

SC068511

Registered provider: Kent County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This short-break service is jointly funded by the health authority and the local authority. The home provides short breaks for up to 6 children with physical disabilities and/or learning disabilities. It currently offers short breaks for 39 children.

At the time of this inspection, 3 children were staying at the home.

The manager registered with Ofsted in August 2016.

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 February 2026

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 25 February 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
25/02/2025	Full	Outstanding
13/06/2023	Full	Good
10/05/2022	Full	Good
23/03/2022	Full	Inadequate

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children receive highly individualised and attentive care from a staff team that knows them well. Staff have exceptional knowledge of each child's likes, routines and preferred ways of communicating. They use this insight to provide care that is nurturing and tailored to children's individual needs. Most of the children have complex health conditions; staff demonstrate a good understanding of these conditions and the associated care needs.

Detailed admissions meetings between parents and staff take place at the start of each stay. This ensures that staff have the most up-to-date information about every child. These conversations focus on children's care routines, communication and health needs. Information shared by parents is communicated promptly to the wider team. Children's care plans are updated without delay. This ensures that children receive highly responsive, well-coordinated care throughout their stay.

Children make significant progress in the areas that matter to them. Staff agree achievable targets with parents. During children's stays, staff support them in working towards these targets. Staff review targets often and update them so that they remain relevant. This is a notable achievement, as most children only attend once or twice a month, yet they still make steady, measurable progress. All achievements are celebrated in the home, no matter how small, so every child feels proud of what they have done.

Staff encourage children to express their views in simple and effective ways. They build strong relationships with the children and have a clear understanding of each child's communication style. This ensures that every child can express what they want and how they feel. Children have choices throughout their stay, which includes activities, meals and, when suitable, their choice of bedroom. Staff always ask children about their stay so that they can learn and improve from each visit. They also use surveys and regular check-ins to ensure that the children are happy. When children and parents suggest changes, staff respond quickly and make changes whenever possible.

Children who attend the home often find it difficult to communicate their wishes and feelings because of their complex needs. Staff use a range of tailored communication methods to ensure that every child feels heard. One parent reported that their child's communication has improved because staff use a consistent approach that helps him feel confident and able to express himself.

Children receive life-changing support during their short breaks. One child was provided with increased support when his education was disrupted. This helped stabilise his family life and prevented the need for an emergency placement. For another child, who is new to the home, staff took time to understand her needs and communication style in detail. As a result, she has settled extremely well and has been able to sleep through the night for the first time.

Parents provide positive feedback about the exceptionally good care their children receive. They speak with confidence about the difference the home makes to their lives. Parents say that staff are knowledgeable, consistent and committed to understanding each child as an individual. Parents feel heard and involved in care planning, and they value the way that staff help their children to feel safe and settled during their stays. One parent said, 'Staff really know his needs, and they listen to us as parents. I haven't met a member of staff who doesn't have an exceptional understanding. The support provided by the home has a positive impact on family life.' This confidence has enabled parents to trust that their children are being cared for and are enjoying their stay.

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

There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the home. All staff and leaders clearly understand their responsibilities. They take pride in creating a safe, calm and loving environment in which children thrive. Safeguarding is seen as everyone's role, and staff remain alert, confident and proactive in always keeping children safe.

Safeguarding incidents in the home are rare. When they occur, the response is thorough and focused on learning and prevention. Staff record any worries or potential safeguarding concerns with great care and attention to detail. Their approach shows a very high level of diligence and a strong commitment to keeping children safe. For example, when a child slipped down in her wheelchair on two occasions, staff immediately arranged a full occupational therapy review to check that all equipment was suitable and safe. This proactive attitude ensures that risks are quickly identified, acted on and reduced so that children continue to receive safe and thoughtful care.

Since the last inspection, there have been no missing-from-care incidents or allegations, and there has been only one incident involving the use of restraint. This was managed safely and appropriately. Leaders are very aware that strong performance can lead to complacency, and they take steps to prevent this. They regularly use scenarios and discussions with staff to keep safeguarding knowledge current and to ensure that all staff are alert, confident and ready to respond to any concerns.

