

Children's homes inspection - Full

Inspection date	28/05/2015
Unique reference number	SC407169
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Choices Home for Children Limited
Registered person address	31 Wellington Road, NANTWICH, Cheshire, CW5 7ED

Responsible individual	Mrs Susan Mackay
Registered manager	Miss Linda Darbyshire
Inspector	Ms Stella Lovie

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

SC407169

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

All the children and young people gave extremely positive feedback about their daily experiences and how staff have helped them to make progress. They all rated the home as outstanding. Some felt their time in the home has been 'life-changing'. They feel listened to, taken seriously and cared about. As one young person said: 'They're all listeners, not talkers. They don't fill your head up but do take what you say seriously and try to do something about it.'

Children and young people benefit from an enthusiastic staff team who genuinely care for them and want to be there to make a difference. This promotes strong and meaningful relationships and encourages children and young people to make excellent progress from their starting points.

Children and young people have a strong voice in the home. Their views matter and have an influence in how the home is run. As one social worker said: 'I was very impressed with the young people's meetings – they feel like they take meaningful account and effort to discuss young people's feelings and views. I think they make an outstanding commitment to meet young people's needs.'

The culture and atmosphere in the home is very warm and nurturing. There is no doubt that children and young people feel valued and cherished. As one young person said: 'They're the best family I have ever had'. However, that drive to establish and maintain long-term, committed relationships was undermined recently by the manager's decision to accept a short-term respite placement. This had a temporary de-stabilising impact on the home.

Staff are successful in working with external professionals to reduce risky behaviours such as going missing and sexual exploitation. As a result, children and young people are much safer. As one social worker confirmed: 'My young person is part of a project to spread awareness of the risks of child sexual exploitation to other young people. She has now got a much better understanding of those risks and has come a long way in her thought processes.' That said, staff need to ensure that key documents such as strategy meeting minutes are placed in children and young people's files so that multi-agency risk management is easily accessible to guide staff understanding and actions.

The Registered Manager ensures strong partnership working to meet all areas of children and young people's development needs. As one external professional said: 'They do a lot of joined-up thinking.'

Managerial monitoring is robust so that patterns and trends are identified and acted upon. However, external monitoring fails to provide enough evaluation of the home's impact on children and young people's welfare and safety.

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 the *Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards*. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
13: The leadership and management standard: ensure that the registered person leads and manages the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos set out in the home's statement of purpose; with specific regard to no longer taking respite placements (Regulation 13 (2) (a))	30/06/2015
36: Children's case records: maintain records for each child which are kept up to date; with specific regard to ensuring all key planning documents are kept on children's files (Regulation 36 (1) (b))	30/06/2015
44: Independent person: visits and reports: ensure that the independent person produces a report about a visit which sets out the independent person's opinion as to whether children are effectively safeguarded and the conduct of the home promotes children's well-being. (Regulation 44 (4) (a) (b))	30/07/2015

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children can access advocacy support, with use of an independent advocate where necessary. (Guide, page 23, paragraph 4.18)

Full report

Information about this children's home

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
03/12/2014	CH - Interim	improved effectiveness
10/07/2014	CH - Full	Adequate
19/05/2014	CH - Full	Inadequate

Inspection Judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	outstanding
All the children and young people spoke about how staff make strong and effective relationships with them based on honest, straightforward talking and genuine emotional investment. This means that children and young people know that staff care and are not just doing a standard job. This helps them to begin to believe in their own self-worth and to trust adults, possibly for the first time ever. For example, despite having had dozens of failed placements prior to coming to this home, some young people have managed with staff support to form strong attachments and have positive aspirations for their future. This contributes to the development of self-esteem and emotional security. Staff develop a comprehensive understanding of each young person and are able to be flexible to meet their individual needs. They cope with high levels of very challenging behaviour. They give children and young people hope that things can be turned around. As one young person said: 'Since I've come here I've been really happy. Staff are great. It's the best placement I've ever been to and I've been to loads. Staff are loving and funny and it's like a big family here. I think it's a lovely home. They've helped me a lot emotionally. I don't self-harm anymore. I still feel the emotions but I don't act on them.' Children and young people talked in different ways about how living in this home has taught them to be broadminded and to get on with other people. They spoke about how they learn to communicate easily with others, meet new people and make them feel welcome in the home, get on with young people of different age groups, get on with adults, be tolerant, make compromises, put up with both good and bad in others and never write anyone else off. They said they learned that other people, as well as themselves, need space, have moods, and are not always happy. They thought that this has taught them self-reliance which will always prove useful in the future. Those sentiments were evident in the relaxed and productive atmosphere in the home throughout the inspection. As one social worker enthused: 'I just wanted to let you know that I have been a social worker since 2004 and have never placed a young person in such a vibrant residential home as yours. I have been impressed and overwhelmed by the staff's positive attitude and their desire to make a difference to the young people they are looking after.' Children and young people have lovely bedrooms. They take pride in decorating them and keeping them clean and tidy. They enjoy a very comfortable and welcoming home environment which strongly reflects their interests, creativity and ownership. This promotes their positive self-esteem, the harmony of the peer	

group, and confirms to them that they are valued.

