

2772524

Registered provider: Willows (Devon) Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is operated by a private provider. It offers care for up to three children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

At the time of the inspection, three children were living at the home. Two of the children were staying with family members for one night, so they were not present for the whole inspection.

The manager has recently cancelled her registration with Ofsted but continues to provide support in a deputy role. The deputy manager is planning to apply to become the registered manager.

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 June 2025

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: 14 May 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/05/2024	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children have trusted relationships with staff. The team is committed to providing stability for the children. Two children have lived at the home for over a year, and the third child has lived there for eight months. There is a consistent staffing pattern, meaning children know who is going to be with them. During the inspection, one child spent lots of time talking with staff and said that they like the way the staff look after them. Two of the children were away from the home during the inspection. They were offered telephone calls and different ways to contact the inspector but declined.

Children are supported in having positive relationships with each other. Staff appropriately challenge children to ensure they treat one another with kindness. Conversations take place to help children understand healthy relationships and boundaries.

All three children are attending school. Their education has been disrupted for various reasons. Managers have pushed to secure suitable education for one child. This included escalating concerns to the virtual school, commissioners and Ofsted. Staff carried out some educational activities with children when they were not attending school. Staff worked closely with the provider's own school to support a child when they refused to attend. However, clarity and planning around informal education are less clear. Education planners for children are vague. As a result, staff are left with limited guidance on what activities to try or what areas of education to develop when children are not in school.

Children's health needs are supported well. Staff have close working relationships with the professionals involved with one child. Staff encourage this child to attend frequent appointments, and they communicate regularly with hospital staff. Staff hold discussions with children to help them understand and track their periods.

Staff recognise the importance of children spending time with family members in accordance with their plans. They advocate children's views on this and can see when children need additional time with a family member because they are struggling.

Children are encouraged to spend mealtimes together. The kitchen serves as a social space in the home that allows children to come together. It also provides space for children to spread out when being together becomes overwhelming for them. Home-cooked meals are the norm, and children are encouraged to bake and cook for themselves. This helps them to develop their independence skills.

Children have opportunities to do fun things, but they often choose not to. Managers are trying to address this. However, there is little proactive encouragement to try more activities. Children have memory books, but some are quite out of date, so certain memories may be lost.

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

Staff understand the risks to the children well. Small changes in the children's presentation are noted, and staff are curious about these. There is close monitoring of one child's health and presentation, and there is a clear approach to this that all staff follow. Information is regularly shared with health professionals to ensure children's safety.

Staff members closely communicate lower-level concerns to each other, enabling prompt escalation. The team manages this sensitively so that it is not overly intrusive for the child.

There is a coordinated response when children go missing from home. Staff search for children and attempt to contact them. Guidance for staff is not always clear. Children's plans routinely advise contacting British Transport Police. However, this does not always happen, and it is not always relevant. Staff attempt to talk with children when they return home, and formal return home interviews are offered. Changes have been made as a direct result of the learning from incidents. For example, an inventory for keys is now in place as a direct result of learning.

Staff make efforts to engage in difficult conversations with children and approach these sensitively. This is particularly the case when children have harmed themselves. When incidents occur, children receive nurturing responses from staff. On one occasion, a child was encouraged to write down their feelings after watching a sad film. Staff make efforts to build positive relationships with the children.

When concerns were raised by a child about another child, these were responded to sensitively and reported appropriately. Safety measures were in place during and after the incident to ensure that the child was safe.

Since the last inspection, there have been five incidents involving the use of restraint. The restraints were applied for minimal periods and were proportionate to the situation. For example, children were moved from a dangerous road when they declined to comply. Incidents are clearly recorded and overseen by a manager and responsible individual. Mediation is also attempted afterwards to repair the relationships between staff and children.

Positive behaviour is promoted. There are clear incentives, such as hair and nail treatments, in line with children's interests. The option to earn extra money is consistently clear. When items have been damaged, consequences such as cancelled trips have been used to help children understand the repercussions.

Safer recruitment processes are in place so that only suitable adults are employed to work at the home.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

There is a consistent and stable staff team. Children know who is working and when. No agency staff are used, and the same members of bank staff are used. This means that children know the adults who are supporting them. There have been recent changes to the registered manager and deputy manager. These were fluid changes, meaning that the children have continued to have consistent relationships. Managers know children well and prioritise building relationships with them.

Management oversight is clear, with every significant incident being reviewed by the manager and responsible individual. During team meetings, leaders share their reflections on the lessons learned from each incident.

Children's plans are up to date and clear. However, some important documents are not the latest versions. Managers have requested the documents, but there has not been sufficient challenge to ensure that information is shared quickly with the home.

The team collaborates and shares information about the children. For one child with specific healthcare needs, this information needs to be shared in explicit detail. The team manages this well to ensure that information is not lost. Specific training regarding the child's health took place before they moved in so that staff would be able to better meet their needs.

Staff say they feel supported by colleagues and managers and that the induction process is helpful, with shadowing opportunities being useful. Professionals speak of good communication and a staff team that supports the children well.

The home itself is maintained to a high standard, and any damage caused is repaired quickly.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that staff work closely with placing local authorities so that children who are not in full-time education can return as soon as possible. In the interim, staff should ensure that informal activities for learning are in place and there are suitable, structured educational activities available. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 28, paragraph 5.15)
- The registered person should ensure that children are offered a wide range of activities inside and outside the home. Staff should encourage children to try various activities and help them develop hobbies and friendships. Memories of the activities should be captured in a meaningful way for children. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 31, paragraph 6.5)
- The registered person should ensure that children's plans provide clear guidance to staff about the responses needed when children go missing. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.28)
- The registered person should ensure that they have the most recent versions of the children's plans from the placing authority and that they have up-to-date versions of all the children's important documents. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.13)

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: 2772524

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Willows (Devon) Ltd

Registered provider address: Old Farm House, Gussage St Michael, Wimborne BH21 5JE

Responsible individual: Carolyn Coombes

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Nickie Doney, Social Care Inspector

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