufficiently high to warrant the issue of two compliance notices in respect of the implementation of safeguarding procedures, and the employment of sufficient staff at all times. At the point of this inspection both compliance notices have been satisfactorily addressed.

Overall, the direction of travel since the last inspection has been a positive one. The home has met all requirements and recommendations made to improve practice, though it is still early days for the home to demonstrate that this can be sustained. Working together relationships with external agencies are significantly improved. However, evidence suggests that mutual professional trust is still in process of being fully re-established.

Outcomes for children and young people remain only adequate as risk-taking

behaviours associated with running away have increased since the last inspection. Quality of care has improved though, so that children and young people living in this home benefit from a more experienced staff group who demonstrate a commitment to meeting their needs and keeping them safe.

Children and young people are safeguarded by sound child protection practice. They say they feel safe at the home and respected by staff. Group dynamics and behaviour are managed well. This provides them with a harmonious environment in which to live.

Management arrangements have been strengthened so that leadership is more effective. A cycle of improvement has been set in motion through more effective communication and partnership working. That said, some further relatively minor shortfalls are identified. These do not currently have a direct negative impact on the welfare or safety of young people.

Full report

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
19/05/2014	Full	inadequate
10/02/2014	Interim	inadequate progress
06/11/2013	Full	adequate
15/03/2013	Interim	good progress

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

Recommendations

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

- work collaboratively with the young person's social worker to obtain and implement the pathway plan (NMS 12.2)
- ensure all staff, including bank staff, are provided with regular supervision, with specific regard to clarification about which bank staff are to be managed by which manager (NMS 19.4)
- ensure that visits of the home carried out under Regulation 33 include relevant checks set out in regulations and guidance and checks of any disciplinary measures and use of restraint and records of missing person's reports (NMS 21.7)
- ensure that the registered person has a system in place to notify within 24 hours the persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with Regulation 30; with specific regard to succinct, accurate and clear recording. (NMS 24.1)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **adequate**

Children and young people continue to enjoy positive relationships with motivated and enthusiastic staff who care about them and act as influential role models. They benefit from a nurturing and structured environment which helps them to respect boundaries and to develop emotional resilience. As a result, some children and young people make reasonable progress from their starting points across all aspects of their social and psychological development. As one head teacher confirmed: 'I have been most pleased by the developments he has made in his ability to discuss how he is feeling, enabling us to work together to find a solution to a problem. He should be proud of his achievements.' That said, since the last inspection, some children and young people have chosen to increase risk-taking behaviours such as running away. This has exposed them to situations of harm and offending.

Children and young people have generally good attendance at their various educational provisions. However, for some, their previously good motivation has become more equivocal. Staff have worked closely with them though to ensure that key exams are still completed and that sufficient preparation is undertaken for interviews for possible college placements. This helps to ensure that the focus on children and young people's educational achievement remains central to their experience in the home.

Children and young people remain in good health. This is maintained through balanced diets, proactive health care and appropriate exercise. Although some children and young people continue to smoke and occasionally abuse various substances, they have good access to advice and support to encourage them to move away from these harmful lifestyle choices. All children and young people in the home now have access to specialist psychological support in accordance with need. This helps to promote their emotional health.

Children and young people continue to enjoy a wide range of exciting activities and trips out. These experiences are celebrated and recorded in photos to share with family and friends, and to form part of a visual record of their life in the home. In addition, there has been an improved drive to encourage children and young people to have greater participation in the wider community in various ways such as sports clubs and possible volunteer work. This helps them to build friendship networks and promotes development of social skills.

Children and young people play a significant part in the daily running of the home. This includes helping to prepare meals and to do minor chores. They consequently develop useful skills for future independent living. However, some relevant young people have yet to benefit from pathway plans to focus that preparation for independence more effectively. This does not help them to be confident and realistic

about their readiness for adult life.

Quality of care

good

Staff continue to work hard to establish and maintain positive relationships with children and young people based on the values of good parenting and trust. This approach is underpinned by effective use of individualised positive behaviour strategies. It remains a real strength of this home. As a result, children and young people enjoy warm relationships with staff and there is good rapport between them. They report that staff really care about them. As one young person said: 'I get lots of staff time here and they listen to me. I trust them here. This is better than at my previous care home.' This is further confirmed by feedback from an external professional: 'I think that staff handle this young person very well. They are clearly committed to her and obviously care that she's safe.'

The home's attention to placement planning has improved since the last inspection. Placement plans for individual children and young people now comprehensively address their needs and experiences, are more focussed with targets and timescales, and link back effectively with their care plans. Children and young people have a clear understanding of their future plans. Plans are regularly reviewed to make sure they continue to be right for the child.

Staff actively pursue referrals to get the right kind of support for children and young people's complex needs, particularly in relation to their emotional and psychological health. As one external professional commented: 'I have been working intensively with the home in relation to one young person. They made a prompt referral to me about this young person who is at risk of sexual exploitation. They have been proactive in getting her to appointments with me and in communicating with me. The home has played a significant role in coordinating all the agencies around this young person. They have asked me for resources to do direct work with her and with other young people in the home. All in all, it's going very well.' This demonstrates that children and young people now receive appropriate access to the services they need to meet their emotional and psychological needs.

Staff champion children and young people's educational needs through proactive partnerships with teachers and other relevant agencies. They acknowledge children and young people's achievements in the home and celebrate these. These practices help children and young people to experience success and develop their confidence.

