

1259631

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is privately owned and registered to provide care and accommodation for up to seven children and young people who have emotional and/or behavioural problems. In the same grounds, there is another children's home and a school, both of which are separately registered and inspected and owned by the same provider. All the young people attend the on-site school.

There is currently no registered manager providing day-to-day management of the home. A new manager has been recruited.

Inspection dates: 14 to 15 January 2020

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **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: 6 March 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: improved effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
06/03/2019	Interim	Improved effectiveness
02/05/2018	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children make good and continuous progress from their starting points. This relates to their emotional stability, improved self-esteem and better self-regulation of their behaviours. The children benefit from the staff team's nurturing care and they respond well to the consistent boundaries and routines. The staff invest time getting to know the children, who benefit from the strong and trusting relationships that staff build with them.

The children are kept busy with a structured weekly programme. This promotes good physical health and reduces the chances of them becoming bored. The children have opportunities to build on their existing talents and interests, such as going fishing or dirt biking. Children spend lots of time together and as a result learn to become more tolerant of each other, encouraging better peer relationships. The children have happy memories together, such as those from their residential summer holiday. One child, who recently moved out of the home, had a positive experience of leaving, with their peers giving them a bear with a personalised recorded message. Children that have moved on from the home maintain contact with the staff team and their peers, which offers ongoing emotional support.

The children have individualised education plans which help them to re-engage with their learning. The majority of the children have very good attendance and engagement at the on-site school. Staff persist with all children, including those who struggle, through adopting part-time learning to encourage progress through taking small steps. The staff use opportunities at the home to supplement work at the school, such as through key-work sessions. There is good communication between the home and school, offering children a consistent approach.

The staff develop important links with children's family members. The proactive and mindful staff understand the importance of familial relationships for children. They facilitate contact between children and their families, often travelling many miles to make this happen. When contact is unsupervised, the staff sometimes stay nearby, reassuring children and their families that they can intervene and support quickly, if needed. The clinical team also provides family therapy sessions at the home. Together, this leads to the children having positive and meaningful relationship with their families, improving the chances of them returning home.

New children moving in to the home settle quickly and develop a sense of belonging and stability. The children have improved self-esteem and confidence, particularly following their successful bidding for a grant from a local authority. One selfless child spent his money on buying a leaf blower to clear the neighbours' gardens. This, together with sending Christmas cards and holding a Remembrance Day service at the home, has strengthened neighbourhood relationships and led to enhanced community spirit.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

The staff's risk management is good and the children are cared for by a staff team that understands their vulnerabilities. This helps to protect the children. There are regular reflective internal team around the child meetings with psychological input from the on-site clinical team. This helps the staff team to formulate the individualised risk management plans. These are working documents and inform the staff of the agreed strategies and responses to use. The staff team's consistent approach helps stabilise the children. For one child, a change of their bedtime routine has led to less aggressive outbursts during the evening and a far better sleep pattern. All the children benefit as a result of the undisturbed nights.

The staff team uses positive behaviour management strategies to enhance participation from the children. The children understand, and say that they enjoy the bronze, silver and gold reward scheme. The children's individual targets, such as trying to stop swearing, are linked to their reward charts. The children benefit from a consistent reward scheme and also receive points at the school, building on their motivation to improve and succeed. Their achievements are celebrated, demonstrated with the colourful certificates on display at the home. Children develop positive social skills and their behaviours improve as they learn alternative ways to manage their frustrations and emotions.

On some occasions, staff are required to physically intervene with the children to keep them and others safe. These strategies for managing specific behaviours are outlined in the children's individualised plans and are only used as a last resort. The manager's monthly monitoring is effective and provides an analysis looking at potential themes and trends. For all the other children, the amount of times physical intervention is necessary has reduced. Additional scrutiny, oversight and challenge are available from the provider's external safeguarding team to support improvements.

The children are not known to engage in any criminal behaviours and there are no known issues with substance misuse. None of the children are known to be at risk of exploitation, radicalisation or extremism. Children rarely go missing from home. However, the staff are aware of the risks and on the few occasions that children have left the home, the staff have followed them and work together with the police to achieve their safe return home. There is no agreement with the placing authorities about who should provide the independent interview on children's return, if the social worker is not available. As such, this has not always happened.

The staff team completes good-quality direct work with children to educate them about their risk-taking behaviours. This is through general discussions as well as more structured individual intervention work. The children engage with the sessions due to the staff's efforts to make them interesting. External trainers also come in to speak to children to discuss current issues such as knife crime, gang culture and county lines to improve children's understanding of risk and how to stay safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, the registered manager has moved on from the home. The deputy manager, who has been acting up as the manager, has been successful in securing the permanent position. She is still to make her application to the regulator to formalise her role.

The acting manager is child-focused and has a good understanding of the children's behaviour, needs and progress. The acting manager has developed a good relationship with the children from her hands-on role at the home. One child said, 'She has done a lot for me and helped me. She is honest, caring and loving.' Consequently, the children feel confident to raise any issues with her. Any grumbles made by the children are properly dealt with and fully and satisfactorily addressed.

New staff have been introduced gradually throughout the year, so children are not affected adversely by the changes. The current team of staff provides children with an eclectic mix of new and established staff members. Those that are new to the home receive a good induction to prepare them for the complexities of caring for the children. Staff feel supported by the acting manager and benefit from regular supervision and team meetings. The children are at the centre of the discussions during these meetings. Staff say that they have ample opportunities to reflect on their practice and approach, including with the clinical team.

The acting manager has developed many monitoring systems which provide good oversight of the staff's practice and children's progress against their targets. An escalation procedure ensures that staff report concerns to the placing authority in a timely way. The acting manager also makes sure that children have access to an advocate to help them get their voice heard when important decisions are made about their future.

Feedback provided by professionals and parents is positive about the staff's care for the children. Professionals spoke about the good progress the children are making. The thorough and comprehensive evaluation of the service is insightful, and the manager has a clear vision for the future.

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

Recommendations

- When a child returns to the home after being missing from care or away from the home without permission, the responsible local authority must provide an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. Homes should take account of information provided by such interviews when assessing risks and putting arrangements in place to protect each child. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30) Specifically, the manager should make sure that arrangements are in place to determine who is going to conduct the return-to-home interview. This is especially for those placing

authorities who are a distance from the home. The missing-from-home incident forms should also outline when an interview has taken place.

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 differences 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 whom 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: 1259631

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Ltd

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

Responsible individual: Howard Tennant

Registered manager: post vacant

Inspector

Tina Ruffles, social care inspector

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