

2626773

Registered provider: Hertfordshire County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This is a local authority home that provides care to children aged 7 to 18 years with a range of complex needs, including trauma, mental health needs, exploitation risks and attachment difficulties.

The home consists of three flats for three solo placements.

The registered manager has oversight of the three sub teams for each flat.

At the time of the inspection, there was one child living in one of the flats.

The manager was registered with Ofsted in February 2021.

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 January 2026

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
---	--

How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
---	---------------------------------

The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
---	---------------------------------

The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 21 January 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
21/01/2025	Full	Outstanding
31/01/2024	Full	Good
01/02/2023	Full	Good
19/07/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Children's experiences are mixed. They are not making sustained progress in line with their individual needs and starting points. The staff are committed to supporting children. However, inconsistencies in planning, relational practice and managerial oversight limit their positive experiences and progress.

Children do not always move into the home in a planned way. In small number of circumstances unplanned admissions restrict the staff's ability to provide stability and reassurance from the outset. Staff work hard to support and understand children who move in emergency situations.

When children move on from the home, staff try to support positive endings. Staff have worked with external agencies to support one child to move to a new home once they turned 18. Records indicate that a range of independence work was undertaken, however for this care leaver, they reported that they did not feel adequately prepared for independent living and experienced feeling unsupported.

Children's voices are not consistently heard or acted on, which impacts their overall experience of living at the home. Mechanisms for capturing children's voices are underdeveloped and there was limited evidence as to how children's voices and lived experiences were influencing their care or the running and development of the home. One child felt that staff engagement was task focused and procedural, rather than relational and caring. This left her feeling unsettled and reduced her sense of belonging at the home.

There is a significant amount of recording and documentation of conversations with children. These records show staff's intention to work relationally and therapeutically with children. However, records are written from the staff's perspective and lack meaningful reflection of the child's experience. There is limited evidence of how children felt about these interventions, whether they understood or value them, or whether they lead to a positive change.

Children are supported and encouraged to engage in education, and staff work effectively with schools and external agencies to encourage attendance and learning with limited success. Children are supported to access specialist services and advice to support with their health needs.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Children's concerns and complaints are not consistently listened to or processed in a timely manner. This compromises children's feelings of wellbeing and security. One child

raised concerns about a member of staff over a period of time, her feelings were not taken seriously or explored. This meant that this child did not feel that their experiences were validated. One former resident reflected that they believed that their complaints were only taken seriously when an incident was witnessed by another member of staff. This undermined their trust and discouraged them from speaking up when they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

Incidents are frequently reported to the police. One child has 11 outstanding offences, 10 of which relate to incidents at the home involving staff or property damage. While staff have acted to protect themselves and others, this approach is not therapeutic or restorative. While these actions were an agreed response as part of a multi-agency response, staff did not challenge this or apply a graduated, consistent, and pragmatic approach to the needs of this child. The repeated involvement of the criminal justice system risks criminalising children's behaviour that is closely linked to their adverse experiences.

The staff are committed to keeping children safe and respond appropriately when risks escalate. However, the systems and practices do not consistently reduce risk or improve children's safety and wellbeing over time. The staff rely on police curfews, and this places an emphasis on enforcement rather than supportive, preventative safeguarding led by the staff.

Staff act to safeguard children when risks increase and appropriately involve external agencies. However, risk management is not consistently effective in reducing harm. One child continues to engage in substance misuse and frequently goes missing from the home, including when he was subject to a Deprivation of Liberty Order. This has affected his mental health and school attendance.

Procedures for responding to missing-from-home incidents are followed in line with local authority expectations. However, return-home interviews are not consistently used to inform learning or adapt risk management strategies. There is little evidence that information gained from these discussions is analysed or used to understand patterns and reduce the likelihood of future missing-from-home episodes.

