

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	28 June 2016
Unique reference number	SC407169
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Choices Home for Children Limited
Registered provider address	31 Wellington Road, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 7ED

Responsible individual	Susan Mackay
Registered manager	Linda Darbyshire
Inspector	Rebecca Quested

Inspection date	28 June 2016
Previous inspection judgement	Improved effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Outstanding
The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the home contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help, protection and care.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good

SC407169

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is outstanding because:

- Young people consistently make exceptional progress from their starting points, which is sustained over time. One young person said: 'Thank you all so much for a lovely and life-changing experience. I came with my problems and left with a life!'
- The registered manager and staff are committed to the young people in their care. Their consistent and reliable care provides young people with a strong sense of security and belonging.
- Staff spend time investing in young people. They develop a detailed understanding of their experiences and behaviour, which enables them to provide highly individualised care.
- The registered manager's and staff's practice is informed by research, and results in sustained improvements in young people's progress.
- Stakeholders recognise the difference that staff's practice makes. One youth offending case worker said, 'The change is dramatic – I'm so impressed.' They recognise staff's work as being worthy of further dissemination.
- Staff work proactively with stakeholders, with whom they have exceptionally effective working relationships. This ensures that services wrap around young people who are at high risk of sexual exploitation to provide consistent care and management.
- Young people have a strong sense of safety and well-being, including those who are most vulnerable and have been on the brink of custody or secure care. They develop strategies to self-regulate their behaviours and consequently become increasingly safe.
- The registered manager provides strong and inspirational leadership. She is passionate about her young people and strives to improve continually.
- There is one requirement in relation to having a complete record of who has worked in the home, and there are recommendations to improve practice around recruitment and in ensuring that Ofsted is informed of serious incidents in a timely manner. These shortfalls have not impacted on the outcomes for young people.

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 within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The registered person must maintain in the home the records in Schedule 4 and ensure that the records are kept up to date. (Regulation 37 (2)(a)(b))	29 July 2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- The registered person is responsible for maintaining good employment practice. They must ensure that recruitment safeguards children and minimises risks to children. In particular, that records of interviews demonstrate rigorous assessment of potential candidates and that there is evaluation of any gaps in employment. (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 61, paragraph 13.1)
- The registered person should have a system in place so that all serious events are notified, within 24 hours, to the appropriate people, in particular to Ofsted. (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 63, paragraph 14.13)

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home is registered to provide care for four children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The home forms part of a social care company.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
28 January 2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
28 May 2015	Full	Good
3 December 2014	Interim	Improved effectiveness
10 July 2014	Full	Adequate

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
<p>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are</p>	<p>Outstanding</p>
<p>Staff provide highly individualised care for young people. They invest considerable time and effort into understanding young people, and consequently develop excellent relationships with them. Young people develop a sense of permanence and belonging and invest in the home. A young person said: 'I'm happy and settled and they're really caring, and I class them as my family and don't want anything to change.' Staff remain in contact with young people who have moved on. They continue to provide emotional support to them and continuing guidance reflecting the permanence of their attachments.</p> <p>Young people are able to talk about what is difficult for them. Even those who have recently moved into the home are able to discuss the most difficult experiences with staff. Staff take robust action to ensure that young people are able to access an advocate so that they are able to gain further support in progressing their wishes and feelings and in complaining about their placing authority.</p> <p>All young people make exceptional progress with their education. They are attending schools and colleges, which ensures that they are able to access academic and workplace skills. For some young people, who have disengaged from education for many years, this represents significant progress. For example, a young person said, 'School's going really good. It's the best school I've done in 10 years. I've made massive progress.' Staff understand how young people are progressing and are proud of the progress they make: 'X achieved so much – she came not attending school, but she went to school, became head girl and took four GCSEs. We needed to show her that achieving was positive.'</p> <p>Staff support young people to enjoy a range of social activities and opportunities. They work effectively with partner agencies, such as the police and sexual exploitation agencies, to direct young people into positive interests where they can develop new skills and new friends and have fun, such as judo, pool and horse riding. Staff support young people's contact with friends and family where that is safe and in their best interests. They ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place for young people to take age-appropriate risks with friends and make good use of their delegated authority. For those young people who have arrived following multiple placement moves, and are at very high risk of sexual exploitation, substance misuse and criminal behaviour, this represents a fantastic achievement and a complete change of lifestyle.</p>	

