

PRESS RELEASE

New Research Highlights Ongoing Challenges in Recruiting and Retaining Leaders for Children's Homes and Residential Special Schools

A new report led by **dialogue** and supported by a broad coalition of sector stakeholders has revealed persistent challenges in filling Registered Manager (RM) and Head of Care roles across England's children's homes and Residential Special Schools (RSS).

Drawing on survey responses from 378 professionals and national data, the research explores why managers are leaving, what discourages others from stepping into these roles, and what helps sustain those who remain.

Key Findings

- **Vacancy rates remain high:** In March 2025, 19% of children's homes had no Registered Manager, with almost half of these (9%) having no manager in post at all.
- **Sector growth outpaces leadership capacity:** The number of children's homes has grown by nearly 50% since 2021, driven by rising numbers of children in care, smaller home models, foster carer shortages, and increasing complexity of the work. The number of Registered Managers has risen but not kept pace.
- **Managers managing more than one home:** Measures introduced by the Department for Education and Ofsted in 2021 allowed managers to register for more than one home. By March 2025, 17% of homes were sharing a manager – enabling more homes to open. These homes are achieving well at inspection and, while managers report similar levels of stress, they are more likely to feel the job is achievable.
- **Rising responsibility, workload and stress:** Almost all managers report significantly increased working hours, with almost all experiencing stress in their role. Many feel accountable not only for everything within their homes but also for the actions of external agencies. Managers cite workload, inspection demands, stress, and lack of support as reasons for leaving. Many do not intend to move into another RM role, risking a loss of vital experience.
- **Inspection pressures:** The demands of inspection and their worries about the Ofsted 'fit person' process are discouraging some from remaining in or entering the role.
- **Organisational culture matters:** Managers thrive where they feel supported by senior leaders, have effective deputies, receive high-quality supervision and training, and work in environments that value wellbeing. Registered Managers run children's homes to make a difference in young people's lives – high levels of criticism, organisations that do not keep children at the centre of their decisions and the real recruitment challenges all impact on Registered Manager retention.

The report identifies opportunities to strengthen leadership capacity, and recommendations in the report centre on:

- Streamlining registration processes and making changes to regulation to support this
- Enhancing support structures and supervision
- Promoting the Registered Manager role more positively

- Shifting workplace culture even more towards child-centred, sustainable practice

The report asks Government, local authorities, the regulator and providers to work towards a cultural change that promotes a positive image of the Registered Manager role, reduces unreasonable expectations on managers and refocuses attention on children and young people.

Next Steps

dialogue and partners are equipping organisations with tools to support change, including new training for Registered Managers, workshops to build confidence in ‘fit person’ interviews, and resources to strengthen leadership structures.

More information and the report itself can be downloaded at

<https://dialogueltd.co.uk/research/>