

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 South West provides fostering services for children and young people.

At the time of the inspection, there were 24 children and young people living in 20 fostering households.

The registered manager has been in post and registered with Ofsted since September 2022.

Inspection dates: 27 February to 3 March 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 22 October 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

In the main, children who live with foster carers are making progress and live in stable placements. Foster carers spoke warmly about the children they look after and gave examples of their progress, going to school and having enjoyable activities and holidays. Even so, for a small number of children, foster carers have not always provided good levels of care. Inspectors found that some foster carers' use of language in records was unkind, not child friendly and stigmatising.

Since the previous inspection in October 2018, there have been repeated changes in the supervising social workers. Foster carers spoke of the changes, but were overwhelmingly positive of the relationships they have with their current supervising social worker. Despite all of the supervising social workers being relatively new to the agency, individual outcomes for children are well known to the supervising social workers and foster carers. However, there is not currently a centralised outcome tracker that gives an overview to managers of what progress children are making in all areas of their lives and how this compares to their peers.

Inspectors found a heavy reliance on virtual visits to supervise the foster carers and during the assessment process, despite the lifting of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Furthermore, some records of these visits were found to be lacking in detail and children were not always seen.

Foster carers are provided with a range of training and learning opportunities that are both face to face and virtual. However, inspectors found that the registered manager failed to make sure that all foster carers complete mandatory training. In addition, foster carers who, on occasion, were required to physically restrain a child had not been adequately trained, and not all carers were given specific training that would enable them to better support children with complex needs.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

In the main, children living with foster carers are kept safe because supervising social workers and foster carers understand the children's safeguarding needs. This is despite a high volume of foster carers not remaining up to date with their mandatory training. Nonetheless, inspectors found that, in a small number of cases, foster carers were seen to be careless in respect of ensuring medication was safely stored. In addition a child's identity was compromised by a foster carer's use of social media platforms.

Children rarely go missing. However, inspectors found that, on the one occasion a child did go missing, there was unnecessary delay in the foster carer reporting this to the agency. Delay by foster carers in sharing and reporting matters of concern was found by inspectors in a small number of the reviewed records.

Notifiable events are, in the main, shared with all safeguarding partners and Ofsted, and there are records evidencing the actions that follow. However, inspectors found that, in a small number of cases, the registered manager was unable to evidence how he had shared fully historical concerns about a foster carer with a local authority. He had been slow to provide Ofsted with updates, and he had investigated an allegation made by a child as a complaint.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Leaders and managers have failed to lead and manage the agency in line with their statement of purpose.

Leaders and managers have failed to provide sufficient support, challenge and scrutiny to staff and foster carers to ensure that they are able to provide all children with consistently safe, good-quality care.

Since the previous inspection in October 2018, the agency has experienced a change in the leadership of the agency. There have also been changes to the staff team, and there has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders and managers have failed to protect all staff, all foster carers, and all children from the adverse effects of these events.

Monitoring by the registered manager and systems to audit the quality of the service are inadequate. They failed to identify all the shortfalls found by the inspectors. These include the failure by the registered manager to review and address practice by some supervising social workers and some foster carers that was not good enough. Inspectors found a continued reliance on virtual visits, despite there not being any restrictions, children not always being seen during visits, failure by supervising social workers to promptly raise safeguarding concerns, and failure by the registered manager to evidence his own practice.

Supervising social workers receive regular supervision from the registered manager and told the inspectors that this was helpful and supportive. Despite this, inspectors found that supervision records lacked details, were generic and there was evidence of copying and pasting from previous records. Furthermore, the registered manager failed to provide the supervising social workers who were new to fostering with sufficient guidance to enable them to develop their skills and knowledge base.

The fostering panel functions effectively, is safe, and provides support and challenge appropriately. The panel chair person is experienced in the field of children's social care and child protection. They raise practice issues when appropriate to help the agency to improve. Except for one case, the inspectors found the panel applying sufficient levels, though minutes recorded could benefit from the better detailing of actions. For example, in one case, the panel minutes did not capture a level of scrutiny into the history of an applicant. Inspectors found a direct correlation between this shortfall and the registered manager's failing to adequately share

concerns held about this foster carer with the local authority, and the subsequent poor standards of care provided by the foster carers.

Four requirements and nine recommendations are made because of the serious shortfalls identified at this inspection. At the end of the inspection, senior leaders within the agency took action to secure the management of the agency. They have provided Ofsted with assurances of how they will rectify the shortfalls. Ofsted will continue to monitor the progress of the agency.

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
If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Regulation 36 (1))	5 May 2023
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 specifically relates to leaders and managers ensuring that all foster carers 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.	5 May 2023
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 specifically relates to leaders and managers making sure that all staff receive supervision that is recorded and captured accurately, and evidences the support staff receive for their ongoing development. In addition, that supervision records the actions and who is responsible for addressing the actions.	5 May 2023

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))	5 May 2023
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Recommendations

- Leaders and managers must ensure that all foster carers who need to, receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes. The fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes supporting positive behaviour, de-escalation of conflicts and discipline. The fostering service's policy is made clear to the responsible authority/placing authority, child and parent/s or carers before the placement begins or, in an emergency placement, at the time of the placement. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 13, paragraph 3.8)
- Leaders and managers must make sure that children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. Children are protected from abuse and other forms of significant harm (for example, sexual or labour exploitation). Leaders and managers must take prompt and effective action when safeguarding concerns are raised. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 14, paragraph 4.1)
- Leaders and managers must make sure that all foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children. This specifically relates to the conduct of the foster carers, and any potential impact and risk of a foster carer's use of social media platforms. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 14, paragraph 4.2)
- Leaders and managers must ensure that all medicines kept in the foster home are stored safely and are accessible only by those for whom they are intended. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 18, paragraph 6.9)
- Leaders and managers must make sure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the

child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. The frequency of meetings for short-break foster carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided. Foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings. In particular, leaders and managers must make sure that foster carers and the child in placement are seen face to face and on a regular basis. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 43, paragraph 21.8)

- Leaders and managers must ensure that allegations against people that work with children or members of the fostering household are reported by the fostering service to the LADO and, where necessary, Ofsted. This includes allegations that, on the face of it, may appear relatively insignificant or that have also been reported directly to the police or Children and Family Services. In particular, leaders and managers must demonstrate an understanding between a complaint and an allegation and take the necessary action. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 45, paragraph 22.6)
- Leaders and managers must make sure that entries in records, decisions, and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information, and are signed and dated. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 52, paragraph 26.5)
- Leaders and managers must make sure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 52, paragraph 26.2)
- Senior leaders and managers must 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)

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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Inspectors

Linda Bond, Social Care Inspector
Angela Weston, Social Care Inspector

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