Staff provide an exceptionally good level of support and nurture to the children and young people. One youth offending worker commented that it was 'quite possibly the most supportive children's home I've ever worked with.' Staff undertake direct work with the children and young people which is meaningful and fully incorporated into how the home functions on a daily basis. Visual evidence of this is apparent all over the house in terms of children and young people's paintings, posters and inspirational quotes chosen by them. Staff work closely with mental health professionals and other specialist agencies to ensure that therapeutic approaches extend into the home itself. They encourage a creative use of art to help improve self-esteem and engage children and young people in thinking and talking about their past experiences. For example, some young people have used posters with their hand and foot prints to gather comments about them as individuals from peers and staff. This has helped them to see themselves more positively and has given their peers a chance to practice giving constructive feedback. Similarly, staff are imaginative in helping children and young people who have missed out on younger child life experiences. In some situations they successfully use tooth fairy stories to encourage children and young people to learn better dental hygiene.

Children and young people make excellent educational progress from their starting points in terms of attendance, motivation and attainment. Some children and young people who previously were not attending any education before coming to the home are now on track for taking their GCSE examinations. Some young people are reported to be producing outstanding work in their formal studies. As one school confirmed about their young person: 'She is a delight to work with. Her drive and enthusiasm a joy to behold. I can see the high level of support she is receiving outside of school.'

Children and young people are effectively prepared for a successful transition to adult life. They are supported to develop necessary life skills such as personal care, choosing the clothes they want to wear and helping to tidy shared spaces and their bedrooms. Young people have developed skills around making drinks along with cooking and baking.

Children and young people enjoy a wide range of interesting and fun activities such as horse-riding, martial arts, cheer leading, dog walking and swimming. As one young person said; 'I think it's nice here, all of it, the staff, the house, loads of nice activities. I now do swimming and horse-riding which I didn't do before I came here. I get on well with everyone, children and staff. They are helping me a lot.' These experiences broaden their horizons and give them new skills and confidence. Participation in these activities supports their inclusion in their local community. It also helps to maintain their good health. Some young people have done training with St John's ambulance, which has helped their development of life skills. Staff also pay close attention to the need for children and young people to learn about the diverse society they live within. They hold regular culture nights centred

around food, games and quizzes so that children and young people gain a greater understanding about cultural difference with a view to promoting tolerance.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
Children and young people report that they feel safe in the home. This is endorsed by feedback from external professionals and relatives. Children and young people enjoy living together as a group. Boundaries are firm, well-known and managed consistently and fairly. As one young person confirmed: 'There's no bullying in the home. There are sometimes fallings-out but everyone's friendly. We are like brothers and sisters here. New people are made to feel welcome – we do this depending on what they need. Some new people need hugs, others need to be quiet and check us out. We do whatever they need to feel settled in here.' That said, a recent decision by the manager to admit a young person on a short-term respite basis had an unsettling effect on the peer group. It led to a young person making a complaint about the adverse impact of witnessing an associated increase in restraints. It did not fit with the home's stated purpose to aim to provide a stable, nurturing environment where children and young people are encouraged to commit emotionally. The manager has subsequently decided not to make any further respite placements. Positive behaviour in the home is founded on the strength of the children and young people's relationships with staff. As one external professional observed: 'I have very much enjoyed coming to your home. I found it to be a very positive environment and it was lovely to see how passionate and protective everyone is to my young person. It is clear you all care very much for her and have worked extremely hard to help her build a sense of safety. She has made huge progress over her time with you and the fact that she is trusting you all is a huge step after her previous experiences with adults.' Children and young people have faith in the staff and feel able to talk to them if they are worried about anything. As one young person said: 'I can talk to staff, all the staff, whenever I feel I need to. That helps to keep me safe. They stop me running off by talking to me about things like my family. They make me feel warm inside. They try to sort out my problems. They're there for me.' Some children and young people come to the home with long-established histories of very high risk behaviours in relation to sexual exploitation, running away and substance misuse. Staff have a very good understanding of those risks in respect of each of the children and young people and have effective risk management plans in place to address them. This is complemented by strong and effective	

working together with other agencies to safeguard the children and young people. Risk assessments are suitably detailed and comprehensive. They show careful consideration of staff ratios and appropriate levels of supervision, including use of waking night staff. Trigger points, patterns and trends are identified and considered in planning.

