

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	27 April 2016
Unique reference number	1159763
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Witherslack Group Ltd
Registered person address	Witherslack Group Lupton Tower Carnforth LA6 2PR

Responsible individual	Marcia McLoughlin
Registered manager	Cristopher Beattie
Inspector	Nick Murphy

Inspection date	27 April 2016
Previous inspection judgement	N/A
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Outstanding
The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the home contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help, protection and care.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good

1159763

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is outstanding because:

- The support provided by staff has enabled young people to make outstanding progress over a short period of time. They enjoy good health, attain excellent academic results and markedly increase their confidence and self-esteem.
- The on-site provision of education and specialist psychological support helps young people to benefit from the collaboration between care staff, teachers and therapists. This enables them to thrive within a caring and supportive community.
- Routines and boundaries within the home provide consistency and security for young people. The number of incidents of physical restraints have been high, but have reduced significantly. The use of restraint is meticulously recorded and evaluated to ensure that young people are safeguarded.
- Young people are, and feel, very safe. They seldom go missing. Bullying is rare, but when it does occur it is well managed. Staff are highly effective in helping young people to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles and a positive outlook.
- Staff work diligently to ensure that relationships between young people and their families are maintained and strengthened. They are effective at doing this even for young people who are far away from their home areas.
- Some aspects of leadership and management need attention. These shortfalls do not detract from the outstanding quality of young people's experiences or the progress that they make.

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

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person(s) meets the Care Standards Act 2000, 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 with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered person must ensure that—</p> <p>(a) within 24 hours of the use of a measure of control, discipline or restraint in relation to a child in the home, a record is made which includes—</p> <p>(i) the name of the child;</p> <p>(ii) details of the child's behaviour leading to the use of the measure;</p> <p>(iii) the date, time and location of the use of the measure;</p> <p>(iv) a description of the measure and its duration;</p> <p>(v) details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure;</p> <p>(vi) the name of the person who used the measure ("the user"), and of any other person present when the measure was used;</p> <p>(vii) the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure; and</p> <p>(viii) a description of any injury to the child or any other person, and any medical treatment administered, as a result of the measure (Regulation 35 (3)(a)).</p>	10 June 2016
<p>The registered person must compile in relation to the children's home a statement ("the statement of purpose") which covers the matters listed in Schedule 1. In particular, provide accurate details of the specific therapeutic services provided by the home (Regulation 16 (1)).</p>	10 June 2016

<p>The registered person must complete a review of the quality of care provided for children ("a quality of care review") at least once every 6 months. The system must provide for ascertaining and considering the opinions of children, their parents, placing authorities and staff (Regulation 45 (1) and (5)).</p>	<p>10 June 2016</p>
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Ensure that children have access to a telephone that they can use privately without reference to staff. Where this access is restricted because of concerns about the child's welfare or safety, there is a clear risk assessment in place with regular reviews as to its continuing necessity ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 58, paragraph 11.17).
- Ensure that the home provides a domestic and homely environment, specifically that children are not routinely required to sign documents such as key worker sessions, debriefs following restraint or pocket money records ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9).

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home provides accommodation for up to seven children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. It is operated by a private company.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
7 December 2015	Full	Good

Inspection Judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Outstanding
<p>Young people and staff enjoy excellent relationships. There is a feeling of mutual trust and respect, which is evident within the home and across the campus. One young person said, 'I've had my moments here, but staff just deal with it and move on, they're great, and will fight your corner for you.' Staff manage minor disagreements with humour and encouragement. For example, a young person refused to put on a warm coat to go to school, but after some jovial discussion with the staff they complied. This kind of approach usually produces the desired result without the young person losing their dignity.</p> <p>Placement plans are concise yet contain all required information. They are drawn up and modified in regular meetings between care staff, teaching staff and therapists. They therefore address the whole range of young people's needs and draw on information from all three specialist areas. This collaborative working is key to the exceptional progress that young people make. One social worker said, 'The transformation in the young person is amazing.' If a young person is having difficulties in one particular area, for example the classroom, they are addressed not just by teachers but also by the care staff and the psychological team. Such an all-encompassing approach ensures that all staff work together and enables a quicker resolution of problems. As part of the planning process, staff make regular assessments of each young person's progress using a 'resilience web'. This enables them to identify areas which need further attention and plan work by the appropriate professional to achieve agreed targets.</p> <p>Plans and targets are presented in a format which is easy for young people to understand. One young person has chosen to read their plan (with their key worker) eight times in six months. This indicates how involved young people feel and how they like to see how their plan changes as they achieve success and make progress.</p> <p>All young people make outstanding progress educationally. They benefit from the close communication between care and teaching staff which ensures consistency and a structured, supportive school day. Many young people had extremely poor attendance prior to coming here, now they all have virtually 100% attendance. Academically, all young people improve their actual and expected attainments significantly. One young person will be sitting their GCSEs a year early. Young people take pride in their school and the work that they do there.</p> <p>Staff are highly effective in supporting and promoting young people's health. Food is plentiful but nutritious, and staff motivate young people to eat healthily. One young person said, 'I like the food and I like cooking my own.' A wide range of</p>	

