

SC475697

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

A private organisation operates this children's home. The service is registered to accommodate up to seven young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and/or learning disabilities.

Inspection dates: 16 to 17 October 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	Outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding
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The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 14 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: Sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is outstanding because:

- Based on their starting point when first entering the home, young people make excellent progress in all areas of their lives.
- Young people, many of whom have had poor life experiences, settle and adopt more socially acceptable lifestyles. They re-engage with their education and learn how to socialise through new experiences and activities. This allows them to develop their own appropriate social network.
- Young people benefit from living in a structured environment with clearly defined boundaries that still allow for individuality to thrive, with plans, strategies and areas of personal risk, all of which are individualised to reflect identity and need.
- Aspirations for young people are high. Staff advocate strongly on young people's behalf to ensure that their rights are preserved and their outcomes are maximised.
- A competent, stable and highly motivated staff team is well led by a manager and senior team who have excellent organisational and management skills
- Excellent monitoring of the home, both internally and externally, recognises strengths and areas for continued development.
- A relatively new manager, with the support of the staff team, has been successful in creating an ethos, culture and working practices in the home that are more inclusive and less confrontational for young people. This has reduced the number of serious behavioural management issues affecting the home of late.

The children's home's areas for development:

- Promote reflection and evaluation of working practices to ensure that the home moves forward and achieves continued progress. For example, the managers should strive to ensure that all staff are professionally qualified.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/03/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
15/12/2016	Full	Good
17/02/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
21/10/2015	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The home experienced a difficult period in the early part of the year, but a relatively new manager, with the full backing of a stable and dedicated staff team, has worked collectively to resolve the issues affecting young people at that time. As a result, young people have re-engaged with their education and now demonstrate a more positive outlook on life. A shift in the home's ethos, culture and working practices has created a more inclusive environment that is supportive rather than confrontational. Based on their starting points, young people are making outstanding progress in all areas of their lives.

The level of trust and strength of the relationships that are now in place is testament to the consistency of care provided by a united and settled staff team. For example, staff have worked supportively with a young person who was extremely challenging, rejecting of education and, on occasions, highly aggressive. The young person has re-engaged with their education, has a part-time community-based job and, more importantly, is happy within himself and his current circumstances. The young person's social worker commented, 'Staff have done an incredible job with this young person. They have completely turned him around. Their resilience has been amazing.'

This is a home where staff and young people actually like and respect each other. The relationships created are strong and often long lasting. The stability and consistency of the staff team gives young people time to develop relationships at a pace that they are comfortable with. Relationships are strong enough to withstand challenges and upsets so that they remain intact. A young person told the inspector, 'We have got really good staff here who listen and respect you.' Another said, 'I like the staff and the activities I go on.'

Young people's needs are identified either prior to their placement, or early into their placement. Those needs translate into a range of high-quality planning documents that identify strategies designed to meet individual needs. The home recently introduced a revised and updated risk assessment format that completes the planning package. All documents are updated and revised regularly. This ensures that they are current so that the changing needs of young people can be addressed, such as stabilising behaviour, developing self-confidence, enjoying new experiences that turn into interests and hobbies, becoming fully engaged with their education, and developing social networks as they prepare for adulthood.

All young people have educational arrangements at schools that are operated by the parent company. For many young people, education previously has been an area of rejection. Over time, and by thinking creatively, attendance and engaging positively with their education improves significantly for young people. For example, currently a young person is being successfully re-integrated back into education, following a period of total rejection. This has been achieved because of the high expectations of staff who implement structured morning routines designed to get young people to school in a positive frame of mind. Overall, attendance figures are high and this is reflected in the

educational progress being made by young people.

Young people's everyday health needs are fully addressed through the use of community-based services that are well established and work well with the home. In addition, the home has its own mental health practitioner who is now fully embedded into the staff team. This gives young people access to regular contact, input and counselling. Staff benefit from receiving additional levels of training and by having access to someone who can help to disseminate and give a clear insight into the behaviour patterns that are exhibited. As a result, staff have a greater insight and understanding of some of the research-informed practice that is integrated into everyday working practices, such as the use of PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy), which promotes engagement and, in turn, attachments. This is an area of improvement since the last full inspection.

