

# SC436559

Registered provider: Choices Home For Children Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this children's home

The home is registered to provide care for five children who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and/or physical disabilities. The home forms part of a small independent social care company.

**Inspection dates:** 1 to 2 August 2017

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account**      **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected      requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers      good

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 2 March 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** Sustained effectiveness

**Enforcement action since last inspection:**

None

## Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- Staff are committed to providing nurturing, individualised care for young people.
- The registered manager and staff work effectively with professional stakeholders and families to provide young people with consistent care.
- Staff really value education. They ensure that young people secure school and college placements and support them to achieve their potential.
- Staff understand what is important to young people. They spend time with them and offer them new opportunities. As a result, young people invest in their home and their relationships with their staff.
- Young people are rarely missing. Staff are proactive in searching for young people when they are missing. Staff work with the police to make sure that young people are at risk for the minimum time.
- Some young people make exceptional progress in addressing their risk-taking behaviour.
- Young people feel that staff support them well during their transitions to and from the home. Some young people who have left the home have made excellent transitions back to their placing authorities and their families.
- The registered manager is ambitious for young people and is beginning to influence the outcomes of the young people's and staff's development.

The children's home's areas for development:

- To ensure that there is robust challenge to placing authorities when the home is unable to keep young people safe or is unable to meet their needs.
- To ensure that staff understand and implement the policy when a young person makes an allegation and that staff make records of such allegations and the actions and responses.
- To ensure that risk assessments are clear and up to date.
- That staff only administer medication to the young person as it is prescribed. Any changes to prescriptions must be made in writing.
- That staff follow the fire safety risk-assessment and ensure that fire evacuations take place as detailed.
- That the registered manager follows safer recruitment practices.

## Recent inspection history

<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>Inspection type</b>	<b>Inspection judgement</b>
02/03/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
13/09/2016	Full	Outstanding
25/01/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
19/05/2015	Full	Good

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

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet 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 within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>In order to ensure the care planning standard is met, the registered provider must ensure–</p> <p>1(a) children receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and</p> <p>(b) have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home.</p> <p>(2) In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure–</p> <p>that the child's placing authority is contacted, and a review of that child's relevant plan is requested, if–</p> <p>the registered person considers the child is at risk of harm or has concerns that the care provided for the child is inadequate to meet the child's needs.</p> <p>This specifically refers to the registered person effectively and robustly challenging the child's placing authority to ensure that the review of plans is prompt and efficient to keep the child safe, and the child's peers and staff are safe. (Regulation 14(1)(a)(b)(2)(e)(i))</p>	31/08/2017
<p>The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>In order to meet the protection of children standard, the registered provider must ensure that staff assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child. In particular, ensuring that risk assessments are accurate and up to date. (Regulation 12(2)(a)(i))</p>	31/08/2017
<p>The procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect must, in particular, provide for the prompt referral of an allegation about current or ongoing abuse or neglect in relation to a child to the placing authority; provide for</p>	31/08/2017

records to be kept of an allegation of abuse or neglect and the action taken in response. (Regulation 34(2)(b) (d))	
The registered person must ensure that medicine which is prescribed for a child is administered as prescribed to the child for whom it is prescribed. In particular, that any changes made by doctors to a child's prescribed medicine is made in writing. (Regulation 23(2)(b))	31/08/2017
After consultation with the fire and rescue authority, the registered person must ensure, by means of drills and practices at suitable intervals, that persons working at the home and, so far as reasonably practicable, children are aware of the procedures to be followed in case of fire.(Regulation 25 (1)(d))	31/08/2017
The registered person must maintain records for each child which– (1)(a) include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to a child; (b) are kept up to date; and (c) are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36(1))	31/08/2017

## Recommendations

- The registered person is responsible for maintaining good employment practice. They must ensure that recruitment safeguards children and minimises risk to children. In particular, that records of interviews demonstrate rigorous assessment of potential candidates and that there is evaluation of any gaps in employment and of previous convictions. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1)
- All staff must have their performance and fitness to carry out their role formally appraised at least once annually. This appraisal should take into account, the views of other professionals who have worked with the staff member over the year and children in the home's care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.5)

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Since the last inspection there has been considerable upheaval and change within the home. A young person remained living in the home for a considerable period after the

previous registered manager had decided that the home was unable to meet her needs. This had a significant impact on the environment, the young person's peers and staff. In total, four young people have left the home over the last five months. Placements for two young people ended because staff were unable to meet their needs or keep them safe. Despite this, one social work team manager commented: 'The staff had close links with the young person's father and gave a smooth transition to his return home.'

