

SC475748

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to seven children who have learning difficulties, and/or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home is operated by a private provider.

Inspection dates: 24 to 25 October 2017

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 February 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- The new leadership team continues to drive improvements and raise standards for young people.

- Following a difficult period, the home is calm and stable. Young people who were in the home during this period recognise the positive changes that are taking place and report being happy and feeling safe.
- Young people benefit from living in a structured environment with clearly defined boundaries, which helps them to grow in confidence, enjoy improved health, reduce risky or challenging behaviours and remain safe.
- Young people receive individualised care. Well-written placement plans capture young people's strengths, needs, personalities and interests. They show that staff know young people well.
- A relatively new manager, with the backing of the staff team, has refreshed the ethos, culture and working practices of the home, making it more inclusive and less confrontational for young people.
- Based on their starting point when first entering the home, young people are making good progress in all areas of their lives.
- Young people develop positive relationships with staff and talk to them about their wishes and feelings. Consultation levels are high and because staff act on what young people say, young people feel listened to.
- The manager has a clear sense of direction regarding change and improvement. Working practices are critically analysed, with decisive decisions taken that are designed to improve overall practice in the home and outcomes for young people.

The children's home's areas for development:

- Ensure that young people are redirected and supported to adopt lifestyles that promote their health to the full.
- Ensure that new staff receive appropriate training quickly to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles and meet the challenges presented by young people.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/02/2017	Full	Good
26/10/2016	Full	Inadequate
05/02/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
01/10/2015	Full	Good

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that children are offered advice, support and guidance on health and well-being. Staff should have the relevant skills and knowledge to be able to help children understand and, where necessary, work to challenge negative behaviours in key areas of health and well-being, such as nutrition and a healthy diet. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 35, paragraph 7.18)

In particular, in redirecting young people and supporting them to adopt a lifestyle that promotes their health to the full.

- The registered person should ensure that staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support training needs. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.11)

With particular reference to ensuring that new staff receive appropriate training quickly to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles and meet the challenges presented by young people.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

When the last inspection took place, the home had just come through a troubled period. The acting manager had taken on the task of working through and resolving many of the difficulties that had impacted on the home. Since then, his position has been made permanent and registration with Ofsted has been completed. The home is now full. A much-changed staff team, which is working collectively and adopting a team-centred approach, is laying the foundations for future development.

The completion of a successful recruitment drive has added to the stability of the home. The young people, of whom many have been admitted since the last inspection, are being provided with a high standard of care. A young person stated, 'This is a good place to be and it's been good for me.' A parent, when speaking about his son reported, 'They know how to manage him and they are doing a brilliant job with him.' Many young people are dealing with issues that have affected them previously or affect them now. Staff work supportively and patiently with them, which is allowing all of the young people in the home to make steady and good progress in all areas of their lives.

Progress is evidenced in the high-quality, individualised planning documentation produced by the home. This is supported with positive support plans, monthly reviews that evaluate progress, and reports being produced for reviews, which are written using the recently revised and updated format, that assess risk.

Documents are reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that they reflect the changing needs of young people.

The home works hard to promote and engage young people with their education, which many have been rejecting in the past. The whole focus of morning routines in the home on a school day is about getting young people into school in a positive frame of mind. All of the young people in the home of school age are in full-time education. They attend one of two schools run by the organisation that operates the home. Overall, school attendance is good and this reflects the education progress being made.

The arrangements to address the health needs of young people are good. Everyday health needs are met effectively through community-based facilities. In addition to this, the home has its own mental health practitioner who works alongside staff in the home, giving young people access to regular counselling and support. Other specialist services are accessed and brought in where necessary. Detailed health plans form part of each young person's placement plan. Since the last inspection, the procedures around administering and recording medication have been completely revised and updated. This is an area of improvement.

Staff have had differing levels of success when promoting healthy eating with young people to enjoy good health and encouraging them to adopt a healthier lifestyle. Fitness and diet are addressed regularly with young people. The summer period met with considerable success, but only with a minority and due to contributing factors beyond anyone's control, some recent regression has taken place. Plans and strategies have been devised to combat this regression. However, with a greater emphasis on nutritional value and activities that include regular exercise, young people's overall physical, emotional and mental health needs are being well met.

The home runs an extensive activity programme which supports any interests a young person may have, as well as introducing them to new ones. Staffing levels are generous and allow for both group and individual activities to take place. For example, one young person told the inspector about a trip to a safari park the previous day, which was thoroughly enjoyed by all. Another described how he was having time with his key worker, which included a trip to the cinema.

The strength of the relationships between young people and staff enhance the high levels of communication and consultation taking place. Changes to the culture and ethos have made the home more inclusive for young people. Rather than having formal group meetings, they are asked to make choices and suggestions individually on a weekly basis. Young people also have influence in other areas of the home's operation and practice. For example, they are consulted when staff recruitment takes place. This gives young people some empowerment as well as developing greater confidence, a sense of achievement and a feeling that their views and opinions do matter.

Becoming more independent and taking on more responsibility for yourself are areas that are promoted quickly after admission. A formal programme to develop and measure independence skills comes later. Young people demonstrated many independence skills

throughout the visit, particularly in the kitchen. Many were seen making and cooking snacks and light meals, sometimes with staff oversight. Staff are promoting independence with young people on a daily basis, for example in handling money, planning contact with family members and travelling independently.

