

SC368763

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 who have physical disabilities and/or learning disabilities.

A total of 34 children use this service. There were 2 children staying at the home at the time of the inspection.

Inspection dates: 27 and 28 January 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: 12 March 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
12/03/2025	Full	Outstanding
18/12/2023	Full	Good
08/06/2022	Full	Good
08/03/2022	Interim	Declined in effectiveness

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children receive individualised care from a staff team whose members have an exceptionally strong knowledge of their likes, needs and how best to care for them. Staff focus on making short breaks a positive, enriching experience, where children feel safe, cared for and are given the opportunity to learn and play.

Children make significant progress in key areas of their lives. Realistic targets are agreed and set with parents and the children are then encouraged and supported to achieve them. Staff place a strong focus on increasing independence skills and children respond well to this. Success is celebrated and shared through certificates, rewards and recognition on noticeboards.

Staff support children to express their views; they do this through a combination of relationships and knowledge of children's preferred communication styles. Children are given options throughout their stay in terms of activities, meal choices and, when appropriate, choice of bedroom. Children's views on their stay are always sought, to make sure that there is immediate learning. Alongside this, staff use surveys and regular check-ins to make sure that children are happy. Any changes suggested by children receive a positive and well-considered response.

For children with complex needs, leaders and staff, in conjunction with relevant professionals, have made suitable changes to the environment so that their stays can be positive and safe. This has meant that children have been able to continue having short breaks, providing families with genuinely life-changing support.

Detailed admissions meetings between parents and staff take place before visits commence. This ensures that staff have the most up-to-date information when looking after a child, with a focus on care and health needs. This information is shared immediately with the wider team, and care plans are subsequently updated.

Families praise the work of staff and value the experience that the short breaks provide for their children. One parent described the service as '10 out of 10', while another said that her child has an amazing experience every time they stay. Parents value the care that their children receive and comment on how well this is shared with them via detailed daily reports that are sent home. This has allowed parents to trust that their children are being cared for and are enjoying their stay.

Staff have built good links with local specialist community event leaders for activities such as attending youth clubs. This immediate access for the children, where appropriate, gives them an opportunity to spend time with other children that they may not normally experience.

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

Staff have a comprehensive understanding of their responsibilities regarding the safeguarding of children, and they keep this at the forefront of all that they do. Risks are shared with parents and professionals and individual risk assessments support staff to recognise and manage any concerns.

Staff are vigilant around potential risks and respond immediately to any concerns. This means that children do not go missing and physical interventions are rare. When incidents do occur, staff always check the wellbeing of children and feedback any concerns to parents or professionals. Staff are mindful that not all children are able to communicate verbally and so use children's preferred communication methods when checking how they are feeling.

Staff demonstrate a strong ability to identify even subtle changes in children's behaviour or mood. They act swiftly when concerns arise, ensuring that information is promptly shared with parents and relevant professionals. Given the short break nature of the home, staff are acutely aware that they hold a small but significant part of the wider picture of a child's experiences.

Leaders have comprehensive oversight of any safeguarding concerns. Quarterly monitoring reports allow leaders to identify any patterns or changes. This ensures that suitable levels of staff are always available to meet children's needs. The regular monitoring also enables leaders to recognise and celebrate when children have made progress in keeping themselves safe with staff support.

Safer recruitment practices are robust. Leaders maintain detailed monitoring and oversight of all checks. This helps to ensure that all staff working in the home are suitable.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders are highly ambitious for what children can achieve. Despite children only staying for a few nights at a time, leaders are focused on helping the children to prepare for their futures by setting achievable and realistic targets. Disability is not seen as a hindrance to progress and leaders actively encourage children to have varied and positive experiences.

The manager supports her staff to look after children with complex emotional and health needs. Through role modelling, training and guidance through supervision, staff feel confident in their abilities and can see the positive impact of the work that they do.

The manager has prioritised the needs of children. At one point, this resulted in less frequent supervision for staff. However, this was rectified and all staff now receive regular supervision. During the period of less frequent formal supervision, leaders ensured staff wellbeing through informal drop-ins, an open-door policy and regular team

meetings. Staff valued this and felt well supported. As a result, the staff team has remained consistent, with only one member of staff leaving for a promotion in a sister home.

Staff are proud of the work that they do and the role that they play in children's lives. Successes are celebrated and whenever there are learning opportunities and chances to reflect, these are always taken. Staff share practice with each other so that learning is effective.

The manager is a champion for the children and will advocate whenever there are concerns. She is quick to challenge professionals if she believes that children's needs are not being met. This has resulted in some children being able to maintain their short break stays, providing invaluable support to families.

The manager uses comprehensive monitoring systems to ensure that she had effective knowledge of the day-to-day running of the home. She has robust oversight of safeguarding, care experiences and children's progress, and ensures that staff maintain high aspirations for children.

Independent monitoring takes place through monthly visits. However, these visits do not provide adequate scrutiny or information to help leaders to identify any potential areas for improvement or service development. Any shortfalls in the home have been picked up through the manager's own thorough monitoring.

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 ensure that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month. The independent person must produce a report about a visit ("the independent person's report") which sets out, in particular, the independent person's opinion as to whether— children are effectively safeguarded; and the conduct of the home promotes children's well-being. The independent person's report may recommend actions that the registered person may take in relation to the home and timescales within which the registered person must consider whether or not to take those actions. (Regulation 44 (1) (4)(a)(b) (5))	31 March 2026

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that all staff, including the manager, receive supervision of their practice from an appropriately qualified and experienced professional, which allows them to reflect on their practice and the needs of the children assigned to 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: SC368763

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Kent County Council

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

Responsible individual: Tanya Hartness

Registered manager: Katrina O'Leary

Inspector

Mark Newington, 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
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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