Two young people moved on in a planned way, which reflected their considerable progress as they had developed their independence skills and emotional resilience. Staff prepared them well for adulthood and ensured that they marked their moves with celebratory meals and that their favourite staff member moved them to their semi-independent placement. Both young people had lived in the home for a number of years and moving on was positive for them. Their transition ensured that they selected appropriate places to live, with college places set up ready for September. As one young person said: 'Staff helped me so much – I had bad drug problems – I have been clean now for over a year! Staff helped me a lot with mental health issues... actually with everything! I'm doing brilliant. I have a job and am looking forward to starting college.'

Staff develop secure relationships with individuals, they spend time getting to know young people. Therefore, they are able to provide individualised care with clear and consistent boundaries in place, which provide young people with stability and security. These positive relationships enable young people to invest in the home. This is evident through young people choosing how to have their rooms decorated, planting and growing flowers and choosing what to eat and how to spend their leisure time. The positive relationships between staff and young people are fundamental to young people's reduced risk-taking.

Staff refer young people appropriately to services where there are concerns regarding substance misuse and child sexual exploitation. Excellent partnership working results in positive, sustained changes for young people. A local lead practitioner for child sexual exploitation commented: 'Staff are prompt in referring young people once they identify that the young person has drug/alcohol issues either presently or just prior to being placed. Over the years, staff have also developed well in their own knowledge of child sexual exploitation and will also carry out issue-based work on this, including online safety, grooming models and methods etc.... Staff contribute to their young people's progress including consistently supporting them to appointments, advocating and challenging for them with social services/parents etc. Staff are open to receiving advice and... assisting in assessments.' As a result, young people make significant progress in addressing these issues, which they are proud of, and their physical and emotional health improves and their risk-taking reduces. As one young person said: 'I am being good and it makes me feel better – I looked like a crack-head, my skin was horrible and I was dead skinny... I'm eating well, no alcohol and no weed... people say I was at risk [of child sexual exploitation]. I wasn't, but was getting there – I realise now what could have happened.'

Staff promote young people's education. The registered manager is proactive in securing school placements as soon as young people join the home. She liaises with virtual school

headteachers to ensure that there is minimal delay for young people and that young people receive home tutoring until their placing authority secures an appropriate placement. Some young people complete their public examinations and others make great educational progress from their starting points. One young person told the inspector proudly: 'I stay at school on my own now – there are none of my staff there! I enjoy school.'

Young people enjoy a range of social activities outside the home. This includes volunteering at a local animal shelter, horse-riding, martial arts and the cinema. This promotes their self-confidence and self-esteem. Staff ensure that young people benefit from universal health services and specialist health services, as necessary, to meet their physical and emotional needs. They encourage healthy living and involve young people in planning meals and cooking and encourage them to make healthy life choices. One young person told the inspector: 'Staff are helping me reduce my smoking. I was smoking between 15 and 20 cigarettes a day and now they have helped me reduce that to nine. I'm aiming to get to three.'

Young people who are new to the home are welcomed sensitively. These transitions occur in a planned way, whenever possible, and have contributed to a more stable period in the home. Young people who have the opportunity to visit the home beforehand and meet their staff and peers describe this positively. Those young people who arrive in an emergency are equally positive about how staff have welcomed them: 'I arrived at midnight and was so upset... they made me feel really welcome.' Young people receive a young person's guide to help familiarise them with the routines in the home. They also receive details of how to complain, with various routes open to them, such as a post-box and complaints forms. There have been no complaints since the last inspection.

Staff support young people to develop a positive self-view and are responsive to their identity and family backgrounds. Staff promote young people's contact with family and friends whenever it is safe and in their best interests. Families value staff's excellent communication with them and support for their children. One parent commented: 'Staff help my daughter to improve her behaviour and education. They support my visits to the home where I am always made welcome and also bring her to visit me. All the staff are friendly.'

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

Staff recognise young people's risk-taking behaviour and support them in addressing this behaviour. Some young people make excellent progress in addressing these issues around child sexual exploitation and substance misuse. Most young people become increasingly safe. For some young people this exceeds the placing authority's expectations; one social worker stated that: 'My young person has exceeded my expectations – she has made remarkable changes due to the hard work of staff and the young person.'

Young people feel safe. They develop trusted relationships with staff and are able to talk to them about what is difficult. Staff support young people to develop and improve strategies for managing their behaviour. For some young people this is successful and their self-regulation improves.

