

2626773

Registered provider: Hertfordshire County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This local authority home provides care for up to three children. The children have a range of highly complex needs and cannot be placed in mainstream care settings at the time of admission. These include significant trauma, mental health needs, risk of exploitation, significant attachment issues and associated challenging behaviour.

The home consists of three flats that provide accommodation for three solo placements.

The manager registered with Ofsted in February 2021.

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 February 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 19 July 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
19/07/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

There were two children living at the home at the time of the inspection. In the last six months, three children have moved on to new placements. Two of the children moved suddenly, for reasons beyond the manager's control. However, both children continue to receive further support from the manager and staff as they settle into new homes and become more independent.

Both children now at the home are very settled and enjoy living there. They have positive and warm relationships with staff, who treat them with kindness and respect. Staff understand the impact of children's adverse experiences. They offer consistent support to help children make progress. Children often have extensive histories of placement breakdowns. However, children settle in this home for longer periods and one child stayed for almost two years, after multiple placements which were short-lived.

Children are making good progress with their educational studies. Staff are consistent in their expectations of attendance for children who find attendance challenging. They give encouragement and praise to motivate children. The staff remind children of the benefits and rewards for achieving their agreed attendance goals.

Staff provide good support to help children improve their health and lead healthier lifestyles. This includes encouraging better sleep routines, healthy eating and engaging with health professionals and therapeutic support. One professional said that staff supported a child to regularly attend intensive therapy sessions, helping to reduce incidents of self-harm.

Children are making very good progress with improving resilience, building confidence and learning independence skills. Children enjoy good-quality activities including swimming and going to Premier League football matches. A social worker said one child had made progress beyond expectations. Another social worker said, 'I have never seen [name of child] in such a positive place as this.' The child now has an opportunity to move to a therapeutic placement which was not previously possible.

The staff value children's relationships with their families, and work intensively to help them maintain positive family relationships. A parent said they are grateful for this, and the staff work well as a team to support their child. Staff respect family members and value their input. Parents are supported by staff, who share their skills. Two of the children have enjoyed summer holidays with their brothers and sisters.

Children live in modern individual purpose-built accommodation. Children are encouraged to choose the decor and furnishings. Children can have pets, which

helps them settle and improves their well-being. However, improvements are needed to ensure that broken play equipment is removed from the garden.

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

Child said that they feel safe and are confident that any concerns they raise will be taken seriously. Staff have extensive training in safeguarding and know the children's risks and how to reduce these. The manager takes action to safeguard children if concerns are raised.

Each child has a detailed assessment of individual risks which is well understood by staff. These assessments are regularly updated as children make progress. Regular reviews promote children's independence and sense of achievement. Calls have occasionally been made to the police to manage behaviour for a small number of serious incidents that were beyond the staff's control. When the police were called, staff provided support to other children to reduce the impact of the incident.

Professionals said that high-risk behaviours, including incidents of self-harm and children going missing from home, have decreased. Children previously exposed to the risks of exploitation are well protected by staff who are vigilant to the risks associated with social media. Staff balance restrictions proportionately with children's independence and well-being.

When children have gone missing from the home, staff respond appropriately to prevent them coming to harm. Staff actively look for children and alert other authorities without delay. When children return to the home, they are offered an interview with an independent person. However, these records fail to identify the reasons why children may not wish to engage.

The staff rarely use physical interventions. When these are used, staff follow detailed plans that emphasise de-escalation and use their extensive training in de-escalation techniques. Staff apply appropriate consequences as part of restorative work following incidents.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is suitably qualified, very experienced and understands the purpose of the home to support children with complex needs. He knows children well. The children respond to him warmly and positively. Staff spoke of their respectful admiration for him and the support that he provides.

Staff receive extensive bespoke training in the model of therapeutic care and support. Newly recruited staff are supported through an academy which provides a six-month programme of training and skills. Staff said that this training has been essential in helping them understand the impact of adverse childhood experiences.

The manager provides good-quality supervision and support sessions which are reflective, constructive and build staff confidence. Staff said they have the skills and support to look after children well.

External professionals all said that the home was very well managed and led. They said that generally communication is good and that staff work in the best interests of children. Social workers said that children had made better than expected progress due to the quality of support provided by the staff team.

Before moving to the home, children's needs are usually assessed so that the manager and staff can work with multidisciplinary professionals quickly. This includes when children need short-notice and emergency placements. However, at times, children are accepted when the assessment and suitability processes are incomplete. On one occasion, a child was moved into accommodation that was not in use due to staff vacancies. This child was moved in without the agreement of the registered manager. Due to the staffing levels, the child's needs could not be met. This goes against the procedures for new placements, which should be agreed by the registered manager.

One child was placed without the manager's assessment, planning or preparation. The provider deployed a temporary agency team without having considered their skills or suitability. The manager took swift action to assess the child's needs. He ensured that the agency staff had undergone the required recruitment checks. This response by the manager reduced the risk of negative impact on the child and other children. The provider and manager have subsequently reviewed this incident. An in-depth review was carried out by the quality assurance team and shared for future learning.

The manager explores and reviews the quality of care provided on a monthly basis, using these findings for a wider evaluation of children's progress twice a year. This helps to measure progress for children and meets the home's stated aims.

A revised statement of purpose was not sent to Ofsted, as is required after a change in the provider's responsible individual.

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
The quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children; use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose; ensure that staff— understand and apply the home's statement of purpose; protect and promote each child's welfare; provide personalised care that meets each child's needs, as recorded in the child's relevant plans, taking account of the child's background. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iv)) In particular, ensure that children are only placed at the home when the registered manager has assessed that the child's needs can be met.	28 February 2023
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home.	28 February 2023

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; that arrangements are in place to— ensure the effective induction of each child into the home. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(i))	
The registered person must— keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it; and notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. Subject to paragraph (6), the registered person must ensure that the home is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. (Regulation 16 (3)(a)(b) (5)) In particular, children should only be admitted to the home in accordance with the assessment and authorisation as set out in the statement of purpose.	28 February 2023
The registered person must ensure that the employment of any person on a temporary basis at the children’s home does not prevent children from receiving such continuity of care as is reasonable to meet their needs. (Regulation 31 (1)) In particular, temporary staff used to facilitate emergency placements for children must have the required level of skills and experience needed to meet the needs of the child.	28 February 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children’s homes are nurturing and supportive environments that meet the needs of their children. In particular, ensure that play equipment is well maintained and removed when broken. (‘Guide

to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)

- The registered person should ensure that when a child returns to the home after being missing from care or away from the home without permission, the responsible local authority must provide an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. Homes should take account of information provided by such interviews when assessing risks and putting arrangements in place to protect each child. In particular, ensure that records clearly identify these interviews have taken place so that action can be taken if they have not. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.30)

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: 2626773

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Hertfordshire County Council

Registered provider address: County Hall, Pegs Lane, Hertford SG13 8DQ

Responsible individual: Miranda Gittos

Registered manager: Christopher Davis

Inspector

Jamie Cousins, Social Care Inspector

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