Health promotion is also an area of improvement. For example, work has taken place so that the choices that young people make regarding food are more nutritious and balanced. Exercise is also built into the activity programme. Greater attention and focus is now given to any young person who may have weight issues or eating habits that are a cause for concern. Overall, young people's physical, emotional and mental health needs are being well met.

The home has an extensive activity programme which promotes any interests a young person may have. Young people are also introduced to a range of new activities that have the potential to turn into a long-standing interest or hobby. Staffing levels are generous and allow for both group and individual activities to run together. For example, one young person excitedly told the inspector he was going to a Champions League football match with a staff member, so that he could see his current football hero.

Recent changes to the ethos and culture of the home have made it more inclusive for young people. This, coupled with the strong relationships that young people develop with staff, means that consultation between both parties has become an area of strength. Young people are asked to make choices and suggestions formally on a weekly basis, and staff listen and act on those suggestions made. For example, a new television has just been ordered following representations made by young people. Young people's views are also canvassed and taken into account when the home recruits new staff and when staff appraisals are being finalised.

Developing independence skills with a view to future transition is built into everyday working practice. Young people are expected to take on certain responsibilities such as keeping bedrooms tidy. A more formal programme of independence commences as young people mature and start to plan for transition. One young person explained how his independence programme had been formulated, how it was progressing and the positive impact it was having on him.

Young people live in a home that blends well into the local community. It is spacious and has high standards of repair, fixtures, fittings, décor and equipment. All bedrooms are single occupancy, with their own bathrooms. Bedrooms are decorated and personalised to suite and reflect the taste of the occupant. A rolling programme is in place which is designed to refresh, redecorate and refurbish the home. For example,

the kitchen and young people's bathrooms are next on the list to be redecorated. Young people are relaxed, comfortable and at ease in their surroundings.

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

The home has excellent systems in place designed to keep everyone safe. For example, detailed assessments identifying risks both around the home and in the local community are in place. These are reviewed and updated regularly to keep them current. Service contracts are in place which help to ensure that safety equipment is well maintained. Due to the strong links created, a visit to the home by the fire service is imminent. Various exercises and information will be shared that will improve both the staff and young people's appreciation of fire safety. This all adds to the levels of safety in the home.

The safeguarding procedures adopted by the home continue to keep young people safe. Strong, professional working relationships with the external services charged with keeping young people safe exist. These relationships allow for a swift multi-agency response should a safeguarding issue arise. Staff training is refreshed regularly and staff understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping young people safe. Responses from young people and other professionals confirm that they feel the home is a safe place.

The management of behaviour at the home is outstanding. Following the difficulties experienced at the beginning of the year, staff collectively reviewed and refined their working practices and attitudes. This required a small cultural shift which is proving to be successful. For example, negative consequences have significantly reduced, with rewards and incentives for good behaviour increasing. Having the mental health practitioner as a functioning team member has helped with this. The training and advice he gives is based on theoretical input. This provides staff with a greater knowledge and better understanding of the types of behaviour they deal with.

Incidents that require physical intervention are well managed. Incidents are monitored and evaluated effectively by senior staff, which is an area of improvement since the last inspection. Staff look for indicators, trends or patterns, so that strategies to manage behaviour can be adapted appropriately. This helps to improve practice and aid consistency. The de-briefing sessions that take place with young people and staff provide opportunities to explore each incident to see if lessons can be learned, or if the incident could have been handled differently. As a result, the number of incidents taking place has significantly reduced.

Young people live in a non-punitive environment where rewards exceed sanctions. Clearly defined boundaries, along with consistent routines, help young people to feel safe and secure. A representative from a partner agency observed, 'Staff do the right thing. They take control of incidents before they become critical.' Another commented, 'They have high standards. They know and understand the young people in their care.'