Staff understand what to do when young people are missing. They work in partnership with the police to look for them in familiar places and contact their known acquaintances. They welcome young people when they return home and ensure that they are offered an independent return interview, which informs strategy planning. The registered manager and staff are developing positive relationships with the police and local child sexual exploitation services. This ensures that young people receive a consistent multi-disciplinary response to address their risk-taking behaviours. In recent months there have been very few incidents of missing, as young people's investment in their home increases and their awareness of the risks associated with being missing grows.

Some young people have not become increasingly safe and their placements have ended, as staff have not been able to keep them safe. For one young person there was a lengthy period, after the home serving notice on her placement, when she was frequently aggressive to staff. As a result, staff needed to restrain her on numerous occasions; this did not prevent her from assaulting staff and staff morale dipped as they struggled to manage her behaviour and meet other young people's needs. At the last inspection, the other young people living in the home all told the inspector about the adverse impact living with the young person was having on them. They were generally understanding of how someone's difficulties may affect their behaviour. However, one young person stated he would leave the home if this young person didn't leave. Unfortunately, the previous manager was not robust in his challenge to the placing authority to review her plan and placement urgently and she did not leave the home for another three months. A parent said: 'There was a girl there before, it was a difficult situation, which made my daughter get stressed... things improved when she left.'

Staff complete detailed risk assessments and behaviour management plans that describe how staff can meet young people's needs and safeguard them. Staff are not consistently updating these to reflect the current position and this means that there is a lack of clarity, which limits their effectiveness. Staff do not understand how to manage allegations and have not followed allegation policies. For example, when a young person alleges that staff have injured them during a restraint and staff record that the young person has injuries, staff do not make a referral to the designated officer or obtain medical attention. This does not safeguard young people or staff.

The registered manager carefully selects and recruits staff. However, the records of interviews do not demonstrate rigorous assessment of potential candidates and there is a lack of evaluation of any gaps in employment and of previous convictions. Staff do not promote fire safety in line with the home's agreed fire safety risk assessment. Until the current registered manager joined the home, staff did not conduct fire evacuations in accordance with the home's policy, including when new young people joined the home. This does not promote young people's welfare and safety. The current registered

manager has begun to address this issue and has invited the local fire brigade into the home to support young people's understanding and awareness of fire safety.

Staff have not administered medication as prescribed. They have acted on verbal advice from the local child and adolescent mental health service and have changed medication without obtaining the relevant doctor's prescription or advice in writing. This does not safeguard young people or staff. However, there is no evidence that this has adversely effected young people.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

Leadership and management in the home has gone through significant changes, with both a new registered manager and responsible individual in post. The registered manager is suitably experienced and qualified. She has been in post for two months and is beginning to develop her own stamp on the home. She has made the physical environment more welcoming, including the extensive grounds of the home.

The current registered manager has good monitoring and review processes in place, which are beginning to address some of the shortfalls that had developed in the final months of the last post-holder's term of office. The current registered manager understands some young people's care plans and actively drives these forward. However, she has not ensured that she has all young people's necessary care plans, including details of delegated authority. There is evidence of her challenging placing authority social workers. However, this needs to be more robust so that she obtains delegated authority consent and information. Her positive relationships with professional stakeholders, families and her own records reduce the impact of this shortfall.

Staff report that recent training, provided by the newly appointed responsible individual, has been engaging and informative. Staff have completed all mandatory training and the current registered manager makes good use of team meetings and handovers to disseminate recent developments in social care. Staff receive regular supervision to support them in this challenging role. However, appraisals have not been taking place annually and those that have been completed do not reflect the need to gain feedback from young people and other professionals to improve staff's development.

The current registered manager makes child-centred decisions about young people coming to live in the home. She considers the impact that new young people may have on the existing group and whether staff will be able to meet the young person's needs. The registered manager involves her staff team in these decisions using a collaborative approach, which is beginning to develop its skills following a period of low morale. The current registered manager is confident and ambitious for young people and leads by example. She understands the home's strengths and weaknesses and has a clear development plan in place, which demonstrates the capacity to address the shortfalls identified during this inspection.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and 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.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, 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'.

## Children's home details

**Unique reference number:** SC436559

**Provision sub-type:** Children's home

**Registered provider:** Choices Home For Children Limited

**Registered provider address:** Choices Home for Children Limited, 31 Wellington Road, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 7ED

**Responsible individual:** Pamela Burden

**Registered manager:** Linda Heywood

## Inspector

Rebecca Quested, social care regulatory inspector

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