The home blends well into the local community. It is spacious and, overall, has a good standard of repair, fixtures and fittings, decor and equipment. All bedrooms are single occupancy, with their own bathrooms. They are decorated and personalised to reflect the taste of the occupant. This is an area of improvement since the last inspection. The visit coincided with a school holiday and young people were observed as being comfortable and at ease in their environment. Throughout the visit, young people and staff mixed well together, creating a happy and relaxed atmosphere. This has obviously been picked up by other visitors, with a social worker describing the home as being 'calm and welcoming'.

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

There are good systems in place which keep young people safe; for example, detailed risk assessments that are updated regularly identify risks in and around the home as well as the local community. Service contracts are in place, which help to ensure that safety equipment is well maintained. Visitors' credentials are checked on arrival at the home, which adds to the home's sense of security.

Incidents of a safeguarding nature are well managed. They trigger an immediate response by the home to the agencies charged with keeping young people safe. This results in a multi-agency response. Although a proportion of staff are relatively new, they have completed the initial training that allows them to understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping young people safe.

Other professionals recognise the home's strength in this area, with a social worker observing, 'Safeguarding is well measured and staff are not as oppressive as they have been in the past. The risk assessments have been developed, which is allowing my young person to test himself out, which means he has not been restricted in his preparation for independence.'

Although young people are well settled in their placements, they do pose serious challenges at times which test the skills and resolve of staff. Staff work collectively and supportively, allowing young people to work through their issues with a sense of security and trust. For example, when reviewing negative consequences, it is clear that sanctions are used sparingly. Many outcomes as a result of an incident are dealt with positively rather than negatively. This enhances the trust, respect and strong relationships that young people build with staff.

Behavioural incidents requiring physical intervention are managed effectively. Incidents are monitored and evaluated by senior staff. This allows for indicators, trends or patterns to be identified, allowing for alternative strategies to be considered. As a result, practice improves, which aids consistency. Young people's views are listened to following

an incident and if necessary, managers take prompt and decisive action.

Plans and assessments of risk are in place to cover incidents where a young person may go missing. Local protocols along with the home's own procedures are followed. Staff will go out of their way and put in a lot of effort to retrieve young people to ensure that they are kept safe. However, the procedures have only been tested once since the last inspection, which is a reflection of the current stability being enjoyed by the home.

Bullying in the home is not an area of concern to young people, although it is taken seriously by staff, who act proactively to stop and address issues of bullying. Good staffing levels reduce opportunities for bullying to occur, adding to young people's sense of security. Immediate action has been taken when young people have complained about bullying at school.

The manager has purposely made changes to the staff group, with eight new staff being recruited since the last inspection. New staff are being well supported and integrated into the main staff group. It is to everyone's credit that until specific questions were asked, it was not possible to pick out who was new when observations of working practice took place.

The recruitment and clearance procedures for new staff are thorough and meet with regulatory requirement and current guidance. Longer-serving staff are being rechecked regularly, which is deemed to be good practice. This ensures that young people are only being looked after by staff who have been suitably cleared and recruited.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager, who is an experienced child-care practitioner, recently completed the registration process with Ofsted, although has been in post longer. The clear vision and positive influence he has is reflected in the changes made to the home's ethos, culture and working practices. He is well supported by a senior staff team who complement each other well.

Staff are fully supportive of the ethos, culture and working practices they are helping to create. They say that they feel well supported. Some staff said how much they now look forward to coming to work, which reflects the positive morale of a united staff team.

The formal programme of supervision is being implemented with consistency. Performance is assessed annually, although review of performance is built into the supervision programme. The organisation and deployment of staff are well managed, with staff knowing their roles and responsibilities for each shift.

Due to the influx of new staff, there are gaps in some people's training that can only be addressed by time. Two staff spoke positively about the support they are receiving through their induction, which they find beneficial. The manager is aware of the need to implement training at a steady pace so that skills required every day develop accordingly and staff still have opportunities to complete a professional qualification. Specific training

can be sourced when required. For example, recently in response to a young person's needs, the staff group benefited from a training session on self-harm.

The monitoring of the home internally is good. The manager and his senior team monitor and evaluate practice. This allows them to critically analyse data, which highlights areas of strength and weakness. This transfers into the home's own development and workforce plan, which identifies areas for future development. External senior managers are active in monitoring the home regularly. The monthly external monitoring of the home is an area that has been reviewed recently, resulting in some improvement regarding the quality of visits and the reports produced.

The home has a good record of compliance. The requirement and recommendation made at the previous inspection have both been addressed. This has resulted in a complete overhaul of the medication procedures and with improvements made to some areas of the building, both inside and externally. In addition to this, the manager has made a number of changes and introduced new developments, which include the creation of a new guide to the home and self-esteem files for young people, a new risk assessment format and new negative consequences forms. In addition, he has reshaped the staff team, along with the ethos, culture and working practices of the home.

Following the manager becoming permanent, the reshaping of the staff team and the home now operating to its maximum capacity, there is a much more stable feel to it. The areas to be developed are recognised and time is required for this to be accomplished. Young people's individual needs are being well met and they live in an environment that respects their views and keeps them safe. They are experiencing a period of stability that allows them to reflect on their past, develop plans for their future and achieve positive outcomes in all areas of their lives.

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: SC475748

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: Simon Barton

Inspector

Graham Robinson, social care inspector

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