

SC064472

Registered provider: Willows (Devon) Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is owned by a private provider. It can provide care for up to four children who may experience social and emotional difficulties.

The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2021.

Three children were living at the home at the time of the inspection.

Staff at the home are referred to as carers. This is reflected in the report.

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 December 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: 23 January 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
23/01/2024	Full	Good
21/02/2023	Full	Good
21/02/2022	Interim	Improved effectiveness
20/07/2021	Full	Requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are building strong relationships with carers. The children were involved in the inspection and spoke about which carers they have particular bonds with. There have been significant changes within the team, and, at times, this has upset the children. However, the consistency of the manager has supported them through this.

Children are making good progress. All of them are currently attending full-time education. Their attendance has either improved or remained high and they have all achieved successes in gaining GCSEs or functional skills. The progress from each of their starting points is fantastic to see. The carers instil a culture of high aspirations for them.

Children are involved in additional activities like the Rock Project, and they all spoke about taking part in the up-coming Christmas show. There have been opportunities to explore music or horse riding and all of them have engaged with these activities to some extent.

Children are generally in good health. However, dental hygiene is a concern, with some of the children refusing to go to dental appointments. However, it is clear to see the encouragement and efforts that have been made to support each of them with this. Children are provided with healthy diets and encouraged to exercise. Nutritious home cooked meals are provided. Each of the children cook from scratch on one night of the week. The meal made by one of the children during the inspection looked and smelled amazing.

Boundaries are clear and incentives are used to help the children to achieve targets and work towards goals. Although children do not always agree with the rules, they understand them. The members of the team are consistent in their approach, despite being relatively new.

The home environment is well presented and cosy, and the manager is always looking to improve this. Maintenance workers were on site during the inspection and other improvements are planned. Children are supported to have clean bedrooms. The home was beautifully decorated for Christmas. The office is the only part of the home that feels out of place, it is locked at times and the girls have to knock. This is not in keeping with the rest of the home or the family style ethos. An issue about damp in one of the children's bedrooms was raised and dealt with swiftly during the inspection.

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

At times, the children have struggled to identify carers that they could talk to. However, when this was explored with them, it was clear that their concerns are being taken seriously and responded to sensitively.

Risks are well understood by carers. Children's plans give clear guidance to the team on how risks should be managed and responded to. When children go missing from the home, carers follow the procedures and work together to support the children. All missing-from-home incidents are taken seriously. During many of the incidents, children have not gone far from the home, but processes are followed in the same way.

The carers know the children well and when risks have potentially increased, they adapt their care. On occasion, carers have challenged the police and other professionals to not simply accept what the child has said but to investigate further. For example, a child told the police that she had not taken an overdose, and a carer insisted that she was medically checked over, ensuring her safety.

Children are supported to manage their behaviour. Responses from carers to self-harm are nurturing and supportive. One child has their own self-care kit and is encouraged to use this. Incidents of self-harm have significantly reduced over the year.

Restraint has been used. Conversations take place with the carers and children involved. Management oversight of these incidents considers the build-up and possible reasons for the behaviour. However, it is less clear what the adults could have done differently to avoid the situation. Learning identified the need to review the physical intervention techniques. However, reflection lacked how carers could have acted differently and whether the outcome would be different.

Learning from the previous inspection has meant clearer guidance is available on when the police should be involved. A policy has been put into place on this for the whole organisation. This means that children are not involved unnecessarily in the criminal justice system. Close working relationships exist with professionals involved with the children, and information is shared quickly to ensure children's safety.

Investigations into concerns are carried out quickly and are thorough. When children have raised concerns, they are responded to so that they know they have been listened to and taken seriously.

Medication processes are thorough. An error earlier in the year has led to learning being put into place regarding access to keys and medication storage.

Safer recruitment processes are in place to ensure that suitable people are employed.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

This home is operated by an experienced and reflective manager. She listens to and acts on feedback and has high aspirations for the carers and children alike. While there have been changes to the staff team, the manager has maintained clear and consistent approaches and boundaries are in place. This has helped to develop the team but, moreover, has ensured consistent care of the children.

Management oversight of all incidents can be seen. Significant incidents are reviewed by leaders and managers, including the registered individual and the director. This ensures good oversight and professional challenge of the work in the home.

Supervision happens regularly, and the manager has good systems in place to ensure that this happens routinely. The managers work together to ensure that information is shared effectively when carers have worked across different homes.

At times, language in records describes children in negative terms, for example as 'manipulative' and 'calculated'. While this may reflect a behaviour or situation it has had a negative impact on the children. Children have identified these comments as 'hurtful'. The manager is very clear about the difference between separating the child from the behaviour, but some of the records do not reflect this.

Carers are enthusiastic and speak of feeling highly supported by a manager who leads by example. Professionals report quick and effective communication, and their feedback reflects the good progress the girls are making because of the care they are receiving.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that records of restraint are kept and should enable the registered person and staff to review the use of control, discipline and restraint to identify effective practice and respond promptly where any issues or trends of concern emerge. The review should provide the opportunity for amending practice to ensure it meets the needs of each child. This means that review of any incidents of restraint should consider what carers could have done differently and whether this would have had a different outcome for the child. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 49, paragraph 9.59)
- The registered person should ensure that staff are familiar with the home's policies on record keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective and clear recording. Staff should record information on individual children in a non-stigmatising way that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party opinion. Information that is recorded about the child must always be recorded in a way that is helpful to the child. In particular, the registered person should ensure that both practice and records reflect the culture and attitudes within the home. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.4)

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: SC064472

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: Michelle Tickner

Inspector

Nickie Doney, Social Care Inspector

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