

2709816

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is part of a national organisation and offers care for up to 5 children with complex needs. At the time of this inspection, 3 children were living at the home, and they all spoke with the inspectors.

The home is on the same site as a learning centre and two other children's homes that are part of the same organisation. The inspector only inspected this home. The other 2 children's homes and the learning centre were not part of this inspection.

Inspectors were aware during this inspection that three serious incidents that occurred at the setting since the last inspection were under investigation by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the setting in response to the incident(s) were considered (where appropriate) alongside other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements

The registered manager has been in post since the home opened in January 2023.

The inspection started on 18 November 2025. An inspector returned on 22 December 2025 to gather additional evidence in line with '[Ofsted inspections and visits: deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence](#)' policy.

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 November 2025 and 22 December 2025

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

requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 12 November 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
12/11/2024	Full	Good
12/07/2023	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Since the last inspection, there has been a significant incident in which a member of staff did not follow children's plans or the home's policies. Two children were allowed to leave the home unsupervised at night. This incident resulted in a serious allegation, which remains under investigation and contributed to both children moving from the home prematurely.

This experience undermined children's trust in staff. Following this incident, one of the children said they felt feeling unsafe living in the home. The other experienced a significant deterioration in their mental health, and this led to an increase in significant safeguarding incidents. Despite the premature nature of the moves for these children, leaders and managers ensured that the moves were well planned and the children's time in the home was celebrated. One of the children regularly maintains contact with staff, and during the inspection attended a celebration of their time in the home.

The home provides children with plenty of space to relax and enjoy themselves. However, some institutional features detract from the otherwise homely environment. For example, window restrictors are installed on all windows, and some internal doors are locked, without a clear rationale. Other restrictive practices, such as the use of door alarms, are applied with a blanket approach and are not regularly reviewed. This impacts on children's right to privacy.

Children currently living in the home said that they like living there. They rated their home 10 out of 10 and said that they would not change anything about it. Children are supported to participate in a range of activities that they enjoy. They go swimming, learn to ride bikes and attend local youth clubs. These experiences bring children joy and build their self-esteem.

Children's physical health needs are well met. For one child, staff helped them to understand their medical needs and the importance of a healthy lifestyle, while working alongside health experts to manage the child's complex health needs. This has significantly improved the child's health and resulted in the child no longer requiring medication to manage their condition. This change has enhanced the child's life.

Children who previously found it difficult to attend school are now attending regularly. Staff work proactively with education professionals to share information and ensure that children are meeting their academic potential.

Children enjoy spending time with the people who are important to them. Staff help children's family members to understand their child's needs and how to respond to them appropriately. This ensures that the time children spend with their family is positive and helps children feel settled. Family members are complimentary about the home and their

children's experiences. One family member said the progress their child has made is 'phenomenal'.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Staff do not consistently assess children's risks effectively or follow children's plans. On one occasion, a member of staff allowed 2 children to leave the home unsupervised at night. This resulted in a serious incident, following which one child alleged experiencing significant harm. Furthermore, staff were not open and honest about the incident, and this led to delays in leaders responding appropriately.

Staff regularly restrain children, and the use of restraint is normalised. Since the last inspection, restraint has been used 62 times, and children have been injured on 6 occasions. At times, staff have used restraint holds that are not proportionate and that they have not been trained to use. Leaders and managers investigate these incidents but do not always offer additional training promptly. Such experiences are likely to leave children feeling upset, angry and scared.

When children are angry or upset and seek time alone in their bedrooms, staff do not always allow them to do so. This has resulted in children becoming increasingly upset and has ended in children being restrained. This is likely to undermine the important relationships children have with staff.

When children raise concerns about their safety, immediate action is taken to protect them from harm. Children are informed of the actions being taken and are supported to express their views and wishes about what they would like to happen. While investigations are ongoing, staff ensure that children are offered appropriate support. This helps to ensure that children feel listened to and protected.