Staff do not consistently demonstrate the confidence needed to challenge racist attitudes and behaviours. Challenges are predominantly raised by those who were directly targeted, rather than by wider staff members. This highlights a lack of a structured and embedded approach to recognising discriminatory behaviours. As a result, opportunities to address harmful attitudes promptly and model safe, respectful behaviour are being missed.

Staff use restrictive practices in a way that is proportionate and appropriate to protect the children and others. However, debriefs are not held consistently with staff or with children following these incidents. This limits the opportunities to reflect on the use of restraint, understand triggers and support children's emotional recovery.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The registered manager is established and leads the teams who work in each flat.

The registered manager has not developed a strong culture in which children's voices are central to safeguarding and care. There has been missed opportunity for leaders and managers to demonstrate that children are listened to and respected, and to model transparent, reflective responses to concerns that children raise.

The registered manager has not ensured that staff are consistently supported to respond to children's concerns with curiosity, empathy and appropriate professional action. As a result, opportunities to build trusting relationships and reinforce a culture of accountability are lost, thereby influencing children's sense of safety and emotional security.

The managerial oversight of missing-from-home episodes and risk-taking is procedural rather than evaluative. While staff follow agreed protocols, leaders and managers have not ensured that return-home interviews are used to inform meaningful changes to care planning. Current controls, such as reliance on police curfews, place responsibility on enforcement rather than on relationship-based interventions by the staff. There are established systems for safeguarding and risk management, and staff respond appropriately when risks escalate. However, the effectiveness of these systems in identifying triggers and linking behaviours to reduce harm to children is limited.

Staff have regular supervision sessions and team meetings when the children's plans are discussed. However, managers and leaders have not consistently explored or embedded alternative approaches, such as de-escalation, relationship-based practice or coordinated multi-agency interventions. This fails to reduce incidents or help children to develop safer ways to manage their behaviour.

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, The 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
Subject to paragraph (6), the registered person must establish a procedure for considering complaints made by or on behalf of children. In particular, the procedure must provide that no person who is the subject of a complaint takes any part in its consideration or investigation, except at the informal resolution stage if the registered person considers it appropriate. The registered person must ensure that a record is made of any complaint, the action taken in response, and the outcome of any investigation. Regulation 39 (1) (2) (3))	20 May 2026
The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— 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; understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home; demonstrate that practice in the home is informed and improved by taking into account and acting on—	20 May 2026

research and developments in relation to the ways in which the needs of children are best met; and feedback on the experiences of children, including complaints received; and 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)(f)(g)(i)(ii)(h)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that when children move in or out of the home, this is planned in a way that ensures they receive the right help and support.	
The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust; an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and positive responses to other children and adults. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— meet each child’s behavioural and emotional needs, as set out in the child’s relevant plans; help each child to develop socially aware behaviour; encourage each child to take responsibility for the child’s behaviour, in accordance with the child’s age and understanding; strive to gain each child’s respect and trust; understand how children’s previous experiences and present emotions can be communicated through behaviour and have the competence and skills to interpret these and develop positive relationships with children. Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(vii)(viii)(ix))	20 May 2026
The children’s views, wishes and feelings standard is that children receive care from staff who—	20 May 2026

develop positive relationships with them;

engage with them; and

take their views, wishes and feelings into account in relation to matters affecting the children's care and welfare and their lives.

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

ensure that staff—

help each child to express views, wishes and feelings;

help each child to understand how the child's views, wishes and feelings have been taken into account and give the child reasons for decisions in relation to the child;

regularly consult children, and seek their feedback, about the quality of the home's care;

how to make a complaint or representations in relation to the home or the care the child receives and how any such complaint or representations will be dealt with; and

what advocacy support or services are available to the child, how the child may access that support or those services and any entitlement the child may have to independent advocacy provision. Regulation 7 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(ii)(iii)(iv)(d)(ii)(iii)

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: Hertfordshire County Council, Farnham House, Six Hills Way, Stevenage SG1 2ST

Responsible individual: Miranda Kumar

Registered manager: Christopher Davis

Inspector

Shaheda Dhandia, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2026