Staff are attuned to children's behaviour and notice even small changes in a child's presentation or mood. They act quickly when concerns arise. Any concerns are shared promptly with parents and relevant professionals, which supports effective multi-agency planning and ensures that the child's welfare remains the focus. Because this is a short-break service, staff know they only see part of a child's life, so they place great importance on clear, thorough information-sharing. This helps maintain continuity of care and strengthens children's safety and wellbeing across all settings.

When staff use specialist equipment with children, they do so under the clear guidance of the relevant professionals, such as occupational therapists, and always in partnership with families and other agencies. Equipment is routinely checked by qualified technicians to ensure that it remains safe and in good working order. New hoists have recently been fitted, improving the safety and quality of support offered to children who require such

assistance. This careful, coordinated approach ensures that children can always use specialist equipment confidently and safely.

Regular monitoring allows leaders to recognise and celebrate when children make progress in keeping themselves safe. Staff notice and acknowledge even small achievements. This helps the children build confidence and independence, and they are able to develop safer behaviours over time.

Safer recruitment practices in the home are robust. Leaders maintain clear oversight of all required checks. Recruitment files are well organised, and leaders carefully track each stage of the process, ensuring a high level of oversight. This effective monitoring ensures that every staff member is suitable, safe and appropriately vetted before assuming their role. It also reflects a wider safeguarding culture where leaders model high standards and expect the same diligence from the whole team.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

An experienced manager leads the home, supported by an equally experienced senior team leader. Together, they provide strong, confident and child-focused leadership. Leaders set high expectations for what staff and children can achieve. They actively support this through consistent role modelling.

The manager operates an open-door approach with staff that encourages learning and reflection. One staff member said that the manager 'sets the standards and raises the bar', highlighting her exceptional accessibility and willingness to discuss any concerns. This leadership style creates a culture where staff feel valued and are well guided. Staff are motivated to deliver high-quality care, which provides children with a stable, nurturing and aspirational environment.

The manager uses comprehensive monitoring systems that provide a clear and informative understanding of the day-to-day running of the home. She maintains robust oversight of safeguarding, care experiences and children's progress. She ensures that practice remains consistently strong. This level of scrutiny helps ensure that staff continue to hold high aspirations for children and deliver safe care. The manager's oversight contributes to a culture of accountability, reflection and continuous improvement across the team.

Staff are proud to work at the home and can clearly see the positive impact of the care they provide. They say they feel well supported and confident in their roles. Ongoing development is prioritised, with regular training and team meetings. This ensures that learning is continuous and that staff have the skills and knowledge to meet children's complex needs. One member of staff said, 'I ask for training, and it's put in place to upskill me and support the child's needs. The manager will find the right training for me.' The manager's commitment to professional growth contributes to a skilled and determined team that delivers consistently personalised care for children. However, recent staff sickness and recruitment challenges have meant that the manager has, at times, prioritised meeting children's needs over carrying out regular supervision



sessions. This shortfall has been acknowledged. There is a clear plan in place to restore the expected frequency and quality of supervision. Staff say they have not felt any negative impact from this temporary reduction and remain confident that they can raise any concerns immediately. This has not affected children, whose care, safety and experiences have remained the priority.

The manager has recognised that supporting children moving on to 18-plus short-break services is becoming difficult due to lack of providers. To help with this, she has built a good working relationship with a local private provider. She meets with them regularly and shares information so that planning can start early and transitions can be as smooth as possible for children and their families.

Independent monitoring takes place through monthly visits. However, the visits have not provided adequate scrutiny or information to help leaders identify any potential areas for improvement or service development. Leaders have recognised this and have raised their concerns with the visitor, which has led to some recent improvements.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that all staff, including the manager, receive supervision from an appropriately qualified and experienced professional, allowing them to reflect on their practice and the needs of the children in their care. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2)

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: SC068511

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Kent County Council

Registered provider address: Sessions House, County Road, Maidstone ME14 1XQ

Responsible individual: Tanya Hartness

Registered manager: Jolene Hobden

Inspectors

Mark Newington, Social Care Inspector

Ben Wilson, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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