

Action for Children Fostering Wessex

Action for Children

Round House, Newgate Lane, Fareham, Hampshire PO14 1JD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is operated by a large national charity. This branch provides fostering placements for children with a variety of complex needs. The service provides therapeutic parenting and attachment-based foster care.

At the time of this inspection, the service was working with 11 children and had nine approved fostering households.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since August 2019.

Inspection dates: 9 to 12 October 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	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 11 March 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children make consistently good progress because they receive individualised support that helps them to feel safe and settled with their foster families.

The quality of relationships between professionals and children is a strength. The small size of the organisation allows the staff team to maintain good relationships with all the children and their foster carers. Children feel comfortable with the registered manager and the social workers. Children know who their foster carer's social worker is and feel able to tell them if they have any concerns.

Children spoke highly of their foster families. One child said, 'They are great people, easy to get along with. Very understanding.' When the inspector asked about the foster carer's strengths, the child said, 'Where to begin? They have helped me a lot.'

All external professionals spoken to commented on the positive working relationship they have with the provider. They reported a good level of communication and transparency. A further strength identified by one external professional is the staff team's child-centred approach.

Foster carers are well prepared and supported to ensure children's safety and well-being. The referrals and matching processes are thorough and thoughtful, which means that children benefit from placement stability. Most placement endings are well planned, and child-led. Foster carers usually maintain contact with children who have moved to other placements.

Foster carers spoke positively about the support they receive from staff and retention of foster carers is good. One foster carer said, 'The agency have been with us every step of way. We could not have done it without them.'

All children are accessing education. When children have difficulties in education, the staff team proactively supports foster families. Staff advocate on behalf of children when they identify shortfalls in the service they are receiving from other professionals.

An external therapeutic support service is commissioned for families and staff. A named psychologist is available to staff and families two days a month. There is also therapeutic training available one day a month. The service is accessible, with no waiting lists. At least half of the foster families access this resource regularly. This specialised service works with the team around the child, to promote a consistently therapeutic approach.

Foster carers promote contact between children and their families. One foster carer said that they valued the relationship that they have built with their child's family. They recognise that helping the child to maintain the relationship is an integral part

of meeting the child's needs. Continuity of care is promoted by working in partnership with people who are important to children.

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

Safeguarding children is given high priority and embedded into practice. Responses to safeguarding concerns are monitored at both national and local levels. Safeguarding practice is routinely audited, and learning is applied to ensure that there is continuous improvement.

When safeguarding concerns arise, they are thoroughly investigated. Standard-of-care reports are completed and returned to panel. A dedicated safeguarding team has oversight of all safeguarding incidents, which further underpins the safeguarding culture and promotes children's safety.

Incidents that require foster carers to use physical restraint are rare. When they do occur, they are subject to an appropriate amount of scrutiny. Foster carers receive training from the agency to ensure a consistent understanding about safe and proportionate restraint practice.

Suitable procedures are followed when children make allegations about foster carers. The local authority designated officer told the inspectors that the agency makes appropriate referrals, and that their judgements are sound. The child's voice is central to their considerations. Actions taken are responsive and reduce the risk of a recurrence.

Mandatory safeguarding training has been completed by all fostering households, but this is not the case for mandatory first-aid and medication training. Additionally, the foster carers of one child with particularly complex needs have not been offered specific training around how to meet those needs. As a result, there is a risk that not all foster carers have the skills they need to meet the needs of the children in their care.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers have high ambitions for the service provided to children. The registered manager has positive relationships with all the children and foster carers. He has high expectations for what children can achieve. There is an emphasis on promoting the best outcomes for children.

The registered manager has sound understanding of the agency's strengths and areas for development. He works closely with managers from the wider organisation. As a result, his oversight and scrutiny of the service are thorough and well informed. He is valued by staff and foster carers, who spoke positively about his leadership.

Children's progress is closely monitored and included in detailed reports completed by supervising social workers.

The staff team has the relevant skills and expertise in fostering, and offers a good level of support to carers and children. A strength of this provider is the stability of the team. This has ensured a low turnover of staff and is testament to a supportive and reflective working environment.

Supervisions and appraisals are undertaken at agreed intervals. Good-quality records of these discussions demonstrate that they are reflective and child-focused. There is an open learning culture within the staff team. Staff are encouraged to undertake training and develop in their roles. Career progression is valued and promoted within the agency.

There is a focus on recruitment of foster carers. The provider on a national level has become more innovative. It is investing and testing its strategy before outlaying to other specific projects. The strategy is smart and targeted, but still in its infancy. The provider continues to be financially viable.

The fostering panel is diverse and meets monthly. There is a longstanding, appropriately experienced panel chair. There is regular contact between the agency decision-maker, panel chair, managers and assessment team. Paperwork to panel is on time and of a good standard. Panel members have access to a variety of relevant training. This includes the therapeutic training offered by the external therapy service. It is beneficial that both the registered manager and team manager sit on panel as advisers. This allows for continuity of communication and learning between the panel and provider.

There are some inconsistencies identified across the provider's recording system. Some documentation is missing, delayed or not signed. There is not a clear record of how this is being actively followed up by the provider. It is therefore difficult to track what attempts are routinely being made by the agency to address shortfalls in this area of practice.

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 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. (Regulation 17 (1)) In particular, ensure that all foster carers have completed mandatory training, and that all foster carers are offered training specific to the needs of children placed with them.	4 December 2023

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). There should be a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and action should be taken when needed. In particular, managers and leaders should ensure that documentation of records is consistently of a high standard across the agency. ('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: SC039572

Registered provider: Action for Children

Registered provider address: 3 The Boulevard, Ascot Road, Watford D18 8AG

Responsible individual: Colette Ferns

Registered manager: James Heane

Telephone number: 01329 666930

Inspectors

Skye Frain, Social Care Inspector

Tash Williams, Social Care Inspector

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