

Hythe House Support

Registered provider: Hythe House Support Ltd

59 Staplehurst Road, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 2NY

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Hythe House Support is an independent fostering agency, registered since 2003. The agency provides permanent, long-term, short-term, and emergency foster care and parent and child placements. The provider offers fostering services for children with social and emotional needs and/or mild learning difficulties.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering service had 14 carer households providing care for 26 children and young people. The manager registered with Ofsted in January 2014.

Inspection dates: 11 to 14 November 2024

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: 8 November 2021

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 enjoy nurturing support from foster carers who are committed to improving outcomes for children. Children speak positively about their experiences of being in foster care and the support that they receive from the agency.

Children make good progress. Examples include children learning new strategies to manage difficult emotions, and improvements in children's health and education outcomes. Many children are being supported to safely have an increased amount of independence by learning skills such as cooking, travelling independently and managing a budget. There is good oversight of children's progress through outcome trackers, which helps to ensure that children are receiving targeted and child-centred care.

Foster carers advocate for the children in their care as would be expected of a good parent. One child's carers took action to resolve a bullying concern by liaising with professionals at the child's school. By providing a safe space for the child to share their experiences and generating an effective response through their action, they built the child's confidence in sharing future worries with them.

Children's daily logs vary in quality. Many logs and records convey accurate and beneficial information about children's individual circumstances, progress and the support that they receive from carers. However, there are occasions when the language used within logs does not reflect the child-centred approach that carers employ. This could be unhelpful for children who may wish to access their records in the future.

The agency organises and hosts group activities and events for children and foster families, including birth children. They recently attended a pottery-making experience and have planned a Christmas party, with bespoke gifts for each of the children. This gives the children and foster carers an opportunity to socialise and support one another.

External professionals shared very positive feedback about the quality of care that children receive and how this has made a difference to their experiences. One social worker described the carer supporting a parent and child as 'observant' and 'proactive'. She reflected on the carer's efforts to accommodate the communication needs of the parent and to improve the health outcomes for the child.

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

Children say that they feel safe with their foster carers and trust them to 'listen and try and sort things out'. Supervising social workers understand children's needs and vulnerabilities well.

Overall, stability for children is good at this agency. The longevity of carers reflects the positive relationships they have with their supervising social workers and the support that they receive. Children feel 'at home' with carers and the positive introductions they receive help to create stability from the start of their relationships. The ongoing thoughtfulness from carers helps to ensure children feel welcomed and valued.

The agency communicates safeguarding concerns appropriately and liaises with the relevant statutory bodies to ensure that there are protective strategies agreed and implemented. Supervising social workers provide emotional and practical guidance to fostering families. They support carers to navigate incidents in a way that promotes children's safety and welfare.

Risks affecting children at this agency are well understood. Whilst risk assessments are thorough, records do not always provide clear guidance for carers on the actions to take in the event of an incident. However, the impact of this is minimised by the knowledge of carers and the readily available support provided by the agency, including effective out of hours support.

Children rarely go missing from their carers. When this does occur, carers ensure that they take appropriate action to find children who are missing, including working alongside the police and other agencies. Children receive nurturing responses from their carers upon their return.

When there are concerns about self-harm, these are reflected in children's risk assessments and carers support children to access therapeutic interventions. However, there are times when the response to children who self-harm, or demonstrate other concerning behaviours, can lack curiosity. This lack of exploration means that opportunities are missed to mitigate future risk and report it appropriately.

Staff receive regular and reflective supervision. There is a review of any safeguarding concerns, further learning and development needs as well as statutory duties and support for foster carers. They also receive an annual appraisal which includes a self-reflective account and reviews their performance over the last year and plans ahead for the development of the next period. This helps to ensure that staff have the relevant skills and knowledge to provide a good level of support to carers and children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Feedback from foster carers is overwhelmingly positive regarding the support that they receive from the agency. The registered manager is responsive to their needs, and they say that they 'never feel alone'.

Leaders and managers ensure there is collaborative working between the senior managers, supervising social workers, children and their foster carers. Due to the small intimate scope of the agency, all of the senior leaders, staff and supervising

social workers know the children and foster carers well. This relationship-based approach is the foundation of the agency and an ethos that generates loyalty and permanency amongst carers.

Despite efforts from the registered manager, there have been challenges in obtaining all relevant documentation for children in a timely way. Leaders have recognised this difficulty and have been creative in their response to ensure that children's information is acquired. For example, supervising social workers attend all statutory meetings to gain an overview of children's care planning so they can provide support accordingly.

The registered provider ensures staff are suitably vetted before they commence employment. One member of staff did start employment before a disclosure and barring check was in place, though they had no access to children or confidential information. Leaders have since strengthened their recruitment policy to ensure this exceeds good practice.

The suitability of prospective carers is well-evidenced through explorative assessment. These are scrutinised by an appropriately qualified and experienced panel which, although small in number, possesses a variety of expertise. Panel members offer investigative questioning and ensure the child's voice is represented well.

Effective training is provided to most of the foster carers and the registered manager has prepared a training schedule for the upcoming year. However, there are a number of male carers that are not being consistently engaged in training and supervision. Leaders have made attempts to improve the uptake, but are yet to effectively ensure that all living within the household possess apposite understanding of the children they care for and the issues affecting them.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that carers are proactive and alert to any signs or symptoms that might indicate a child is at risk of harm, so that intervention and de-escalation can be initiated at the earliest opportunity. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.3)
- The registered person should ensure that support and training is made available to foster carers, including hard to reach carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. In particular, the agency should ensure that male carers and other household occupants are able to access sufficient training and support. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.8)
- The registered person should ensure that carers logs and other information about children is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.6)
- The registered person should ensure that all applicable statutory checks, including DBS checks, are undertaken prior to staff commencing their employment. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 19.2)

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: SC043609

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Registered provider address: 59 Staplehurst Road, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 2NY

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Inspectors

Tash Williams, Social Care Inspector
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