

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 who may experience social and emotional difficulties. Some 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 the inspection. Inspectors observed five of the children who live in the home and spoke to three of them.

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 October 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

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: 5 March 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
05/03/2024	Full	Outstanding
08/03/2023	Full	Good
10/05/2021	Full	Outstanding
12/11/2019	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children living at this home make significant and sustained progress due to the excellent levels of care they receive. The children's trusting relationships with staff enhance the stability they experience in their lives, as they have lived in the home for long a time. Children make progress socially, emotionally and academically. Professionals recognise the impact the quality of care has had on the children's lives. One professional said, '[Name of child] has made exceptional progress in all areas of their life. Her overall well-being has flourished, showing a positive change in her mood, behaviour and interaction with others.'

Staff and managers are highly knowledgeable about each child and understand their individual needs. Children say that they like living in this home. Staff's warm and nurturing approach enables children to feel safe and supported in their care. One child said, 'Staff are amazing. I know they will always support me.'

Children make exceptional progress with their educational attendance and attainment. Those who were not in education before coming to the home, now attend on a regular basis. Senior leaders have effective oversight of children's educational achievements. As a result, children are meeting their expected targets, and some are exceeding these, for example by achieving good GCSE results. Staff are proactive in supporting the children's career choices. This enables children to reach their academic potential and aspire for the future.

Staff develop positive relationships with children's family members. They take time to get to know them and understand each child's family dynamics. Staff's joint working approach with family members provides children with consistency in their care. When children experience loss or trauma, staff go above and beyond to ensure that children are well supported. One child's family member said, '[Name of manager] is very supportive of us. The staff are amazing at supporting [name of child] to see us.'

Children enjoy an abundance of activities and positive life experiences. They are empowered to take part in activities that support their hobbies and interests. The manager gives significant importance to promoting the children's engagement in the community, such as fund-raising. This has helped develop one child's confidence in public speaking.

The home environment is maintained to a high standard. Every child has a personalised bedroom. Children decorate the home for special occasions, such as Halloween. Photos of children throughout the home enrich the environment, helping to create a comfortable, warm and homely feel.

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

The children's safety is paramount, and there is a strong safeguarding culture at this home. Staff strive to ensure that information and advice are sought from partner agencies to further support their understanding of the children's needs. They creatively look at ways to manage risk while promoting age-appropriate risk-taking. This enables some children to significantly reduce their risks, and safeguarding incidents are low. However, staff remain acutely aware of risks that may occur. The manager takes the necessary safeguarding steps and escalates their concerns when the risks for children increase.

There is a stable and committed staff team caring for the children. The level of consistency this creates enables children to speak to staff about their worries. Staff discuss plans and decision-making with children. Even when children do not necessarily agree with decisions, they highlight that staff take the time to explain their reasons to them. These established and trusting relationships with staff enable the children to follow the advice given and make safer choices.

The strong relationships that staff have established with children reduce the risk of missing-from-home incidents. As a result, children do not go missing from this home. Staff use these relationships to de-escalate situations effectively. When children need to be held for their safety, staff use restraint as a last resort to keep children safe. Staff speak to the children following any behavioural incident, giving them the opportunity to reflect and learn from these situations.

Staff take the time to research and gain a better understanding of specific aspects of the children's needs, such as gender identity and neurodiversity. Staff use children as experts in their own care needs, which helps to ensure that staff understand how to meet these needs. Staff access training to further develop their knowledge. The manager's enthusiasm, guidance and leadership of the team have helped to embed staff's learning into practice. As a result, children experience exceptional levels of individualised care. Furthermore, the manager delivers training to other care teams to further improve their practice.

The manager takes the children's views and opinions about their care seriously. When they raise concerns about staff's practice, the manager is thorough in their investigation of the concern. The manager ensures that feedback is given to the children. This allows children to feel that their concerns are listened to and acted on.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Staff benefit greatly from a stable management team that strives to achieve the best possible outcomes for children in its care. The managers hold high aspirations for both children and staff. Staff feel that they are well supported by managers, and there are clear expectations in place. One member of staff said, 'I couldn't have asked for a better management team. They have been very supportive with me and very informative with

rules, regulations, and what they expect from me within my role.' This support helps to maintain the high level of care children experience.

The manager has developed strong working relationships with partner agencies. He ensures that the staff reach out to other agencies to seek advice and guidance when required to better support children's needs. The manager challenges partner agencies when he does not agree with care planning, and he advocates strongly on behalf of the children.

Staff benefit from regular practice- related supervision. These discussions focus on the well-being of children and staff. However, there is limited evidence recorded of these discussions, including reflective practice.

The managers have monitoring systems in place. These help identify actions required in a range of areas relating to care, staffing and health and safety in the home. However, they do not evidence how identified shortfalls have been managed and rectified.

Children's essential documents, such as an education, health and care plan, have not been sought in a timely manner. There is communication with professionals linked to the child, but limited escalation to acquire the documents. This prevents staff from having the most up-to-date information. However, there has been no impact on children as a result.

Documents completed by staff do not always have management oversight. There are some minor errors and varying quality in documents such as care plans and risk assessments. Daily records do not give an accurate representation of what daily life is like for children. However, staff are fully aware of the children's needs and speak confidently about the support they offer children.

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
<p>The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children’s home that—</p> <p>helps children aspire to fulfil their potential;</p> <p>promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(h))</p>	<p>22 November 2024</p>

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that they have up-to-date care plans for children. If they are not received in a timely manner, they should escalate their concerns with the relevant local authority to ensure that the child’s plan aligns with the expectations set out in their statutory documents. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 12 paragraph 2.8)
- The registered person should ensure that staff maintain clear and accurate records about each child that represent a significant contribution to their life history. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 62 paragraph 14.5)

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

Jess Elliott, Social Care Inspector

Miriam Dolman, Social Care Inspector

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