Young people develop emotional resilience and practical skills to manage their lives as adults. Staff's detailed understanding of young people means that they are able to provide bespoke packages to develop independence skills, so that young people's progress reflects their maturity and individual needs.

Staff help young people to improve their health. They support young people to access specialist substance misuse services to good effect. Staff recognise young people's mental health needs and work tirelessly to ensure that they access appropriate services. When young people wait a long time for services, staff provide robust challenges to placing authorities to resolve issues.

Staff are suitably trained, experienced and qualified to meet young people's needs. The registered manager is innovative in her approach and ensures that staff develop skills that reflect the needs of the young people living in the home. She accesses courses and training, which means that staff are confident in meeting young people's needs well.

Staff welcome young people who are new to the home and promote positive endings for young people, including when these are unplanned. This ensures that young people are able to build a life story and to reflect on their positive experiences of living in the home. Staff are aware of the impact on young people living in the home of other young people leaving and arriving, and provide support and understanding about the changes.

Staff are highly skilled in providing clear and consistent boundaries to young people. Young people respond positively and develop attachments to staff, which allows them to develop strategies to manage their difficult feelings. Young people recognise the progress they make. One young person said: 'Staff are really good. I have had my ups and downs, and staff have supported and helped me through them. All the staff have done it together. I had 24 placements before I came here – they made me a better and stronger person. They made me believe in myself and have confidence in myself. They're nice and caring, they don't treat me as if I'm in care, they are loving. I love them.'

Staff place the well-being of young people at the centre of their practice. They support young people to explore their identities and help them to develop positive self-views. The progress young people make reflects how staff help them to overcome experiences of trauma and neglect. Staff's practice is rooted in research-informed practice, such as in attachments and sexual exploitation. This leads to exceptional progress, which is sustained over time. For example, young people who have been at high risk of sexual exploitation engage effectively with the multi-disciplinary team around them. They stop their risk-taking behaviours and engage with positive activities and friendships. They are now involved in training professionals about sexual exploitation. A therapist fed back to staff: 'X was amazing today, delivering child sexual exploitation training to health and social care staff... so proud of her. Thank you for supporting me with our joint working

approach with young people who have been sexually exploited and involved in substance misuse.'

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
<p>Staff support young people to become increasingly safe. This includes those young people who are at the highest risk of harm through sexual exploitation or substance misuse, who are protected and the risks are reduced..</p> <p>Young people feel safe. They recognise the difference that staff make to them: 'I'm progressing well – drugs, I'm not using them. Staff do direct work with me and its more myself that has done the work. I'm pleased with myself – six months I've not used.'</p> <p>Staff understand what to do when young people are missing. They have effective plans in place that are agreed with the police, which ensure a swift response when young people go missing. This minimises the time they are away from the home and hence the time that they are at risk of harm. When young people have been missing, they have contacted staff and returned home quickly. Staff always look for young people in places they know they are familiar with, and ensure that the police and British transport police are quickly alerted. Staff are robust in their challenges to police forces when young people go missing away from the home's locality. They ensure that police act in accordance with the agreed trigger the home developed with the local police force. Staff ensure that return interviews always take place and the information obtained informs the planning of young people's care to reflect identified risks. Young people make exceptional progress from their starting points and missing episodes reduce and then stop.</p> <p>Staff contribute to young people's exceptional sustained improvements through research-informed practice, which allows young people to develop a strong and confident base from which to maintain improved and safe behaviour. Staff are proactive in developing positive relationships with the police and other safeguarding services, such as sexual exploitation and substance misuse services. A police officer said: 'The staff are very effective at communicating with us, including when a new young person joins the home. They work intensively with young people to reduce missing to zero. When a young person was missing the staff did a fantastic job to wrap around her and tell everyone what was going on – kept everyone on board and we were all able to respond quickly and contact the young person.'</p> <p>Staff consistently promote positive behaviour in the home. This results in</p>	

