

Capstone Foster Care (South West)

Capstone Foster Care (South West) Limited

Unit 5, Scott Law House, Lynch Road Business Park, Lynch Road, Berkeley, Gloucestershire GL13 9TA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is part of a national independent fostering agency. It recruits, assesses and approves foster carers in the south-west of England. It provides emergency, short-term and long-term foster care, including 'staying put' arrangements. The agency provides parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, there were 65 fostering households providing care for 75 children. Ten young people were living in staying put arrangements.

Four children were spoken with during the inspection, and three children were seen with their foster carers at an agency support group.

A new manager has been in post since July 2024.

Inspection dates: 21 to 25 October 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

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

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

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 21 February 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Many children build trusting and enduring relationships with their foster carers, and some children stay put with their carers beyond their 18th birthday. Children and young people are fully involved with their foster carers' lives and they enjoy different activities, including attending family weddings and going on family holidays. Children and young people have developed lifelong relationships with their foster carers and some return to their foster carers for dinner and for advice in adulthood. These relationships and the care provided to them drive children's progress.

Most children make good progress, and for some children they make significant progress over a short period. Foster carers value the support provided by the agency to help them to meet children's specific needs. Specialist therapeutic support is made available to foster carers and to children when their care needs increase. These interventions help children to manage their feelings when they feel overwhelmed and better equip foster carers with the skills needed to respond to children's complex needs.

However, too many children experience moving on from their care arrangements in an unplanned way when foster carers are challenged by the child's needs. High-quality processes that match foster carers as suitable to meet a child's needs and interventions to support foster carers to meet children's complex needs at an earlier stage are not embedded to reduce the number of children leaving their care arrangements in an unplanned way.

Most children are supported to participate in decisions about their lives. Children spoken to said that they have opportunity to talk about their care experiences and to share their views at a national level. They feel listened to. However, the voices of those children who are new to the UK and children who speak English as an additional language are less visible. In addition, there is a lack of creativity to ensure that they have access to information, such as the children's guide and newsletters, in different languages.

The agency's children's champions work with children directly to support their development and well-being. This includes work to develop children's play skills and independence skills, and to help them to manage their emotions when they feel overwhelmed. When foster carers reach milestones in their fostering journey, such as those who have fostered for 10 and 20 years, their achievements are celebrated.

All children are registered with, and have access to, universal health services. There are systems in place to monitor medication given to children effectively.

Most children attend education provisions and make progress in line with their personal education plans. Some children have excelled in achieving high-level exam results. Six children have moved on to college, and one child has moved on to

university. The agency's social workers seek advice from an independent education adviser to challenge and improve children's learning plans effectively. A few children have been out of education for an extended period.

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

The agency has forged strong links with partner agencies, including children's placing authorities, to respond to risks of harm effectively. This includes measures implemented to reduce children going missing from home, and to disrupt activities when there are contextual safeguarding concerns. The children's champions work directly with foster carers to increase their ability to keep children safe, including online.

Foster carers understand the risks posed to children and take steps to increase their safety when this is needed. They receive training to understand how to safeguard children and to help children calm themselves when they are distressed. Supervision visit records do not consistently detail the support provided to foster carers and to children when incidents have occurred; this was discussed with inspectors. In addition, risk management plans do not always provide clear guidance to foster carers.

There have been six incidents involving foster carers using physical intervention or restraint to prevent harm to children. These were reviewed by managers to ensure compliance with the agency's policies. However, there is not sufficient oversight of all foster carer records and on two occasions measures used to prevent harm to children had not been identified or reviewed in the same way. This reduces the opportunity for additional support to be implemented for foster carers and for children.

The agency acts promptly to respond to standards of care concerns effectively. Detailed investigations completed provide clear and proportionate recommendations.

When allegations are made, information is shared with partner agencies, including the local authority designated officer, in a timely way. Managers complete investigations promptly and the outcomes are shared with the relevant agencies and foster carers. On one occasion, it was not clear how the child was helped to understand the actions taken and the outcome.

Children's feedback indicates that they trust in the adults involved in their lives to respond to any concerns they may have about their care. When a child makes a complaint, this is taken seriously by the agency, managed sensitively, and a comprehensive review completed.

The agency has careful procedures in place for staff and new foster carers to reduce the risk of unsuitable staff and foster carers from being recruited.

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

There have been changes in the agency's management arrangements. The new manager has applied to register with Ofsted. They have worked for the agency for many years to understand the agency's functions and to inform their vision to achieve consistency across practice and to increase stability for children.

Feedback from staff describes supportive environments where learning and challenge are encouraged. The agency promotes staff well-being effectively. Those new to the agency describe thorough and effective induction processes. In the main, feedback from children's social workers was positive about the agency and the care provided to children.

The responsible individual, who was appointed in January 2024, has a proven inspection history in delivering good-quality fostering services. They are informed about the agency's strengths and shortfalls to inform development plans. However, these plans are in their infancy and have not progressed to address the shortfalls identified at this inspection. This includes plans to make specialist support available to foster carers in the earlier stages of children's care planning to reduce the number of children leaving their care arrangements in an unplanned way.

Foster carer training is focused on the specific needs of the child and advanced training has been delivered to better equip all staff with the skills they need to support foster carers effectively. However, the monitoring of records to ensure that children's experiences are continually improved is weak. Managers said that a new system is due to be implemented that will measure children's progress more effectively and identify support needed at an earlier stage.

The fostering panel has the necessary knowledge and experience to make child-centred decisions about the approval of new and existing foster carers. The agency decision-maker carries out a rigorous quality assurance function that informs improvements in practice.

Managers challenge services when they consider that children's needs are not being met effectively. At times, the agency's escalation policy is not used promptly by managers to achieve positive outcomes for children in a timely way.

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

Requirement	Due date
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 carer support provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b)) In particular, the registered provider must ensure regular monitoring of foster carer records to ensure that all incidents of physical intervention are reviewed. Training and support must also be in place for foster carers in line with the agency's policy regarding restraint. The registered provider must also monitor the quality of supervision and take action to ensure consistently high-quality support is provided to foster carers. This includes promoting reflection following incidents with a view to promoting stable homes for children and the reduction of unplanned endings.	24 January 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that a child has information, including the children's guide, available to them through suitable alternative methods of communication, including translation into another language. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 16.6)
- The registered person should ensure that staff understand the nature of records maintained and that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. This directly relates to the quality of risk management plans to ensure that they address all known vulnerabilities and provide clear guidance to foster carers. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.2)

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: SC032760

Registered provider: Capstone Foster Care (South West) Limited

Registered provider address: Wootton Chase, Wootton St Lawrence,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG23 8PE

Responsible individual: Debbie Tomlinson

Registered manager: Post vacant

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Inspectors

Louise Bacon, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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