

SC068929

Registered provider: Essex County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This local authority home provides short breaks and respite care for up to 8 children. The aim of the short-breaks service is to provide support to enable children to remain with their families.

The manager registered with Ofsted in July 2017.

Inspection dates: 2 and 3 March 2026

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 11 March 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/03/2025	Full	Good
04/10/2023	Full	Good
07/02/2023	Full	Good
19/04/2021	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

At the time of the inspection, 2 children were staying overnight for short breaks. The service is currently supporting 38 children in total.

Children are supported by dedicated and enthusiastic staff. Relationships between children and staff are affectionate and warm. Staff are well attuned to the children's individual needs.

Parents are consistently positive about the impact that children's short breaks have had on their family life. Parents said that their children were safe, happy and enjoyed their short breaks.

A range of informal opportunities are provided for families to be involved in the service, helping them to feel connected and valued. Regular gatherings and shared activities enable families to build relationships with one another, creating a supportive network beyond the service itself. On one occasion, a family attended the Christmas event and staff used photoshop skills to provide a family photo of the whole family together.

Staff support children to develop their independence skills. Children work towards achievable targets that are tailored to their needs. Children are making progress. One child is now able to use the toilet in a range of locations. A parent attributed this to staff's support with personal needs. Another child is willing to try new foods.

Children's health needs are well understood and managed. Staff are well trained and skilled to provide care to meet children's complex health and care needs.

Children with communication needs are supported to have their voices heard. Staff have the skills and training to allow them to communicate with children in line with children's specific communication needs.

Well-structured handover meetings are used effectively to ensure that staff have the most up-to-date information. This means that staff can provide safe and good-quality care.

The home is warm, welcoming, generous in space and well equipped to meet children's needs. Children benefit from large outdoor spaces designed with different sensory equipment to meet their desired stimuli. Children's artwork and pictures are on display throughout the home, contributing to a sense of belonging when they visit.

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

Risk assessments and care plans clearly identify children's known and emerging vulnerabilities. Plans are reviewed regularly and implemented to help keep children safe.

Safeguarding practices have improved. Staff have more-frequent refresher training, strengthening their understanding of risk and safe practice. Professional curiosity, safeguarding responsibilities and professional boundaries have been embedded as topics in supervision and team meetings. This sustained focus has strengthened the home's overall safeguarding culture.

Staff attend statutory reviews regularly, ensuring that there is collaborative working with families and other professionals. Staff provide input into these meetings and share their understanding of children's needs and progress.

Although children have not gone missing from the home, there is clear guidance and individual plans setting out each child's vulnerabilities and risks. These documents give staff and police essential information to respond quickly and effectively if needed.

Physical intervention was used on 2 occasions during this inspection period, each for a short duration. These interventions were proportionate and necessary. In one instance, staff were required to intervene to ensure that a child's lifesaving medication was safely reconnected.

Health and safety checks are carried out routinely. However, fire evacuation drills are not consistently practised with all children. There is no clear rationale for why these have not been attempted. Although staff create individualised evacuation support plans based on their knowledge of each child, the lack of practice limits children's understanding of what to do in an emergency. This reduces opportunities for children to develop confidence and increases the risk that they may not respond safely or promptly during an actual evacuation.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The permanent and qualified manager is child focused with high aspirations for the children. There is a positive, longstanding relationship between the manager and the deputy manager. Combined, they have a detailed knowledge and good understanding of the children's needs.

Managers create a culture of learning and have high expectations for the staff team. Staff say that they are well supported and valued, and are committed to their roles. They say that the manager is approachable and always available if needed. Staff have consistently said that team morale is high.

The manager has built professional relationships with social workers, who speak highly of the home. Professionals have described the manager and the staff as 'going above and beyond'. These working relationships encourage effective partnership working.

The manager ensures that the staff have the skills and training that they need to be able to support children with complex health and communication needs. There is a high

number of staff working at the home who hold the relevant childcare qualification. Other staff are working towards this qualification within the required timeframe.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person must ensure that children feel safe and are safe. Staff should support children to be aware of and manage their own safety both inside and outside the home to the extent that any good parent would. Staff should help children to understand how to protect themselves, feel protected and be protected from significant harm. In particular, the manager should ensure that children understand how to evacuate in the event of a fire. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards,' page 43, paragraph 9.9)

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: SC068929

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: County Hall, Chelmsford CM1 1QH

Responsible individual: Helen Sumner

Registered manager: Osagioduwa Igbinovia

Inspector

Naomi Starbuck, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
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E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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