exceptional progress in young people self-regulating their behaviour. Young people respond well to incentives and relish the rewards they achieve. A young person said: 'I love it here. They are helping me to try and control my anger. There is always someone in here to speak to me. I am using my reward to go to the cinema with my friend.'

Restraint is used infrequently. Staff are skilled in de-escalation as they have good knowledge of young people's behaviour. When restraint is used, staff record this well and spend time reflecting on their practice to see what they can learn to improve their care of young people.

Staff understand the risks that the internet may pose. They undertake work with young people so that they can safeguard themselves and provide appropriate internet security within the home. They engage with young people so that they understand how they are using social media.

The registered manager and staff develop positive relationships with the local authority designated officer. Staff ensure that all allegations or suspicions of harm are referred to the relevant agencies, and that young people and staff are safeguarded. They refer all child protection concerns to the placing authority/host authority and chase these up, which results in a swift response. This safeguards young people.

The physical environment is safe and secure. Staff ensure that regular fire evacuation drills take place and that all fire safety equipment is in good working order. The home presents as a safe and welcoming environment, with much evidence of the young people, who have their photographs and art work prominently displayed.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good
<p>The home is managed by a suitably qualified and experienced registered manager. She has been in post since 2013 and holds a level 5 diploma in residential childcare leadership and management. The registered manager is inspirational and confidently leads by example. She understands the strengths and weaknesses of the home and responds quickly when shortfalls are identified. She has met the two recommendations made at the last inspection and responded to issues identified during the inspection regarding how biometric door locks are used. This reflects her ability to respond and reflect about what constitutes best practice and to continually drive forward improvements.</p>	

The home is properly staffed and resourced to meet young people's needs. This is reflected in young people's views that there is 'always someone to talk to'. Staff are safely recruited. This ensures that no one who is unsafe is allowed to work in the home. There are areas for improvement, including the brevity of recording of interviews and the scrutiny of gaps in applicants' work history. Staff report feeling well-supported. They receive regular supervision, as well as informal support, which provides them with emotional resilience to fulfil their roles. The core staff team has provided a secure-base for young people as some staff changes have occurred. The registered manager ensures that the staff are appropriately trained and that they continually develop, improving the quality of care provided in the home. She has succession plans in place to ensure stability and consistency of the staff team going forward. Parents recognise the impact that staff have: 'Staff make me feel welcome every time... they are amazing, they really get inside kids' heads and listen. Anyone who goes there is lucky.'

The registered manager actively monitors the quality of care provided to young people. She ensures that she reviews all serious incidents and responds by updating risk assessments and plans so that young people's welfare can be positively promoted. For example, she reviews trends and patterns in behaviour and engages the team around the child in reviewing risky situations, such as returning to the placing authority for family contact or attending court near a previous placement.

The registered manager and staff engage proactively with all stakeholders – education, therapy, police and placing authorities – to secure positive outcomes for young people. A teacher said: 'Staff work really hard with young people. They are always up to date and very good at communication. They always prioritise education and the young people's attendance is 100%.' The registered manager actively challenges placing authorities when they are slow in providing key information, such as chasing up children looked after review minutes.

The registered manager understands young people's plans and advocates robustly on their behalf to ensure that their care plans are implemented in a timely manner. They keep a record of statutory visits and challenge placing authorities when they are not fulfilling their role.

The registered manager and staff notify Ofsted of serious incidents within the home, although on one occasion this was delayed. This prevents the regulator from having insight about these incidents as they occur in order to monitor trends and patterns.

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 children looked after 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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