Staff help children to understand important topics, such as healthy friendships, puberty, sexual relationships and how to stay safe online. Staff are sensitive in how they discuss these topics, which avoids children feeling shame or embarrassment. Topics are carefully revisited, and children's knowledge is assessed so that their learning needs can be identified. Children have demonstrated that they can apply what they have learned to their daily lives, and they have made safer choices as a result.

Staff help children to achieve a healthy balance between the time they spend online and engaging in other activities. Age-appropriate parental controls are in place to prevent children from being exposed to harmful content on the internet. When concerns are raised about children's online activity, learning is quickly identified and action is taken to prevent similar situations from happening again.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

Leaders and managers do not demonstrate professional curiosity about the use of restraint in the home. Their focus is on whether restraint is permissible, rather than

whether it has been used for the shortest possible time and only when there is no other alternative to help children and staff to stay safe. Leaders and managers do not regularly challenge incidents of children being harmed during restraint, instead viewing this as an unfortunate and unintended consequence of children being held. This approach does not indicate leaders and managers aspire to or inspire an environment where children can flourish.

The oversight and monitoring of staff training needs are not robust. Leaders and managers are not always able to identify staff training needs, particularly when refresher training is required to update staff's skills and knowledge. This is likely to limit staff's knowledge and impact on the quality of care they provide to children.

Despite these shortfalls, the home has a number of strengths. Leaders and managers share significant incidents and concerns with the relevant external professionals. This promotes children's safety and a collaborative approach to meeting children's needs. The manager carefully coordinates multi-agency responses and ensures effective information-sharing. The manager advocates for children and challenges decisions when they feel they are not in children's best interests.

Additionally, the manager is a consistent presence in the home. She knows the children well and the staff feel supported by her. Staff recognise the recent challenges that they have faced at the home, and they remain committed to children's care. External professionals say that they cannot compliment the staff team enough. Children benefit from continuity of care from staff who understand them. This helps children to develop a sense of belonging and self-worth.

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 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— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home; demonstrate that practice in the home is informed and improved by taking into account and acting on— research and developments in relation to the ways in which the needs of children are best met; and feedback on the experiences of children, including complaints received; and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(c)(f)(g)(i)(ii)(h))	2 March 2026

In particular, the registered person must ensure that their oversight of the use of restraint seeks to reduce its use. They must ensure that restraint is used for the shortest time possible and only when there is no other alternative to help children and staff to stay safe. Additionally, the registered person must ensure robust oversight of staff training needs. Specifically, they must ensure that monitoring systems are used effectively to identify when staff require refresher training to develop and update their skills and knowledge. Furthermore, staff should swiftly be offered support to develop their skills when concerns about their practice are identified.	
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— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the home's child protection policies. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(iv)(v)(vii)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that staff understand children's plans, their roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children and that they act in accordance with the home's child protection policies.	2 March 2026
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust; an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and	2 March 2026

positive responses to other children and adults.

In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—

that staff—

understand how children's previous experiences and present emotions can be communicated through behaviour and have the competence and skills to interpret these and develop positive relationships with children;

de-escalate confrontations with or between children, or potentially violent behaviour by children.

(Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(ix)(xi))

In particular, the registered person must ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills to de-escalate incidents and that they only use restraint as a last resort.

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that the home is a nurturing and supportive environment that meets children's needs. In particular, they should ensure that there is a clear rationale for the use of door sensors on children's bedroom doors and restrictors on windows throughout the home. Where no clear rationale exists, door sensors should not be used, and window restrictors should be removed. Where there is a rationale for the use of a door sensor, its use should be regularly reviewed, and children should be helped to feel safe without the need for electronic monitoring systems. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)

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: 2709816

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Limited

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

Responsible individual: Jill Firth

Registered manager: Jodie Whitehouse

Inspectors

Martin Brown, Social Care Inspector

John Tomlinson, Social Care Inspector

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