

2615005

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is owned and managed by a private provider. It provides care for up to seven children who experience social and emotional difficulties.

The manager registered with Ofsted in October 2022.

At the time of the inspection, there were seven children living at the home. Inspectors met and spoke to all of them.

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 June 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 10 July 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
10/07/2023	Full	Good
21/11/2022	Full	Good
20/09/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children develop trusting relationships with the staff who care for them. The staff show genuine care and interest in all areas of children's lives. Children's achievements are recognised, and certificates are proudly displayed in the home. This helps children to flourish and recognise the progress they have made.

Children receive care that promotes their unique identities. Children are encouraged by staff to gain knowledge and appreciation of different beliefs, cultures and backgrounds. Staff also help children to understand their heritage and promote children's interests in their town or city where they lived before moving to this home. This gives children a sense of familiarity and individuality.

Children attend a wide range of activities, both inside and outside of the home. Staff respect that children have different interests and help children to have their own hobbies, such as swimming, football, youth club and playing guitar. These opportunities help children to develop social skills, maintain friendships in the local area and become more independent, all of which helps children to develop self-confidence.

Staff help children to develop an awareness of societal issues in their local community. Some children volunteer in a local charity shop, and children take part in charity events to raise money. This helps children to develop an understanding of the difficulties people in the community can face. This practice encourages children to develop empathy and tolerance towards others.

Staff help children to understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. The care and support from staff have led to improved physical health for most children. Additionally, staff provide children with support and preparation to attend appointments. For some children, this has reduced their anxieties and enabled them to attend and fully take part in health appointments.

Children make good progress with their education. Children attend school full time and follow national curriculum and vocational subjects. For some children, their attendance has increased. This gives children learning opportunities, raises their aspirations and increases future options. Staff communicate well with education provisions to provide consistent support that benefits the children's academic progress.

The home is well furnished and has a homely atmosphere. The shared spaces enable children to socialise together and, when appropriate, have privacy. Children particularly enjoy spending time in the games room where they play computer games or watch TV. Children have personalised bedrooms that are maintained to a high standard. Children like their bedrooms and have a say on how they are decorated.

Before children move in, the manager carries out a thorough assessment of how well the staff can meet the child's needs and consults with other professionals involved in the child's life. The manager considers other factors, such as the needs of the children already living in the home and the staff's experience and skill set. This helps the manager to plan for children moving in and make decisions based on the children's best interests. Additionally, children are supported emotionally and practically to move out of the home. A transition plan includes visits and telephone calls to the child to help them settle into their new home.

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

Children's risk assessments focus on the children's individual risks and vulnerabilities. When a factor is no longer a risk, the manager removes this from the risk assessment to ensure there is a strong focus on actions to reduce current risks. This means that direct work carried out with children about their personal safety is specific and meaningful.

The children are treated with dignity and respect. Their individual personalities are understood by staff. There are occasions when relationships between children are fractious, and they say unkind words to each other. However, staff respond appropriately to this and make changes where necessary, for example children having separate travel arrangements. The staff talk to the children about their behaviour, and where possible, they plan group activities that help to promote positive relationships.

Children's positive behaviour is promoted, and there is a structured reward system in the home. Children can earn extra points to gain additional time on devices or a later bedtime. However, the allocation of points is sometimes difficult to follow or confusing for children. Additionally, consequences are not consistent for all children and are not always restorative in nature. This limits children's motivation and their understanding of expectations and possible outcomes for an unwanted behaviour.

Children know how to make a complaint or share any worries they may have. Staff use creative tools to help children do this, such as 'Talking Teds' bears, which provide a more natural way for children to share their concerns. Children say they feel their views are listened to.

Staff understand the therapeutic model of care used in the home. Staff welcome the input of the home's therapist, who helps staff to think about children's past experiences and how to respond to presenting behaviours. Staff speak about children with positive regard; however, inspectors saw examples where therapeutic language is not always used in documents. This is not helpful for the children should they read their records now or in the future. The manager is aware of this shortfall and has actions in place to address this.

Staff can easily articulate what action they would take in the event of a child making an allegation. However, on two occasions, staff did not consistently follow the home's own policy around reporting and recording an allegation. This means that, on these occasions, the child was not spoken with by someone independent and outside of the home about their allegation. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that the child's views are listened to and responded to quickly.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is supported well by a deputy manager and senior leaders. Together, they are passionate about making a difference to the lives of the children who live at the home. They know the children well and understand their care journeys and what they need in order to flourish.

There is an established staff team at the home, and the home does not rely on agency staff. This means that children have consistent care from adults who know them well. Most staff have the required qualification, and newer staff are working towards achieving this. This helps to ensure that the children receive care from qualified and experienced staff.

Staff say that they feel supported in their role and that they work well as a team. Staff comment on the positive morale in the home, which benefits staff and children. The manager holds team meetings on a regular basis. Staff explore specific topics, such as online safety or children's rights. This helps to improve staff's knowledge about issues that help them fulfil their role. Supervisions take place on a regular basis. However, there is inconsistency in the quality, which means some staff do not have the opportunity to reflect on and improve their practice.

The manager and staff have established relationships with professionals and family members in the children's network. The manager consults professionals about changes in the home, for example changing unhelpful language in children's records.

When children are ready, staff support them to take age-appropriate risks as part of their development, such as developing friendships and relationships outside of the home. However, staff adopt a generic approach to rules and boundaries in the home, for example handing in mobile phones or games consoles in an evening. The manager does not consistently make a risk assessment to determine whether these arrangements are appropriate for all children, which detracts from otherwise individualised care.

The manager and deputy are strong advocates for the children in their care and challenge professionals on behalf of children. This has resulted in children receiving expert assessments that they need. However, for one child, there is a level of uncertainty around whether they have a formal diagnosis and whether they need the medication they are prescribed. The manager has not escalated her concerns to ensure that the child receives the appropriate care and support.

Furthermore, the manager does not always escalate concerns to the children's placing authority when statutory documents are not received. This limits staff's ability to follow the most up-to-date plan. This was a shortfall at the last inspection.

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, The 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 protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(ii)(v)(d))	9 August 2024
The quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children; use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that staff— provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background; and	9 August 2024

make decisions about the day-to-day arrangements for each child, in accordance with the child's relevant plans, which give the child an appropriate degree of freedom and choice. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(iv)(ix))	
In meeting the quality standards, the registered person must, and must ensure that staff— seek to involve each child's placing authority effectively in the child's care, in accordance with the child's relevant plans; seek to secure the input and services required to meet each child's needs; if the registered person considers, or staff consider, a placing authority's or a relevant person's performance or response to be inadequate in relation to their role, challenge the placing authority or the relevant person to seek to ensure that each child's needs are met in accordance with the child's relevant plans. (Regulation 5 (a)(b)(c))	9 August 2024

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that behaviour responses or consequences are restorative in nature. They should consider the effectiveness of restricting children's social activities as a strategy to manage behaviours. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.38)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff receive practice-related supervision that allows them to reflect on their practice and the needs of the children. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, 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: 2615005

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Limited

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

Responsible individual: Darrell Elsinor

Registered manager: Gemma Winlow

Inspectors

Cat Makel, Social Care Inspector

Claire Webster, Social Care Inspector

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