Staff know the children and young people very well and are able to interpret and anticipate their behaviours, and those of significant others who try to exert an abusive influence. They put in place effective risk management measures such as escorting children and young people on their journeys to school when this is identified as a trigger point. As a result, children and young people have achieved significant reductions in risk-taking behaviours in relation to e-safety, substance misuse, sexual exploitation and going missing. As one young person said: 'When I first came here I was going missing, on drugs, hanging around with older men. Staff made me feel welcome here. Now, six months on, I am off drugs and have only been missing once. I get on with all the staff and kids. It's the best placement I've ever been in. It's been life changing for me.' When the manager considers that they cannot keep children and young people safe, she calls for appropriate formal review of those individuals' care plans.

A number of key strategic planning and decision-making documents were missing from one young person's file. The manager was able to locate them eventually but these are important documents that should have been carefully stored and easily available for information and planning purposes. In mitigation, it is clear from other documents that decisions made in those strategic meetings had been considered and followed through.

The manager ensures that effective return interviews are completed each time a young person goes missing. Those interviews are completed by an independent person to the home. They identify push-pull factors for individual children and young people and action is taken accordingly. They consider any support needs arising from the missing episode and invite the young person to reflect on why they ran away. They help them to see that they have choices and to understand what those choices mean. The interviews include a managerial overview about what to do in future to prevent further occurrences. As a result, episodes of children and young people going missing have reduced significantly over the last six months.

One measure of the home's success is that some young people previously at great risk to themselves have been working in the community to raise awareness of sexual exploitation. The external professional involved in setting up this project commented on how amazing it was to see them gain confidence in talking to members of the public. She further confirmed: 'One young person has made great progress there. She now has no drug use, no missings and is back in education. Another young person has gone the longest ever time of not going missing and is doing very well. The staff all aim to help the young people make better choices and create better outcomes for themselves. They have good, strong working

relationships with all the professionals. They listen to advice, act on it and share information. I think that in all the cases I've worked with staff from that home, the young people have made progress with their substance abuse and sexual exploitation issues. I am confident that the staff do back-up work with the young people in the home to promote these messages further.'

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
The Registered Manager has been in post since March 2014. She is suitably experienced and is about to complete a relevant qualification. She has brought this home forward on a steadily improving journey since they received an inadequate judgement a year ago. The manager sets high standards for the staff and the children and young people. She ensures that children and young people's needs are at the forefront of everything they do. She has expectations for them as she would for her own children. She can demonstrate that children and young people make sustained and significant progress from their starting points across all aspects of their development. The manager achieves this by leading on establishing the nurturing, caring culture in the home. She picks the right staff and develops them to promote that culture. As one young person endorsed: 'Linda is a brilliant manager. All the other managers I've known haven't bothered. She is always there for me. I love her.' The manager ensures that staff have appropriate development opportunities. This enables staff to feel energised and confident in their practice. It also encourages awareness of practice issues beyond the boundary of the home. A culture of learning has been developed so that staff are constantly looking for where improvements can be made. She ensures that this is underpinned by regular supervision of a good quality, and by robust performance management. Staff confirm that they also have access to informal support from their own and other managers in the organisation when they need it. As a result, staff have a real sense of purpose in their role and are able to practice in a clearly defined, goal-orientated manner. As one social; worker confirmed in writing: 'It is evident staff have respect for you as their manager. Linda, you have always been so positive and your motivation and desire to make a difference to the young people in your care has shone through.' The manager has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home, learns from monitoring and inspection activities and improves practice accordingly. Consequently, all the requirements and recommendations from the last inspection have been addressed. Internal quality assurance processes are	

good. The manager has a firm grip on the home and has four monthly action plans in place to continually improve the service. They include consultation with a wide number of individuals including young people, social workers and head teachers. However, external monitoring by the independent visitor does not always contain enough critical scrutiny of the welfare and safety of the children and young people. For example, there is insufficient evaluation of serious incidents such as restraints and missing from home episodes. The reports are also unclear as to whether actions identified as necessary one month are always checked as addressed in subsequent visits. The manager advised that this was her view as well and she has recently asked for more critically constructive feedback from this external process.

The manager ensures that the home has strong and effective working together relationships with other agencies. This underpins and drives the progress that the children and young people make. She is appropriately assertive with agencies if they do not provide a good enough service for children and young people. However, she has yet to make sure that all that children and young people have access to independent advocacy, especially for those who have no real contact with family members. The manager acknowledged this as an unmet need and has plans in place to raise it with the relevant placing authorities.

The home's Statement of Purpose clearly sets out the aims and objectives of the service. Children and young people receive a pack which contains information relating to expectations of behaviour and their responsibilities, as well as their rights during their time in the home. This means that everyone can be clear about what to expect at the home. That said, the manager's decision to offer a respite short-term placement recently does not chime with the aim to provide a stable, nurturing environment. On this occasion it did not have a lasting negative impact and the manager is clear that she will not be accepting such placements again.

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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