

1259631

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The home is owned and operated by a private provider. It is registered for up to seven children who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The manager has been registered at the home since June 2020.

Visit dates: 8 to 9 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 14 January 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Good

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

Children are well cared for by the staff. The children have a positive sense of identity and experience stability. They respond well to the nurturing care and attention from the staff. This provides the children with clear routines and boundaries and enables the staff to build trusting and engaging relationships with the children. One child said, 'They are fair to you and kind.'

The staff consult and act on the children's opinions about their daily plans. Children engage in a range of activities that interest them and enrich their days. The photographs of the children in the home capture them buying sweets from the tuck shop, cooking, baking, and creating some impressive art and craft work. The children have enjoyed day trips away, going fishing and celebrating cultural events. Staff have completed work with the children to help them to understand the government guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Children have also learned about equality issues for black people. This gives them some insight into the events happening around them.

Children understand why face-to-face contact had not been allowed during the lockdown period. They have engaged in phone and video calls with their family and significant others, which has provided comfort to them during this difficult time.

Children's school attendance has remained high. The school closed on one occasion due to COVID-19 infections. However, the children worked from home on their laptops. This has enabled the children to maintain a good routine and make educational progress with minimal disruption.

The children are fit and healthy. They enjoy playing out on the grounds of the home. This helps the children to burn off excess energy, keep physically fit and reduce the risk of infection by sticking within their bubbles. The children's emotional needs are promoted with sensitivity by the staff. The children's engagement in individual therapy sessions supports their complex needs.

The safety of children

Children speak positively about the staff and rate their safety highly. However, some children have felt bullied by other children in the home. Children say that, although the staff intervene, the bullying has not gone away.

Overall, the children's risk assessments inform the staff about the risks and the strategies to mitigate the risks. Not all of the risk management documents are updated quickly when new risks come to light. Although there is no impact on children's safety and welfare because the staff are aware of the new information, the recording gap does not provide staff with the up-to-date guidance in writing.

The positive relationships between the staff and children, and the regular key-work sessions, support the children to make safer choices. This includes children who have been exposed to risk when they have accessed social media sites. The multi-

agency response has promoted children's safety and welfare. The children's engagement with staff in work about social media risks has enhanced their knowledge significantly. The new learning has enabled one child to deliver a presentation about social media to the other children. However, not all direct work has been completed with children when emerging risks have been identified for further exploration. This does not promote robust safeguards for children.

Children's positive behaviour is praised and rewarded by staff. The staff help children to reflect on how children's actions may hurt other people's feelings and how their use of language can be inappropriate. Physical intervention is used as a last resort to prevent harm to children and others.

Children who go missing from home receive a coordinated response that secures their prompt return. Inconsistencies in notifying a local authority of a child's return home has delayed a safe and well visit being undertaken.

An internal audit recently identified that the safeguarding procedures were not followed when an allegation was made against a member of staff. Although this matter has been rectified, the gap in practice did not promote the child's welfare.

Leaders and managers

Gaps in management have, at times, impacted on the effectiveness of the management oversight. Contributing factors have included staff shortages, sickness and team dynamic issues that have all been resolved in recent months.

There has been a period of disruption that arose from one young person's deteriorating behaviour. This led to some instability in the home. A lack of appropriate supervision and vigilance from the staff led to one child accessing another child's bedroom. This could have been prevented had the staff been more vigilant, and a few of the children went missing from the home together. Staff liaised with the local authority and gave immediate notice to end one child's placement as their behaviour was affecting the stability in the home. The provider conducted an internal investigation into the incident and has acted to address the gaps in staff practice which they identified. The involvement of the senior leadership team and extra management support has helped to stabilise the home in recent months.

Staff say they feel well supported and have access to training opportunities that help them to perform their role and responsibilities effectively.

The manager uses the independent visitor reports and internal monitoring systems to develop the service so that the children's experiences continue to improve.

No up-to-date statement of purpose has been sent to Ofsted to show the changes to the staffing in the home. Managers have not notified Ofsted of all serious safeguarding incidents in a timely manner. This has impeded Ofsted from monitoring the home's safeguarding practices promptly.

There is a lack of clarity about the action taken when a child is unhappy with the outcome of their complaint. This has the potential to undermine the children's confidence in the complaints procedure.

Professionals comment positively about the care and progress made by children. Some professionals have said that communication has not been consistently good. Others said that it is improving. One social worker said, 'They are learning from their own mistakes.'

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
The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(h)) In particular: ■ take effective action whenever a child makes an allegation of harm; ■ ensure that all of the children's risk assessment documents are consistently updated when new risks are identified; ■ improve the timeliness of all information-sharing with professionals and parents; ■ make proper provision to ensure an effective response if children say that they are unhappy with the outcome of their complaints; ■ ensure that any key work with children is carried out in a timely manner.	29 January 2021

The registered person must— notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (3)(b)) In particular, include an up-to-date staffing list.	29 January 2021
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(e))	29 January 2021

Recommendations

- Children's home staff should take every step to make sure that individual children and young people are not subject to discrimination, marginalisation or bullying from their peers by virtue of their gender, religion, ethnicity, cultural and linguistic background, sexual identity, mental health, disability or for any other reason. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 16, paragraph 3.12)
- In particular, the provider needs to revisit counter-bullying sessions with children in the home.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1259631

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Ltd

Registered provider address: Lupton Tower, Lupton, Carnforth LA6 2PR

Responsible individual: Lee Riley

Registered manager: Subina Aurangzeb

Inspector

Jacqueline Malcolm, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2020