

2615005

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is owned and managed by a private company. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to seven children who may have emotional and social difficulties.

Children who live in this home also attend one of the provider's independent schools.

The inspectors observed and spoke to all six children who live in this home.

The manager registered with Ofsted in October 2022.

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 November 2022

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: 20 September 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
20/09/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children living in this home continue to make progress.

Most children say that they like living in the home. One child spoke positively about being a looked after child and said, 'A good thing about being in care is that you gain confidence.' Another child said, 'It's good living here.'

When children are preparing to move in to the home, they receive written information and visit the home to meet the staff and the children. A professional said:

'We visited, and the other children were so warm and welcoming. The staff were approachable. [Child's name] was playing with them all, this was a big relief, and we knew it was the right thing for [child's name].'

Children have positive relationships with staff and the manager. Children can identify staff who they can talk to and who they trust will provide help. Children's key workers know the children very well and they follow the children's care plans.

Children are encouraged to influence their day-to-day care. Forums, such as children's meetings, enable children to talk about what matters to them. For example, children have helped to plan Christmas time, identifying their own traditions and how it will look for them. Some children also influence local policy and practice by attending the local authority children in care council.

Children enjoy a range of positive activities that reflect their individual interests and hobbies. The staff encourage the children to try new opportunities and provide them with emotional support to overcome any worries they may have about joining new groups. The manager carries out checks on clubs to ensure that they are suitable for the child. Children also enjoy holidays with the staff, where they have fun and make positive memories.

Children make progress in their education. The manager ensures that the children have opportunities to learn at home, such as reading with staff. Barriers to children's education are well understood, and the staff sensitively support children when needed. Communication between school and staff is strong. The sharing of good-quality information helps the staff and school to support the children's educational needs.

Children are supported to be healthy. Individual routines help to promote children's sleep and diet. When children are feeling unwell, the staff are nurturing. They provide emotional warmth, and they take the children to visit medical professionals when required. In addition, the manager advocates for children to receive additional expert services when they are needed.

Home conditions are homely and maintained to a good standard. The manager has a robust system to track the completion of repairs and maintenance. The new gaming room is very popular with the children and regularly used for socialising and playing games together. Children like their bedrooms, which are personalised and well maintained.

The quality of the children's memory books is improving. The staff add photos of the children and memorabilia, such as tickets from shows. The memory books help the children to remember the good times that they have experienced while living in the home. The staff encourage the children to get involved in the design of their memory books and influence the contents.

Despite a recommendation that was raised at the previous inspection to improve children's records, some records continue to contain minor inaccuracies. This was brought to the manager's attention during the inspection and amendments were made.

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

When there are concerns about children's emotional health, the staff take effective action. They liaise with relevant agencies and hold emergency meetings to assess the child's needs and implement strategies to reduce the risks. Staff debriefs include reflection with the provider's clinical team. This helps the staff to develop a deeper understanding of the children's emotional health needs, and helps them to provide the care that children need.

The manager and staff monitor children's interactions, and the staff appropriately respond to incidents of bullying. Children are encouraged to engage in restorative conversations with each other, which helps them to repair relationships and make amends. Staff use a creative approach and demonstrate empathy so that the children can learn. This helps the children to develop better relationships. One child said that one of their favourite aspects of living in the home is the other children.

Children are encouraged to develop positive behaviour. Children understand what is expected of them and the house rules. Consequences are rarely used. Instead, the staff promote an incentive system, which is individualised for each child and linked to their individual goals. Children look forward to their rewards and they celebrate their achievements.

Complaints and allegations made by children about staff are well managed. Investigations are transparent and they are dealt with in line with safeguarding practice and the provider's own policy. Records clearly show the action taken and the liaison with the relevant professionals. This helps to better protect children and reinforces to children that they will be listened to if they raise any issues.

When staff are concerned that children have dangerous items hidden in their bedroom, the staff carry out a room search. When appropriate, children's consent is

obtained before the search, or children are informed afterwards. Most records include management oversight.

On the rare occasion that children go missing from the home, the staff respond quickly and follow the correct procedures. This includes searching for the missing child and completing clear written records. However, when children return to the home, they do not always receive an interview with an independent person. This impacts on the quality of information that staff have to help reduce future incidents of the children going missing.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

There have been changes to the management team since the last inspection.

A new manager has been appointed. As she worked in the home, she knows the children very well and has a good understanding of the home's strengths and areas for development. The manager is suitably qualified, and she is well supported by the senior leaders in the organisation.

The manager monitors the quality of care that the children receive. She uses internal and external audit systems to identify issues and lead on improvements. She dedicates time each day to review records, and takes effective action when shortfalls are identified.

After a period of high staff turnover, the home is fully staffed. The manager has analysed the reasons for staff leaving and has implemented strategies to reduce the impact on the children. Agency staff have not been used, and instead rotas have been covered by permanent staff and the manager working additional hours. While this has been a challenging period, the manager has prioritised consistency of care for the children, in addition to recruiting staff who are suitably skilled to meet the children's needs.

Half of the staff team do not have the required qualification; however, they are enrolled onto the course and are being supported to develop their skills through the provider's comprehensive training programme. Children's daily care is led by staff who are qualified.

The staff have good working relationships with the children's families and professionals. Communication is good. A child's relative said that the regular updates that they receive from the staff are helpful and ensure that they are aware of their child's progress. The relative said, 'The home isn't what I expected, it's really nice and my child is a lot happier. We've noticed a big change in [child's name].'

The manager reviews the staff's skills and knowledge to ensure that they are suitably trained to meet the children's needs. In one example, the manager arranged a workshop to enhance the staff's understanding of a child's individual needs. The manager is assisted by an improved record system, which tracks the

staff's training and development. However, in two examples, this tracker had not identified that some staff had not completed their refresher training.

Staff say that they feel well supported by the management team. Supervision takes place regularly and includes discussions about the staff's well-being and the safeguarding arrangements for the children. However, some written records are not detailed, and others are not completed.

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

Recommendations

- The registered provider should ensure that when a child returns to the home after being missing from care, the responsible local authority provides 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)
- The registered person should ensure that the staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs, and should understand the key role they play in the training and development of staff in the home. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.11)
- The registered person should ensure that the records of staff supervision sessions are good quality. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.4)
- The registered provider should ensure that the staff are familiar with the home's policies on record-keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective, and clear recording. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 14.3)

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: Witherslack Group, Lupton Tower, Lupton,
Carnforth LA6 2PR

Responsible individual: Lee Riley

Registered manager: Gemma Winlow

Inspectors

Catherine Heron, Social Care Inspector
Laura Grundy, Social Care Inspector

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