Incidents of young people going missing is another area that has reduced in frequency. Although not always successful, the home advocates strongly with placing authorities to complete return interviews following each incident.

High staffing levels and well-planned deployment minimises opportunities for bullying to occur. Bullying is an issue taken seriously and staff act proactively to stop incidents from occurring. This adds to young people's sense of security and, for them currently, bullying is not an area of concern.

A large staff team has experienced little movement since the last full inspection and, overall, staff retention is high. This means that young people are looked after by staff who they know, trust and provide a high level consistency of care. The recruitment and clearance procedures for new staff are thorough and meet with regulatory requirement and current guidance. Longer-serving staff are being re-checked regularly, which is deemed to be good practice. This ensures that young people are only looked after by staff who have been suitably cleared and recruited.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The manager, who is an experienced childcare practitioner, was registered with Ofsted in April 2017, but has been in post a little longer. The positive influence that the manager has made is reflected in the development of the home's ethos, culture and working practices, which he has changed and modified since the last full inspection took place. The manager is well supported by a senior staff team, and the staff complement each other well.

The organisation, management and daily operation of the home are excellent and focus on the needs of young people. Staff are prepared to work flexibly to meet the needs of, and to support, young people. For example, regular trips of high mileage are being made by staff to support a young person who is currently at home. Managers and staff work together cohesively, demonstrating a team-centred approach that benefits and enhances the consistency of care that young people receive. Staff morale is high and, as a visitor, you immediately experience a happy, relaxed atmosphere, where staff and young people actively enjoy each other's company.

Aspirations for young people are high, which also reflect the high expectations the management team has for staff. Staff report that they feel well supported and buy into the ethos, culture and working practices that they are helping to develop. The programme of formal supervision takes place regularly. Managers consult and gain the views of young people as part of the annual process of staff performance development. This is viewed as excellent practice and another example of the high levels of consultation taking place.

Staff are encouraged and supported with their training needs. There are clear expectations placed on them to complete the core staff training programme, which develops and refreshes skills. There are also opportunities for staff to undertake more specialist training. For example, a staff member explained how she has completed a positive support training course and is now in the process of passing this knowledge to the staff group. Longer-serving staff have all attained an appropriate professional qualification, with starting dates agreed and targets set for those few staff still to qualify.

The monitoring of the home, both internally and externally, is excellent. The arrangements for the external, monthly monitoring of the home have changed since

the last full inspection. This has resulted in improvement to the quality of visits and the reports being produced. The internal monitoring of the home is also an area of improvement. The information collected transfers into areas of planning, which results in the creation of well-written development and workforce plans. These high-quality documents provide managers with aims and a sense of direction which target areas for continued development to take place. This, in turn, improves outcomes for young people.

The home has a good record of compliance. All recommendations made at the last inspection have been fully addressed. This has resulted in improvements to supporting young people to keep bedrooms tidy, re-engaging young people with their education, improvements to diet and nutrition, and the quality of evaluating physical intervention records to ensure that staff follow the agreed plans. In addition to this, a number of new developments, initiatives and changes to practice have been introduced. These include improvement to some areas of the home, the development and implementation of new consequences forms and risk assessments for young people, and a new rewards system which is helping to promote healthy eating.

The period from the last full inspection to this one has proved to be one of change. The new manager has implemented practices that have made the home more inclusive for young people and less confrontational. A difficult period has been successfully navigated, with the home quickly regaining its stability. This reflects the positive impact that the stable and resilient staff group has made. Strong and trusting relationships between staff and young people are in place and, as a result, young people are making outstanding progress in all areas of their lives. The current positivity in the home is summed up by a young person who told the inspector, 'I am not sure where I would be, somewhere horrible if I had not come here. Staff treat me like an adult.'

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC475697

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Ltd

Registered provider address: Witherslack Group, Lupton Tower, Lupton, Carnforth
LA6 2PR

Responsible individual: Marcella Bird

Registered manager: Graham Burt
Post Vacant

Inspector

Graham Robinson, social care inspector

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