

Action for Children Fostering South West

Action for Children

Horner Court, 637 Gloucester Road, Horfield (Principle Office), Bristol BS7 0BJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Action for Children is a nationally registered charity providing a range of children's social care services. Action for Children Fostering Southwest provides fostering services for children and young people.

At the time of this inspection, there were 22 children living in 19 fostering households.

The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2022.

Inspection dates: 20 to 23 November 2023

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	requires improvement to be good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 27 February 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

In the main, children are settled and live in long-term care arrangements with experienced foster carers. This helps children to build trusting relationships and to develop a sense of permanence. Children's feedback and interactions observed between children and their foster carers demonstrate that warm and loving relationships are created.

Children make good progress across different areas of their lives. For instance, one child has successfully moved onto college, another child is managing their long-term health condition well, and one child is in employment and is learning to drive. Foster carers understand children's needs and the care that they require to achieve positive outcomes.

Foster carers benefit from professional and supportive relationships with their supervising social workers, who visit them regularly. They advocate for children when this is needed but important decisions about children's lives are not always progressed quickly enough.

Children attend activities in the community, and some attend holiday activities facilitated by the fostering agency. The registered manager said that despite attempts to provide support groups to strengthen networking for foster carers and children, the uptake by foster carers is very low. Managers said that they plan to increase their participation in the agency's activities when new staff are recruited.

Children's views are not well represented across the fostering service or in records about their care. There is little inclusion of their views to influence the agency's development. In addition, support provided to foster carers to help children build a record of their significant life events and to collate important memorabilia is not consistent.

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

Foster carers receive help to respond to children's complex needs. This includes support provided from specialist therapeutic interventions and access to an out of hours service. Feedback received indicate that these are efficient and effective services, and that they have a positive impact on carers and children's lives.

The internal safeguarding team is a valuable resource for strengthening the agency's responses to safeguarding concerns. This includes guidance provided about the sharing of information with external agencies. In addition, managers have improved processes to ensure that they notify Ofsted when significant events occur.

Foster carers understand children's safeguarding needs and take action to reduce harm. They spend time talking to children and help them to learn how to keep themselves safe, including online. On three occasions foster carers, who are trained in the

use of restraint, have used this intervention to prevent one child from seriously harming themselves.

While some foster carers have completed training to help them meet children's specific needs, many foster carers are not up to date with their mandatory training. This includes training relating to the safeguarding of children. This was a shortfall identified at the previous inspection.

The quality of safer care plans and risk assessments is variable. Some are individualised and are helpful to foster carers, others are not and do not reflect current circumstances and levels of risk.

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

The fostering panel functions effectively. Professional curiosity is used to inform decisions about the ongoing suitability of foster carers. The agency decision-maker is experienced. Their oversight ensures that suitable decisions are made. Actions that are recommended by the panel are not always completed promptly.

Managers have increased quality assurance functions with the aim of improving practice standards. This includes action taken to meet some of the requirements and recommendations made at the previous inspection. However, improvements across practice are not embedded. This is compounded by instability in staffing arrangements which prevents progression of the service.

Foster carer feedback about the agency is not wholly positive. Frequent changes in supervising social workers disrupt relationships and confidence in the agency. Feedback was overwhelmingly negative about the quality of training provided in line with foster carers skills and experience.

While monitoring systems are in place to aid management oversight, they are not used effectively. This includes the monitoring of children's progress. In addition, learning reviews and supervision records that seek to improve the safety, experiences and care of children are not comprehensive.

Supervising social workers regularly visit foster carers and children. They ensure that unannounced visits are completed to inform their understanding about children's care. Records are up to date and detail children's lived experiences. However, they lack detail about the interventions that are used to support foster carers. This includes appropriate challenge which is needed to continually improve children's care.

What does the independent fostering agency 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, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information, and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster parents are familiar with, and act in accordance with the policies established in accordance with regulations 12(1) and 13(1) and (3) (The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Regulation 17 (1)(2)) This requirement is repeated. In particular, the registered person must ensure that all members of the fostering household keep up to date with the agency's core mandatory training, and any other training that the carers require to enable them to support children. Foster carers should receive high-quality training in line with their skills and experience.	23 February 2024
The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them— receive appropriate training, supervision, and appraisal. (The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Regulation 21 (4)(a)) This requirement is repeated. This specifically relates to the registered manager ensuring that all staff receive supervision that is recorded and captured accurately and evidences the support staff receive for their on-going development and to enable them to deliver high-quality interventions.	23 February 2024
The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that— The welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (The	23 February 2024

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Regulation 11 (a)) In particular, safer care plans must detail known risks and provide guidance to foster carers about the actions that they should take to keep children safe. In addition, the registered manager must ensure that their oversight is fully recorded and that all actions are completed following incidents.	
The registered person must maintain a system for— monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b)(3)). This requirement is repeated. In particular, the registered person must ensure that monitoring systems are used and that actions are progressed to continually improve the quality of foster care.	

Recommendations

- The registered manager should make sure that the registered manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 50, paragraph 25.2)
- The registered manager should ensure that children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 8, paragraph 1.3).
- The registered person should ensure that the child, subject to age and understanding, is encouraged to keep appropriate memorabilia (including

photographs) of their time in the placement. The fostering service makes this role clear to their foster carers and ensures they can record, and help children make a record of significant life events. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 53, paragraph 26.7).

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 Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC031085

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Responsible individual: Colette Ferns

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Inspector

Louise Bacon, Social Care Inspector

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