

1247559

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The home is privately owned and is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to five children who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The registered manager's post is vacant. A manager was appointed in November 2020 but has not yet applied to become registered with Ofsted.

Visit dates: 3 to 4 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 29 October 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Outstanding

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

The home provides short-term care for children with complex needs. In most cases, children have experienced crisis situations or placement breakdowns and require a period of assessment and planning to identify the most appropriate future placement. At the time of this visit, one child was living at the home.

Children are supported by a consistent and experienced staff team. This provides children with the stability that they need at a difficult point in their lives. One social worker said, 'The home provides a nurturing environment for young people, who thrive with the consistent care the home offers.'

When children arrive at the home, staff try hard to make them feel welcome and provide them with comfort and reassurance. Each child is given an individualised welcome pack, which can include essential toiletries and toys. One child said, 'It's good here, I like it. I've settled in now and the staff are nice.'

A thorough assessment of need is undertaken during the child's stay at the home. This assessment helps to inform decisions about the suitability of future placements. Since the last inspection, most children have made successful transitions to stable long-term placements.

The home has recently experienced an unsettled period. One child moved into the home without their needs and risks being fully understood. This child's placement broke down very quickly and this child has now experienced a number of unplanned moves in a short length of time. The admission of this child also caused disruption to the children already living in the home. A requirement has been raised to address the shortfalls identified in the care planning and pre-admission processes.

All children admitted to the home attend a school that is operated by the same organisation. Many children have not attended school for long lengths of time but staff have been successful in encouraging children to re-engage with education. All children have continued to attend school during the periods of national restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has minimised further disruption to their education.

Children are supported to keep in touch with their families and other people who are important to them. Staff have supported them to use technology and social distancing measures to communicate with their families safely. Supporting children to maintain these important relationships promotes their emotional health and well-being.

The safety of children

Children benefit from a high level of supervision which is in line with the risks identified in their care plans. This helps to ensure that children are safe and protected from harm.

Children's risk assessments and behaviour support plans contain clear guidance for staff to follow. This means that staff have the information they need to respond effectively and to reduce risks for children.

Staff support children to reduce their engagement in risk-taking behaviours. As a result, some children have gone missing from home less often.

Staff have a good understanding of children's emotional responses and are able to de-escalate most challenging situations. However, there have recently been several serious incidents in the home where some children have caused damage to the property and assaulted staff. The police have been called on occasion and staff have needed to engage in physical interventions to keep everyone safe. Physical intervention records are of good quality and provide the reader with a clear understanding of the incident and the need to physically intervene.

Staff have helped children to understand the COVID-19 pandemic and how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Strict hygiene regimes and social distancing measures are in place for staff and visitors. Several children have moved into and out of the home during the periods of national restrictions and additional safety measures have been adopted to facilitate this safely.

Leaders and managers

The home's manager is newly appointed and is not yet registered with Ofsted. He has the required experience within residential childcare settings and was previously the deputy manager at the home. He is well supported by his senior managers and a strong team of residential staff.

Staff report that the transition between managers has been smooth and this provided them with consistent leadership. Staff speak highly of the manager and report that they feel well supported. One member of staff said, 'He is brilliant, very approachable and supportive. I can speak to him about anything.'

Staff benefit from a comprehensive induction and training programme. This equips them with the skills and knowledge they require to fulfil their roles. In addition, all staff receive regular supervision that supports them to reflect on their practice.

The independent visitor continues to monitor the progress and well-being of the children at the home. These visits have been conducted both remotely and on site, in line with the restrictions in place in relation to COVID-19.

The standard of recording is generally good and incident reports are highly detailed. This enables the manager to understand the sequence of events and review staff practice. However, several inaccuracies were identified by inspectors during the visit. For example, some documents contained the wrong dates and the incorrect author was named in one impact risk assessment. A recommendation has been made to improve practice and management oversight of this area.

The registered person has failed to notify Ofsted of all significant events that have occurred within the home. This hinders Ofsted's ability to ensure that the provider has taken the necessary actions to safeguard children. A requirement has been made to address this.

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, 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 registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if—</p> <p>a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation;</p> <p>an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious;</p> <p>there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there;</p> <p>a child protection enquiry involving a child—</p> <p>is instigated; or</p> <p>concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or</p> <p>there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. (Regulation 40 (4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(i)(ii)(e))</p>	29 January 2021
<p>The care planning standard is that children—</p> <p>receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and</p> <p>have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home.</p>	29 January 2021

In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—

that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home's statement of purpose.
(Regulation 14 (1) (a)(b) (2)(a))

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that all children's case records are kept up to date and stored securely while they remain in the home. Case records must be kept up to date and signed and dated by the author of each entry. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1247559

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Limited

Registered provider address: Witherslack Group, Lupton Tower, Lupton, Carnforth LA6 2PR

Responsible individual: Marcella Bird

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Sophie Thomson, Social Care Inspector
Mandy Williams, Social Care Inspector

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