

2748259

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 short-term care for up to four children who may have had multiple in-patient hospital admissions or presentations to accident and emergency in relation to their mental health. The children may have social, emotional and mental health difficulties and complex trauma.

At the time of the inspection, two children were living in the home.

The manager registered with Ofsted in November 2023.

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 August 2025

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: 30 April 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
30/04/2024	Full	good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Two children were living at the home at the time of the inspection. Both children contributed to the inspection.

The children have complex emotional and mental health needs and may have previously lived in a children's inpatient mental health setting. The children are supported by a multi-disciplinary team, with social care workers and children and adolescent mental health workers all working together to provide good-quality, individualised care for children. There are elements of outstanding support for some children.

The home offers care that is focused on helping children to adjust to living outside of a hospital and to move back to their families or another appropriate residential setting. For other children, the care offered has prevented them requiring in-patient care. Due to the short-term nature of the care offered, over 10 children have moved in and out of the home since the last inspection. All moves for children have been meticulously planned and assessed. The manager ensures that prior to a child moving into the home, they have all the information needed. This allows the multi-disciplinary team at the home to competently assess the staff's ability to meet each child's needs. This assessment considers the needs of the child and the suitability of the home's programme and therapeutic ethos to meet both the child's and their family's needs, and the suitability of the child to live with the other children in the home.

Children and their families visit the home prior to the child moving in. Many children have had overnight stays to help reduce their anxieties and aid this transition from in-patient services.

Children are encouraged to access a range of therapies and therapeutic input. Children take part in direct therapy sessions, as well as pottery, arts and crafts and yoga. An educational support lead assesses the children's educational needs and coordinates their education plans. Staff have supported two children to gain suitable qualifications. One child was able to achieve their GCSE's, and another achieved their A levels and moved on to university.

The support that staff have provided the children with has made a positive difference. Staff have been successful in preventing readmission into in-patient settings and reducing presentations at hospital for most children.

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

Children say that they feel safe and are safe here. One child said that moving to the home 'is the best thing that ever happened to me'.

A clinical psychologist works in the home one day a week. This psychologist has input into the children's risk assessments, safety plans and plans around children's day-to-day care. Staff attend monthly meetings with the psychologist, where they discuss children's current needs. They are supported as a team to celebrate any success and process any challenges that have occurred that month.

The staff recognise that for many children, their relationships with their parents are sometimes very strained. Parents are actively encouraged to undertake a parenting course run by the home. This course is specifically designed to support parents of children who may have anxiety and obsessive and compulsive traits. Parents have said that this course has been hugely helpful to them in understanding their child's needs and how best to support them.

The therapeutic ethos is fully embedded into the home. Despite some huge challenges for children and staff, the home is calm and peaceful with a soothing atmosphere. Staff use soft voices and non-stimulating responses to children, and the décor of the home is designed to incorporate elements of nature and the outdoors.

One child has painted a cartoon character mural on the wall of the yoga room and said that they plan to incorporate a quote onto this painting. The child said that the quote, which was about the home, was important to them. They talked about the help that staff had given them and how they felt they were now able to look to their future. The quote read: 'I only get to where I am going from walking away from where I have been.'

Children trust the staff and continue to be supported by them after they move on. Staff manage some very tricky situations. Children know that the staff care about them and are always there for them. Children are kept safe by staff who respond during serious situations in the way in which a good parent would. Children can access the home's therapeutic support for up to two years after moving out. For some children, the home has continued to provide outreach services.

The written guidance for staff on how to respond when children go missing from home is not individualised to reflect the needs of each child and the responses that managers expect from staff. This has led to an inconsistent approach to understanding risk and responding when children have gone missing.

On most occasions, staff manage very tricky situations well. On occasion, there have been some concerns in relation to staff practice. For example, maintaining professional boundaries, night staff falling asleep, unsafe items being left accessible to children and changing of safety plans.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The home is managed by an experienced and well-informed registered manager. They are knowledgeable about the running of this service and are competent at coordinating a multi-disciplinary team. The manager is highly committed to the service and hugely ambitious for what they believe the service model can achieve for children. They have

plans to continue to develop the service further, including the development of a specialised theory-based model and the opening of another home under the same model.

There are some shortfalls that have impacted on the quality of leadership and management oversight. However, this is a hugely complex service and the manager has requested that senior leaders provide additional managerial support in the form of a further deputy manager.

When there have been concerns in relation to staff practice the manager has taken steps to reduce the risk of recurrence. This includes staff training, amending procedures and implementing innovative ways of overcoming some of the challenges.

There have been a high number of significant events requiring notification to Ofsted. The quality of notification has not always been strong. A large number of these notifications have been delayed and have not contained adequate information. On one occasion, there was a very serious incident. However, this information was not included in the notification to Ofsted. This reduces Ofsted's oversight as a regulator to ensure appropriate safeguards for children.

Children know how to raise concerns and feel able to do so. When children have made allegations against staff, the manager has not always quickly submitted referrals to the relevant safeguarding authorities. However, they have taken appropriate action to safeguard children. Investigations into staff practice have been thorough and have led to decisions being made in the best interests of children's safety and well-being.

When damage has occurred in the home, it has not always been fixed quickly. One fire door has been broken since the beginning of 2025. This was raised in the fire risk assessment as an action that needed to be completed by February 2025. While the manager has chased repair of this door on several occasions, it has yet to be fixed. This impacts on the fire evacuation route and potentially the ability of people to safely evacuate in an emergency.

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
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy which— sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect. The procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect must, in particular— provide for the prompt referral of an allegation about current or ongoing abuse or neglect in relation to a child to the placing authority and, if different, the local authority in whose area the home is located. (Regulation 34 (1)(b) (2)(b))	30 September 2025
The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if— there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there; there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. A notification made under this regulation— must include details of— any actions taken by the registered person as a result of the matter. (Regulation 40 (4)(c)(e) (5)(a)(iii))	30 September 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should specify the procedures to be followed and the roles and responsibilities of staff when a child is missing from care or away from the home without permission and how staff should support the child on return to the home. In particular, these procedures should be individual to each child's specific needs. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.28)
- The registered person should ensure that they comply with relevant health and safety legislations. In particular, ensure that actions raised on the fire risk assessment are completed within the specified time frame. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff consistently follow the home's policies and procedures for the benefit of the children in the home's care. Everyone working at the home must understand their roles and responsibilities and what they are authorised to decide on their own initiative. In particular, ensure that all staff following children's relevant plans including night monitoring and access to dangerous items, and that all staff follow the homes internal policies in relation to mobile phone use. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 54, paragraph 10.20)

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: 2748259

Provision sub-type: Children's home

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

Responsible individual: Miranda Kumar

Registered manager: Victoria Apperley

Inspector

Andrea Bounden, 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 <http://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 2025