Children and young people experience care that is sensitive and responsive to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender identity, language, race and sexual orientation. That care helps them to develop a positive self-view, an ability to form

and sustain attachments and to build emotional resilience. It enables them to better understand the diverse society they live within and to learn the value of tolerance and cohesion.

Keeping children and young people safe adequate

In the last inspection in May 2014, this aspect of the home's functioning was found to be inadequate. Since then, leaders and managers have worked hard, with some success, to address a previous key concern about their poor working relationships with local safeguarding agencies. This had caused inconsistency in the home's implementation of its safeguarding procedures. Managers now have regular information-sharing meetings with local agencies such as the police. Clear written processes have been established with the local authority to inform about every out of area placement that the home accepts. These help to ensure that communication is more effective so that children and young people are better protected. As one police officer commented: 'Overall, I think the home has been bending over backwards to make improvements since the last inspection. There are now regular meetings with all to share information and improve working together relationships. This is at an early stage but does represent improvement.'

Children and young people report that they generally feel safe in the home and outside it, and can turn to trusted adults for support. Children and young people with specific needs such as substance abuse and sexual exploitation are offered timely, well-focused support which enables them to feel safer. This is confirmed by feedback from a relevant external professional: 'Staff report concerns promptly. They challenge her every step of the way. She likes the staff, knows where she stands and clearly considers the home a safe place to be. The staff constantly reinforce the messages that the other professionals working with her give. This strengthens those messages and makes sure we are all working to the same end. When she makes disclosures the staff are immediately on it. They arrange for all the right agencies to get involved. Everyone is kept in the loop.'

Children and young people come to the home with high levels of risk-taking behaviours. Some continue to put themselves at risk by going missing from the home. These incidents are responded to promptly but have in fact increased in frequency since the last inspection. The home works well with other agencies to ensure the safe return home of those individuals, particularly with the local police. Records of direct work sessions following an episode of being missing from home are maintained. Feedback to the young person highlights the dangers and the risks to which they expose themselves and reinforces the importance of keeping themselves safe at all times.

Good behaviour is promoted through support, praise and a token economy. Physical intervention is used in a proportionate way. Placement plans and risk assessments

identify the impact of any abuse or neglect and the actions required to protect and support the children and young people concerned. These plans are carefully monitored and reviewed in light of any new information. The manager has been more effective in securing multi-agency meetings when required to evaluate and plan interventions in respect of abuse concerns. Records of these meetings are now held in the home so that everyone is clear about who is responsible for what. This means that children and young people are appropriately supported and protected.

Since the last inspection, staff have received training in specific safeguarding matters such as child sexual exploitation and peer to peer abuse. They are able consequently to demonstrate a more comprehensive understanding of how to identify these concerns, and how and when to refer cases to the appropriate safeguarding agencies. As a result, unsafe situations and behaviour are better managed by staff who are more confident in setting clear and consistent boundaries. These contribute to a feeling of well-being and security for children and young people.

Allegations against staff continue to be handled fairly and swiftly in consultation with relevant external agencies. Recording in the home of action taken in relation to an allegation has been improved so that it is now compliant with minimum standards.

Leadership and management

adequate

Leaders and managers have put in a lot of work over the past several weeks to raise their game from the previous inadequate standard. The Registered Manager remains at a very early stage in her management career, and in obtaining her management qualification, but is fully committed to improving standards in the home. To this end, she is now supported and managed by a more experienced colleague who is a Registered Manager from another home in the wider organisation. He has assumed the role of an area manager in addition to his Registered Manager role elsewhere. He provides assistance with policies and procedures such as the introduction of a formal notification system for all children and young people admitted or discharged from the home. The role also includes the supervision of all the Registered Managers within the organisation. To this end, he has enabled the manager to address and resolve all the shortfalls identified in the last full inspection. This means that the home can demonstrate capacity for achieving improvement, though it is too early to confirm whether this can be sustained. For example, it remains to be seen if the additional support from the area manager role can be maintained in the longer term in light of that individual's responsibilities towards his own children's home.

Quality assurance arrangements have been strengthened by the recent employment of a suitably experienced and qualified independent visitor. This allows for more useful critical oversight to promote improvement. That said, her reports lack structure and do not clearly demonstrate that she has had direct access to all required documentation. This undermines the effectiveness of that monitoring.

The composition of the staff team has been enhanced by moving staff within the organisation so that there is a better mix of more experienced and qualified staff with new and unqualified staff in the home. This arrangement is still in process of bedding down in terms of staff morale, though the remaining original staff members clearly value the additional expertise and confidence that has been introduced. The home now employs a sufficient number of staff to meet the needs of the children and young people they care for. To achieve this, the home draws upon a bank of experienced staff as required. The Registered Manager has strengthened staff support by increasing the frequency of staff supervision to once a month. However arrangements for the supervision of bank staff are unclear. This inhibits rigorous monitoring of their practice.

The home is able to demonstrate improved practice in the notification of all serious events to the appropriate authorities. This promotes a more transparent culture and enables the regulator to undertake a scrutiny role. That said, some notifications are recorded in an unclear and confusing manner which impedes that crucial external oversight.

What inspection judgements mean

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Good	A service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements.
Adequate	A service that only meets minimum requirements.
Inadequate	A service that does not meet minimum requirements.

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.