

SC475706

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 provides care for up to seven children with social and emotional difficulties. Children who live in this home also attend the provider's independent school.

The manager registered with Ofsted in April 2019.

There were seven children living at the home at the time of this inspection. The inspector observed six of the children who live in the home and spoke to four of them.

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 March 2024

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: 8 March 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
08/03/2023	Full	Good
10/05/2021	Full	Outstanding
12/11/2019	Full	Good
06/11/2018	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

All the seven children have remained living in the home since the last inspection. This reflects the stability and security that children experience. Children make significant progress in this home because of the care they receive from a consistent and dedicated staff team.

Children say that they feel safe, well supported, and loved. They call this 'home'. Staff show the children how much they care through the warm and nurturing relationships and safe physical affection. Children are supported remarkably well to explore their gender identity safely. This helps children to feel respected. One child said that they had noticed a significant change in their behaviour since living here. The child said that they no longer react in an aggressive way to stressful situations. This is because of the relationships that they have with staff.

Professionals also recognise the strength of the staff's relationship with children. One professional said:

'Since living at the home, [name of child]'s self-esteem and confidence has grown. They can talk about aspirations. The progress that has been made here is better than in any other placement.'

Staff support the children to develop safe relationships with each other. Many of these relationships have a natural feel to them, with children spontaneously choosing to socialise with each other. This helps to strengthen the children's social skills while increasing their support network.

Children make exceptional progress in both their attendance and achievements at school. Children who were not in formal education previously now have remarkable attendance. All children are meeting their expected targets, while some are exceeding these. The staff are dedicated to supporting children with their further education and career choices. This contributes towards the children having improved opportunities in life.

Staff support the children to have a sense of belonging in their community. Children are encouraged to participate in activities that they enjoy. This includes hikes, such as climbing Ben Nevis, and attending local football matches. Children also help to fund raise for local charities and give toy donations to children in need. The manager invites children from the nearby sister homes to activities he plans at the home. This helps the children to broaden their support networks and make new friendships.

Staff form positive relationships with people that are important to the children. This helps to improve children's safety as staff offer family members advice to help them

to support the child when they become upset. This provides a consistent approach and helps to improve relationships between children and their families. One child's family member said, '[Name of child] is very complex, but staff are amazing and [name of child] has made amazing progress.'

Staff's support extends to providing practical help to children's families. This helps the child's time with family run more smoothly, for example staff provide clean clothes and fresh food. This helps the children to understand that the staff care about and value their families.

Children who experience the loss of a loved one are exceptionally well supported. Staff use expert knowledge to help children to manage their feelings. Staff are creative in supporting children to express their grief. This includes, for example, planting a tree in the memory of someone.

The home is decorated and furnished to a high standard. There are photos of the children around the home which contributes towards a homely environment. Children personalise their bedrooms to create a private space. Children can keep pets to give them a sense of responsibility. When children make requests for their home, such as having a BBQ and vegetable patch, these are acted on. Children are informed of the outcome of their requests which helps children to feel valued and listened to.

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

The manager and the staff thoroughly understand the needs of the children. Where necessary, staff obtain the support of external agencies. This has contributed towards the exceptional progress that the children have made in becoming increasingly safer, including those at risk of exploitation. The risks have reduced so significantly for one child that their risk assessment reflects no known or current risks. However, staff remain alert to how this might change.

Since the previous inspection, there has been one occasion when one child has been missing. The staff located the child quickly due to the detailed understanding that they have about the child. This helps to improve children's safety.

Room searches rarely happen. These are only completed when staff are worried about a child's welfare. Children are involved in this process to help them to understand that the staff care about them and want to keep them safe.

Physical interventions are rare. This is due to the exceptional relationships that the staff have with the children. Any incidents are clearly documented, and demonstrate that when children are held, staff are quick to progress this to a physical demonstration of emotional warmth. This helps children to feel safe and loved. Children are also spoken with in a timely manner after an incident of being held has happened.

Consequences are equally rare, and when they are used, they are restorative in nature. The manager supports children to complete tasks such as rebuilding damaged furniture. This helps children to understand the impact and consequences of their behaviours.

Staff support the children particularly well with their physical and mental health. Some children now take prescribed medication which they previously refused. One health condition associated with a child's emotional distress is reducing significantly. The staff consult well with the provider's psychologist. This helps the staff to better understand the reasons for a child's behaviour and to review the effectiveness of the therapeutic strategies in place.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager is ambitious and enthusiastic. He leads by example. The positive impact of his role-modelling behaviour is evidenced in the staff's exceptional standards of care in the home. The manager is supported by an equally dedicated assistant manager.

Staff understand their roles and responsibilities well. This includes the dress code implemented by the manager. Staff wear office attire during the day when meetings with professionals are likely to happen. Staff then change into leisure wear when the children arrive home from school. This supports the staff to be seen as professionals as well as carers. It also reflects behaviours that may be seen in a family home.

Professionals spoke highly about the staff team. One said:

'I have been absolutely delighted with the progress [name of child] has made since moving into the home. [Name of child] has gone from being a whirlwind to almost running their review meetings (with support). The staff team has a great understanding of their needs and have developed positive relationships with them.'

The manager advocates for the children strongly. He escalates concerns to a child's placing local authority when children are without a social worker. When this impacts directly on a child, such as hindering the progress of the time a child spends with their family, he requests meetings with senior leaders in the local authority. He only concludes the escalation process when a satisfactory outcome is received for the child.

The manager implements a tracking system, which provides measurable outcomes to monitor and assess risk, safety and progress. The manager constantly looks to improve processes in the home to enhance the way the children's risks are understood and their needs are met. This includes reducing any sense of institutionalisation. For example, the manager no longer expects children to sign a contract of expectations regarding mobile phone use. The manager recognises these reviews lead to improved experiences and outcomes for the children.

The provider's senior leadership team recognises the positive impact the manager's review system has on children. As a result of this, they ask him to deliver practice learning sessions to the provider's other homes. This helps to improve practice across the homes, which contributes towards better outcomes for children on a wider scale.

Staff report that they feel well supported. The manager knows the staff's strengths and supports their professional development well. He creates opportunities for learning to promote their development. Two members of staff have moved on from the home since the last inspection. This was to further their careers and build on the opportunities the manager has afforded them in this home.

Supervision is reflective and regular and minutes show that they are of a good standard. The manager ensures that the staff are accountable for meeting the children's needs, but equally ensures that they are fully supported. The manager has high expectations of the staff team. When the manager recognises a staff member's practice falls short of the standards expected, this is addressed through learning and development.

The manager uses team meetings productively to involve the staff in the development of the home and to facilitate training. Information from the senior leadership team meetings is cascaded down to motivate the staff. This supports the cohesive approach the manager has achieved.

Documents containing information about the children are up to date. These given an excellent oversight into the children's backgrounds and the progress that they have made.

The requirements and recommendations made at the previous inspection are met; however, there are some documents which contain errors. For example, one child's name is spelled incorrectly throughout one document, and the provider's recording policy was not followed when one child's medication was returned to the pharmacy. However, these administrative errors do not have an impact and do not reflect the outstanding daily practice of the staff.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person 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.

Recommendations

- The registered manager should ensure that 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 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: SC475706

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Limited

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

Responsible individual: Tracy Nicholson

Registered manager: William Blades

Inspectors

Julia Hagan, Social Care Inspector

Tina Ruffles, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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