

SC475748

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This is a private children's home registered to care for up to seven children. The home provides care for children who may have a range of social and emotional difficulties or special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The home was registered with Ofsted in June 2014 and the manager registered in April 2022. The manager is suitably experienced and qualified.

There were seven children living at the home at the time of this inspection.

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 January 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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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: 22 February 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
22/02/2024	Full	Outstanding
28/02/2023	Full	Good
15/03/2022	Full	Good
21/01/2020	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

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

The home is welcoming, with plenty of space for the children who live here. The children have influenced the decor of their own bedrooms as well as some of the communal areas. Downstairs, there is space for doing homework and gaming; however, most of the children choose to spend their time in their bedrooms. They have TVs and their own belongings in their bedrooms, which means they spend limited time interacting with each other.

Children have established relationships with staff and are making good progress. Staff care about the children. Children who move into the home do so in a planned way. Staff visit the children and share videos of the home and their bedroom with them before they move into the home. One child who has moved into the home since the last inspection said, 'It was good to see where I was going and where I'd be sleeping.'

Most of the children have consistent attendance at school. One child was supported to attend a local college, and when this provision did not meet their needs, they were supported to attend sixth form and continue their journey in education. During the inspection, one child refused to attend school and remained in their bedroom all day. Staff were not proactive and innovative in engaging with the child. The children benefit from a tailored educational plan that addresses their individual learning needs and aspirations. Staff members actively engage with the connected school and other external education providers, which facilitates a smooth transition from home to school.

Staff encourage children to spend time with people who are important to them and support them to understand healthy relationships and boundaries. Children enjoy spending time with their friends in the community. This helps children to develop and maintain positive relationships.

Children are encouraged to attend local activities, football clubs, cadets and volunteering opportunities, with one child helping every week at the local coffee morning held at the church. Children have the opportunity to attend events that reflect their individual interests.

Staff support children to access local health services and are proactive in supporting some children to access the internal therapy provision to meet their complex emotional needs. This provides an insight into how children view their own experiences, and support is tailored around this.

Staff teach children how to take care of themselves and support them to develop independent living skills to prepare them for adult life. Staff encourage children to think about their future and what they will need to achieve their goals. This encourages children to continue striving to reach their ambitions. However, one child said, 'I have

asked for my own gym membership and bus pass so I can be more independent, but this never happens, they just say get school's gym pass.' This does not demonstrate that staff consider each child individually and promote their independence in accordance with their abilities and wishes.

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

Risk assessments do not include details of all known risks and vulnerabilities for children. This compromises safeguarding practice.

Records made in respect of the children vary in quality, and some include language that holds the child accountable for being in care, such as daily logs and key-work sessions. When children raise concerns in relation to risk-taking behaviours or worries about staff, these are not always progressed, escalated or reported and do not always have any management oversight. This does not help to keep children safe.

One social worker spoken with during the inspection said, 'Communication is inconsistent and I do not find things out in a timely manner.' Staff say that they speak up for children to remain in their care.

The management team ensures that local authority documentation, such as care plans, placement plans and delegated authority, is accessible to staff. This means that the staff have access to the background of and current information for each child. The manager guides staff effectively to understand and follow risk management and care plans.

Children rarely go missing from the home. When children do go missing from the home, there is a robust and consistent approach to managing this, and staff are proactive. Staff consult with the relevant professionals and family members so that the child is returned home safely. Children have an independent return home interview. This gives the child an opportunity to share any concerns and helps staff to implement strategies to reduce risk.

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

The manager is experienced and suitably qualified. He has a broad understanding of each child's history, behaviours and permanency planning. He is ambitious for them all in terms of their future care and achievements.

The manager's oversight of some areas of staff's practice is inconsistent. This includes daily records for the children, and key-work and individual sessions with them. This inconsistency means that the manager is not able to identify and address shortfalls in practice.

The home is sufficiently staffed to meet the needs of the children. Safer recruitment practice ensures that new staff are safe to work with children. Staff are provided with appropriate training centred around the specific needs of the children in their care.

The staff team members are provided with regular supervision and have access to the internal therapist to discuss the children and how best they can support them.

Team meetings are held monthly. The manager has taken steps to increase attendance at team meetings by making them more accessible to staff. This ensures that all staff are aware of key updates for children.

Management oversight is poor, with key safeguarding risks missed. The manager is aware of some of these gaps and has introduced new systems to improve monitoring and oversight in the home. However, these have only recently been put into practice, so the impact cannot be assessed.

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 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 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. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(ix)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that language used in records or with children recognises the need behind the behaviour and does not blame the child.	1 April 2025
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;	1 April 2025

help each child to understand how to keep safe. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that the actions for staff to take are individual to the child and that children can share their views, wishes and feelings around their individual risks.	
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— 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; 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)(f)(h)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that they have oversight of all work being completed, ensure that work is evaluated to establish patterns and trends and identify areas of learning in order to make continuous improvements.	1 April 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the quality of the key-work session records are purposeful, evaluative and non-stigmatising, so that they are helpful to the child. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards' page 62, paragraph 14.4)
- The registered person should ensure that children have a safe environment to live in and that maintenance issues are escalated and addressed appropriately. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards' page 33, paragraph 7.3)

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: SC475748

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Limited

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

Responsible individual: Martin Ellis

Registered manager: Daniel Arnold

Inspectors

Deborah Turner, Social Care Inspector
Sarah Jackson, Social Care Inspector

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