physical activities complements the healthy lifestyle which staff encourage. One young person is proud of the fact that they have lost excess weight since they came to the home. Another has given up smoking with the help of a cessation programme put in place by staff. The home is also highly effective in helping young people to improve their emotional well-being. Regular sessions with therapists, as directed by the care plan, enable young people to discuss their anxieties and develop ways of coping with distress. One young person said, 'My therapist is really helpful. They ask me what I want to talk about, help me to talk everything through, listen to me, they are really nice.' A social worker said, 'The young person's previous children's home didn't have this collaborative way of working with their attachment disorder. They would never engage in counselling before but is now doing so, and can have access to therapy pretty much anytime.'

Care staff also contribute to this work within the home by providing ways for young people to learn new skills, develop their confidence and so improve their self-esteem. For example, one young person has taken up the sport of climbing, working through levels one and two and now preparing, with staff support, to undertake level three. This kind of experience is key to the strides that young people make in feeling better about themselves and developing resilience. A social worker said, 'Staff were very quick at tapping into the young person's own skills, which built their confidence.'

Staff respect young people's views and seek them in both informal and formal ways. Regular young people's meetings enable any issues to be discussed and suggestions made. The complaints procedure is robust and easy for young people to access. Complaints are few, but when they are made the registered manager responds in writing to the young person at every stage, finally confirming whether or not they are happy with the outcome. This demonstrates how seriously staff treat the concerns that young people may have and uphold their rights to equality and fairness. Young people also contribute to the recruitment of staff, devising questions and holding their own interview panel. This conveys to young people that their views are valued and that they should have a say in who is appointed to care for them.

Each young person has a scrapbook containing photos and other mementos (for example, concert tickets) of their experiences. Photos are also saved onto a memory stick for young people to take away when they leave, providing memories of their time at the home. Young people access a range of activities, many of which they have never tried before. One young person is a member of the local football team. Another young person attends army cadets and is becoming a skilled horse rider. Such activities which take place within the community have the added benefit of enabling young people to develop friendships outside the home and improve their social skills.

Staff are highly aware of the importance of family contact and promote it effectively. Sometimes, parents and other relatives visit the home to see their child, and report that staff are always welcoming and supportive. This enhances the experience for both the young person and their visitors. A social worker

commented, 'The young person has a better relationship with family than previously, this is down to the quality of contact and how well staff support it.' Another social worker said, 'The staff work with me at promoting sibling contact.' Some young people's home area is at a distance. In these cases, staff are creative in helping young people to stay in touch with people who are important to them. For example, one young person uses a video chat application on their tablet to make regular contact with their family. Young people are able to use a telephone on which they can make and receive calls. Because of safeguarding concerns, it is appropriate that some young people need to be supervised during these calls and are not allowed to have their own mobile phone. The arrangements for assessing risks of unsupervised telephone use, and when to review them, are insufficiently clear. This has the potential to unnecessarily restrict a young person's contact with the outside world.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
<p>Staff use a formal process to assess all potential risks to each young person. This uses known historical information to compile an initial assessment and is then reviewed at regular intervals. This ensures that as a young person's behaviour changes, staff identify different or new risks and put in place strategies to manage them. These assessments include one for young people going missing. They are detailed and set out what might trigger an episode, where the young person might go and who they might try and contact. They also guide staff as to when to report them to the police, and the speed of this depending upon the individual vulnerabilities of each young person. This bespoke approach to preventing and managing missing episodes is highly effective. It goes alongside restriction of a young person's freedom in the early stages of their placement, which is relaxed as they demonstrate that they can behave responsibly. As a result, there are very few episodes of young people going missing. This is particularly noteworthy given that many of the young people had significant issues in this area prior to coming to the home. One young person said, 'I go horse riding, and I can also have time out by myself, I go out for a walk for 10 minutes, this helps when I am stressed out. As I progress I'll get more independence.'</p> <p>The home's e-safety policy and practice ensures that young people's access to the internet or social media is managed effectively. Different young people have different levels of access and supervision, according to their plans and identified risks. The diligence of staff is highly effective in protecting young people from potential exploitation. Bullying is rare, usually taking the form of verbal harassment. Young people confirm that staff are prompt and consistent in dealing with bullying. Every young person emphasised to the inspector that they felt safe. In general, young people behave very well. The quality of their relationships with</p>	

