

SC475710

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

The home is owned and managed by a private provider. It can provide care for up to eight children who may have emotional and social difficulties.

The manager registered with Ofsted on 24 April 2020.

There were eight children living at the home at the time of this inspection. The inspectors observed and/or spoke to all of the children at the inspection.

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 January 2025

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	outstanding
---	-------------

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: 23 January 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
23/01/2024	Full	Outstanding
08/02/2023	Full	Outstanding
30/11/2021	Full	Good
30/07/2019	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

A nurturing staff team provide children with an exceptional level of care. They make a concerted effort to understand the children's backgrounds. Staff work in conjunction with clinicians to develop individualised care plans that enable them to have a deeper understanding of each child's needs and develop creative strategies to help children excel.

Children make phenomenal progress from their starting points, even those who are new to the home. This is because staff engage children in discussions about their care. Strong and trusting relationships help children to feel safe to discuss sensitive topics. Children speak warmly about staff and say they can confide in them. One child who has left the home said:

'It was always clear to me that throughout the staff team, their main goal was for young people to thrive in their own individual ways. In multiple cases I saw and even with me personally, children leaving with a new belief in themselves. [Name of home] eliminated a boundary in our heads as to what we could achieve.'

All children attend the on-site school on a full-time basis. Children make remarkable progress with their attendance and attainment. Adults are highly ambitious for children, enabling them to reach their academic potential and more. There is a focus on building children's confidence and self-worth. This supported one child who has difficulties reading, to proudly read aloud to staff and other children in the home.

The manager carefully considers those moving into the home. He ensures that children benefit from personalised introductions. This includes being visited by managers and the children visiting the home. Furthermore, staff engage children who are already living in the home in discussions about those moving in. This helps to reduce any anxieties that children may have.

Children moving on from the home benefit from exceptional levels of support and planning from staff. Staff give children confidence to visit their new home. Children say that staff were 'amazing during the transition'. Managers strongly advocate to ensure that children move in a way that is consistent with their wishes. This supported one child to have a planned, quality ending.

The highest priority is given to developing strong working relationships with children's families and those who are important to them. They recognise the importance of these relationships and strive to establish co-working relationships. As a result, children experience a consistent approach as family members feel valued and listened to. Staff extend support to parents during times of difficulty. One family member said, 'They [staff] call to see how I am. They always go over and above. I haven't had this from anywhere else.'

The home is maintained to a high standard and provides children with a comfortable living space. The environment is enriched from photos of children that are adorned throughout the home. Children personalise their bedrooms in line with their wishes and feelings.

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

Children are empowered to develop their own safety plans. Children feel listened to because they have a say in how they like to be helped when experiencing overwhelming emotions. They develop their own keeping safe strategies, which have resulted in a reduction in self-injurious incidents.

The manager's analysis of incidents and reflective discussions with staff enable them to continually learn from incidents and develop creative support strategies to meet the children's complex needs. This has led to a significant reduction in behavioural incidents for some children.

Staff engage children in discussions about their behaviour and worries. They strive to support children to learn from incidents. One professional said, 'If [name of child] makes a bad decision, he doesn't experience rejection, they explain things to him.'

Children's health needs are met to a high standard. Staff work alongside partner agencies to understand the difference and links between physical and emotional health needs. Staff utilise a therapeutic approach to address sensitive health and personal care needs. This has led to significant progress for one child.

The trusting relationships that children develop with staff significantly reduce the risk of missing-from-home incidents. As a result, incidents are rare. When they do occur, staff proactively respond to safely return children to the home. Children are welcomed back and given opportunities to discuss any worries or concerns they may have. The manager's oversight of incidents ensures that effective safeguarding practice is consistently maintained.

Allegations made by children are taken seriously and thoroughly investigated. The manager ensures that relevant partner agencies are notified. He challenges any poor responses from other professionals. Children's perceptions of situations are understood alongside their feelings. Staff and managers provide children with reassurance through discussions following incidents. The manager ensures that practice adapts to the children's needs and informs what can be done differently.

A standardised approach to using bedroom door alarms when children are new to the home is not always proportionate to the children's needs. The managers were reflective during discussions and aim to change this practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Staff are led by an aspirational management team. The manager and deputy manager guide staff's embedded therapeutic approach to caring for children. They are inspirational role models. All staff said that the managers are highly supportive and lead a culture that is fixed on providing the best possible care for children. This inspires staff to strive for the same. One member of staff said, 'They help the staff understand the children's needs and offer the best support with unconditional positive regard. They place a strong emphasis on staff well-being.'

The children are cared for by highly skilled staff. Managers and leaders have a remarkable understanding of each child. The manager utilises support from the in-house clinical team to further develop the staff's practice, and they greatly benefit from specialist training that helps them to meet the individual needs of children.

The manager has a comprehensive oversight of what happens in this home. He leads by example and is a visible presence in the children's lives. Children speak highly of him and the support he affords them. This enables children to build strong attachments and have a sense of belonging.

The managers deliver training to the provider's other homes. The practice model supports staff to provide exceptional care for children. This has supported other children outside this home to benefit from this team's knowledge, skills and experience.

There is a constant drive from managers to learn and further develop the quality of care afforded to children. This is embedded throughout the team's discussions and reflections on how best to meet the children's needs. The team's ever-evolving practice creatively responds to ensure that the children's changing needs continue to be met to a high standard.

Staff benefit from regular practice-related supervision that enables reflection and individual development of staff practice. Furthermore, team meetings are highly effective in developing staff's knowledge and skills. Meetings focus on reflecting about the training completed and how this can be best applied in practice to benefit the children living in the home.

There is a commitment to ensuring that positive working relationships with partner agencies are maintained. Professionals say that communication with staff is to a high standard. Managers attend relevant safeguarding meetings and provide challenge to partner agencies, when required, to ensure that children's needs are met.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the home seeks as far as possible to maintain a domestic rather than 'institutional' impression. In particular, the registered person should ensure that the need for bedroom door alarms is proportionate to each child, regularly reviewed and there is a move to ensure that they are not needed. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15 paragraph 3.9)

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: SC475710

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: Gary Smithson

Inspectors

Jess Elliott, Social Care Inspector

Mark Cryer, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

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

© Crown copyright 2025