

2509300

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Limited

Interim inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

A private provider runs this home and provides care and accommodation for up to seven children who have experienced childhood instability, resulting in trauma and associated complex behaviours.

The registered manager's post is currently vacant. The company is currently in the process of appointing a suitably qualified and experienced individual to fulfil this role.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection date: 11 January 2022

Date of last inspection: 21 April 2021

Judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

This inspection

The effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection

This home was judged good at the last full inspection.

At the interim inspection, Ofsted judges that it has declined in effectiveness.

This inspection was carried out to address specific concerns received by Ofsted.

Four children have moved into the home since the last inspection. One child recently moved on due to an escalating pattern of challenging behaviour. This child has settled well in his new home and is making good progress. Another child is currently living with a family member. This child was involved in a safeguarding incident during which a member of staff is alleged to have used inappropriate restraint practice. The member of staff was subsequently suspended in December 2021 due to these allegations. This is currently subject to an investigation by the designated officer and the police.

At the time of the inspection, six children were living in the home. Some children are settled and are making some progress from their starting points. However, poor relationship dynamics between children have had an adverse impact on their lived experiences and overall progress. Children told the inspectors that incidents of bullying are a regular occurrence in the home. A child told the inspector, 'They [children] call me names and talk about my family. They make threats. It makes me sad.'

Staff do not take effective steps to manage the risks that children are exposed to. Staff have been unable to prevent children from harming one another. There have been occasions when children have physically assaulted each other. On occasions, poor staff supervision has resulted in children being physically harmed by their peers.

Impact risk assessments that are completed for new children coming into the home are poor. They do not include all known risks for children and do not fully explore how these risks may affect the other children. Prior to one child moving into the home, it was known that the child did not understand the consequences of making comments that antagonised his peers. The manager did not consider how this child's behaviour would match with children who already displayed bullying behaviours. Within a short period, the child was physically assaulted on three separate occasions causing injury and significant distress. This failure to consider the dynamics between children resulted in children experiencing significant harm.

Staff are ineffective in providing children with appropriate support to understand their challenging behaviour or its impact on others. For example, there is limited evidence of targeted discussions or one-to-one support with children to help them to

explore the context of their bullying behaviours. Records show that staff miss opportunities to have meaningful conversations, for example to encourage reflection and provide reassurance to children when they are distressed.

Some staff do not follow agreed behaviour support plans. For example, some staff's practice is punitive and does not support children to explore the context of their behaviours. On occasions, this inconsistent practice has resulted in challenging incidents escalating and children being exposed to unnecessary distress. In this respect, staff do not provide care in line with the home's therapeutic ethos as outlined in the statement of purpose.

Despite these shortfalls, some children are increasingly settled and making progress. This is in part due to some children moving on from the home. For example, children have excellent school attendance, and they are making progress in their education. Children enjoy a range of activities and enjoyable experiences. Some children have reduced their level of challenging incidents. Social workers told the inspectors that some children have developed a sense of belonging to their home and are making good progress.

When significant incidents have occurred, there has been an overall lack of managerial oversight regarding the quality of staff practice and the capacity of staff to follow safeguarding processes effectively. Staff have not had adequate debriefings after incidents. As a result of these shortfalls, the staff have fewer opportunities to reflect on their practice. For example, a member of staff was subject to a performance improvement plan and a 'no lone working' risk assessment due to ongoing concerns about their practice. Despite this, the member of staff was left alone with a child and they subsequently used inappropriate restraint practice on the child. The management oversight of this incident did not identify that the staff member's risk assessment had not been followed. In addition, records of this incident are unclear and confusing.

Records of restraint lack detail and do not consistently outline the steps staff take to de-escalate challenging incidents. This means that the manager is not able to make a fully informed analysis of these incidents. This is a missed opportunity to understand the effectiveness of the restraint and establish what needs to happen to reduce the need for children to be restrained.

Staff recruitment processes are not sufficiently robust. A member of staff started working at the home without adequate checks being carried out. Managers did not scrutinise available information and failed to follow up on concerns about this individual.

The leadership team is aware of the concerns raised by Ofsted during the inspection and is committed to making improvements to ensure that children live in a safe and nurturing environment.

In response to the widespread concerns identified during the inspection, Ofsted issued two compliance notices under regulation 6 (the quality and purpose of care standard) and regulation 13 (the leadership and management standard).

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
21/04/2021	Full	Good
30/10/2019	Full	Good

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 quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who—</p> <p>understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children;</p> <p>use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>understand and apply the home's statement of purpose;</p> <p>ensure that staff—</p> <p>understand and apply the home's statement of purpose;</p> <p>protect and promote each child's welfare; and</p> <p>provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background.</p> <p>(Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iv))</p>	10 April 2022
<p>The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—</p> <p>that staff</p> <p>assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child;</p>	7 March 2022

<p>manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other.</p> <p>that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(iv)(b))</p> <p>This specifically relates to ensuring that clear plans are in place to manage known risks and that staff understand and follow these.</p>	
<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; and</p> <p>promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose;</p> <p>ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child;</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)(a)(c)(h))</p> <p>This relates to the need for staff to provide children with care in line with the home's statement of purpose. In addition, this relates to the need for effective monitoring systems to identify learning and improve practice.</p>	<p>10 April 2022</p>
<p>The care planning standard is that children—</p> <p>receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home. (Regulation 14 (1)(a))</p> <p>This specifically relates to the need for admissions to be well planned and in the best interests of children.</p>	<p>7 March 2022</p>

<p>No measure of control or discipline which is excessive, unreasonable or contrary to paragraph (2) may be used in relation to any child. (Regulation 19 (1))</p>	<p>7 March 2022</p>
<p>The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety.</p> <p>The registered person may only—</p> <p>employ an individual to work at the children's home; or</p> <p>if an individual is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home,</p> <p>if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3).</p> <p>The requirements are that—</p> <p>full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32 (1) (2)(a)(b) (3)(d))</p> <p>This relates to the need for the provider to embed robust recruitment processes.</p>	<p>7 March 2022</p>
<p>The registered person must prepare and implement a policy ("the behaviour management policy") which sets out—</p> <p>how appropriate behaviour is to be promoted in the children's home; and</p> <p>the measures of control, discipline and restraint which may be used in relation to children in the home.</p> <p>The registered person must ensure that—</p> <p>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>details of any methods used or steps taken to avoid the need to use the measure;</p> <p>the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (3)(a)(v)(vii))</p>	<p>7 March 2022</p>

<p>This specifically relates to the need for staff to follow children's behaviour support plans and record all efforts to de-escalate challenging situations. In addition, the manager will complete robust oversight of these incidents to ensure that staff follow children's plans and to identify any learning.</p>	
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* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Information about this inspection

This inspection focused on the effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full 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: 2509300

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Witherslack Group Limited

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

Responsible individual: Graeme Cheyne

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Gareth Leckey, Social Care Inspector
Mazviita Makiyi, Social Care Inspector

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