staff and consistency in applying boundaries, forms the basis of the home's approach to behaviour management. A social worker said, 'Boundaries for the young person are really clear, staff are good at following things through, they have clear expectations of the young person's behaviour. There are clear and effective reward systems and consequences, which are consistent across the home and school.' Staff encourage young people to behave responsibly and appropriately through the use of incentives and rewards rather than sanctions. These take the form of words of praise and encouragement as well as more tangible benefits such as later bedtimes, slightly increased pocket money or access to paid activities. Poor behaviour results in restriction or withdrawal of these benefits. The scheme has recently been modified to ensure that any restriction of benefits lasts no longer than a day. This gives young people the chance to regain their normal incentive within a shorter time span than previously. In keeping with the integrated working across care and education, incentives within the home are also tied to how well young people have engaged during the school day. Young people understand this and are motivated to try hard in school. One said, 'I like the incentive scheme, it gives me something to work towards.'

Sanctions are rare and not designed to be punitive, but rather a learning experience for the young person. For example, a young person may be asked to make amends to repair damage that they have caused. They might do this by repainting a damaged wall or paying small weekly amounts to contribute to the purchase of an item that they may have broken. The registered manager keeps detailed records of this restorative work, which clearly show the involvement of the young person in agreeing to it and understanding the reasons why. However, they are not recorded as sanctions, and so do not include all the information required by regulations.

Each young person has a behaviour support plan which they contribute to. It sets out what might trigger challenging behaviour and what works for that young person to calm them down. This individual approach is successful in enabling staff to support young people to deal with stress, anger or anxiety.

Since the last inspection, the home went through an unsettled period. During this time, the behaviour of a minority of young people frequently put themselves or others at risk. As a result, a large number of physical restraints were necessary to keep everyone safe. Staff are well trained in both how to avoid having to restrain and the physical techniques themselves, which reduces the risk of injury. A young person said, 'I have been restrained, it was to keep me from hitting another young person. Staff hold me tight but they don't hurt you.'

Since the beginning of 2016, the number of restraints has reduced significantly, particularly those where young people have to be held on the ground (in the last month there were no such incidents). Staff record every restraint in meticulous detail. Senior staff not involved in the incident debrief staff and the young person. Each record is signed off by a senior manager. In addition, the registered manager undertakes a thorough monthly overview. He evaluates any patterns and trends, for example, the time of day of each restraint, who was involved and so on. At his

invitation, the local authority designated officer for safeguarding has visited to inspect the records. This level of scrutiny, evaluation and transparency gives assurance that any use of restraint is appropriate and contributes significantly to the outstanding effectiveness of the home's safeguarding arrangements.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good
<p>The registered manager is suitably experienced and qualified. Two of the three requirements and recommendations from the last inspection have been addressed in full. The workforce plan sets out the deputising arrangements if the registered manager is not on duty. A deputy manager has been appointed who ably fulfils this role. The reports of the independent person who visits the home monthly now express a clear opinion as to how well the home is promoting the welfare of young people and keeping them safe. One requirement was not addressed. The statement of purpose had not been revised to clarify the number and role of people in the therapeutic team who provide support to the home. This was rectified during the inspection.</p> <p>The quality of the premises is exceptionally high. Furnishings and fittings are stylish and modern. Each young person's bedroom is en suite, enhancing privacy and safety. The overall impression of the home conveys to young people that they matter and deserve the best. Young people demonstrate their investment in the home in the ways that they personalise their bedrooms with family photos, posters and favourite soft toys. Staff strive to make the experience of young people as homely and non-institutional as possible. This is made more difficult by the unnecessary requirement for young people to sign a number of documents, such as pocket money records, individual key worker session records and records of debriefs following restraint.</p> <p>Staff produce monthly reports of young people's progress. These are overseen by the registered manager and enable him to identify where further work or additional support to a young person is necessary. The registered manager's own monitoring reports provide an overview of how well the home is meeting young people's needs. They do not include the outcome of consultation with young people, staff, parents or social workers. This means that the opportunity to use their feedback to further improve the home or build on its strengths is lost.</p> <p>Staff are well supported through regular supervision from a senior. They have access to a wide range of training opportunities. This keeps their skills and knowledge up to date and provides them with additional training on topical issues, such as radicalisation. As a result, they have the ability to support young people more effectively and promote their welfare and safety.</p>	

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of looked after children is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place. However, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or that result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, 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 who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service 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'.

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