

Fostering Solutions Limited South

Fostering Solutions Ltd

Suite 3, Poles Copse, Poles Lane, Otterbourne, Winchester, Hampshire SO21 2DZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fostering Solutions Limited South is an independent fostering agency, part of the National Fostering Group. The agency provides a wide range of foster homes. The agency's statement of purpose states that this includes arrangements for short- and long-term, emergency placements, parent and child, children with disabilities, short breaks, staying put, and placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

At the time of this inspection, there were 61 approved fostering households and 79 children placed.

The current manager has been registered with Ofsted since December 2020.

Inspection dates: 23 to 27 May 2022

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: 18 February 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit from living with foster carers who are supported and empowered by the agency to provide nurturing and high-quality, individualised care to children. As a result, the vast majority of children build trusted and secure relationships with their foster carers, who know and understand them well.

Many children continue to live with their fostering families as they become young adults, in 'staying put' arrangements. Moreover, some children have been adopted by their fostering families. This is a testament to the child-centred and relationship-based ethos that the agency promotes.

The long-standing relationship emphasis for children in long-term care increases the children's sense of belonging and ability to form and sustain attachments. One young person, who continues to live with her fostering family during her holiday periods from university, speaks openly and publicly about her sense of belonging to her fostering family, which she had not experienced before.

Foster carers recognise and encourage the children's interests and talents. The children enjoy attending a range of fun activities and clubs. While many activities in the community were curbed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the foster carers continued to encourage the children to lead active and full lives.

Staff listen to the children's views, and their ideas and suggestions are routinely canvassed. Initiatives such as the star of the month and the children's newsletters encourage the children to participate and engage with the agency. Consequently, the children learn to recognise that they can have a positive influence on the people and the environment around them.

Supervising social workers and foster carers understand the important supporting role they play in encouraging the children to reflect on and understand their life stories. Foster carers ensure that photographs and significant memorabilia are shared with the children and are safely stored. These measures help children to explore their identity and to stay connected and maintain important links, and family relationships.

Children all attend school and make good progress from their starting points. Managers collate education data at regular intervals to help inform and track the children's progress. Foster carers are provided with training about the school curriculum. This helps equip the foster carers to support the children in their academic attainment.

For those children who need further support, the in-house education team offers a range of support services, including extra tuition.

Foster carers and staff have access to specialist help from the in-house clinical support hub. This service offers key adults in the children's life therapeutic support and skills. This includes developing skills to respond to and help children with their emotional and psychological health. One foster carer described her monthly call to a play therapist from the clinical support hub as a 'lifeline', and as a result of this support, a potential unplanned move for a child was averted.

On the occasions that unplanned endings for children do occur, supervising social workers do their utmost to ensure that the voice and the welfare of the children remain at the forefront of decision-making. Supervising social workers and managers complete learning reflective sessions as a means to identify areas of development. This informs new learning and future planning, with a strong focus on reducing the number of unplanned placement endings in the agency.

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

The agency has effective links with safeguarding agencies, which helps support and protect the children. Local authority colleagues are positive about the quality of safeguarding practice and partnership working.

Supervising social workers visit foster carers on an unannounced basis at least once per year and regularly spend time alone with the children. Annual health and safety checks, alongside monthly supervision visits, ensure that foster homes are safe places for children to live in.

A central referral hub supports the supervising social workers matching of the foster carers to the children. Foster carers are provided with all the information about the children that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information is provided in a clear, comprehensive written form. This ensures that as much as reasonably possible, foster carers are put forward who have the experience, understanding, and training to meet the needs of children.

Supervising social workers obtain feedback from children, fostering family members, and external professionals in order to inform the foster carers' annual reviews. All required information is submitted to panel members in advance of panel meetings in order to enable full consideration. As a result, foster carers are only approved if they have the necessary experience, training and capabilities to provide the children with safe, comfortable and caring homes.

Foster carers have access to a broad, relevant and accessible training programme. The registered manager has ensured that all the foster carers have completed mandatory training.

The addition of a new online portal, which includes a blend of eLearning and virtual classroom training, means that foster carers can book themselves on and complete at times that are convenient to them. Training is discussed each month with the foster carers as part of their supervision, in order to help embed their learning into practice.

Foster carers, supervising social workers and managers are not afraid to challenge in the child's best interest. There is a strong and proactive response to take action to reduce harm to children.

Managers keep records of safeguarding incidents and practice concerns. This includes any contacts and follow-up actions that are taken. As a result, information is available for the managers' active oversight of any emerging risks or patterns that may arise over a period of time.

Supervising social workers carry out agency risk assessments and safer care plans to support foster carers in meeting the needs of the children in their care. However, some risk assessments are not always updated after significant events.

Overall safeguarding practice is strong. However, in one record sampled, managers did not alert the local authority designated officer of an incident until an allegation had been made at a later date by the child. Nevertheless, managers had taken action to safeguard the child, and the child's social worker had been notified.

There have been two occasions where managers and supervising social workers had not been aware of foster carers using monitoring devices in their homes. The use of these devices had not been agreed with the children's social workers or adequately risk assessed. Consequently, managers could not be confident that the monitoring or surveillance was no more intrusive than necessary, having regard to the child's right to privacy.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager and her dedicated team managers are compassionate and committed to understanding the experiences of the children and foster carers they work with in order to ensure the best possible support and care.

The agency is well staffed. Supervising social workers hold manageable caseloads to ensure that high-quality support is provided to the children and the foster carers. The learning and relationship-based ethos of the organisation supports reflective practice and the staff's ongoing professional development. The arrival of new staff has brought fresh and creative ideas to further improve children's experiences.

The agency has strong, safe recruitment practices. For example, references are verified and gaps in employment are explored. Staff say that they feel valued and appreciated by the managers. New staff undertake a well-planned induction and benefit from buddying with more experienced staff. This ensures that children are cared for by a suitable and safe staff team.

Leaders and managers promote an inclusive and welcoming culture within the agency. Initiatives such as the racial equality café are helping the staff team drive forward the culture in the agency in order to improve equality and diversity in a meaningful way for everyone.

There are several new applicants who are currently in the assessment process. However, foster carer numbers have dropped in the agency since the last inspection. Recruitment initiatives include getting out to the community and using foster carers to promote the agency. Managers and leaders draw on an ongoing national and local recruitment strategy to attract new foster carers, reviewing, and acting on, the current trends and patterns so as to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Foster carers have monthly support groups, and carers representatives feed into management meetings, which are disseminated to the senior leadership team. This helps develop the agency from a foster carer's lens. Consequently, foster carers feel listened to and see that their ideas and suggestions are acted on.

The fostering panel promotes a safe culture through active engagement with the agency. Panel members provide an effective gatekeeping role for ensuring that unsuitable adults do not become foster carers. There are bespoke approval ranges, and no pressure to widen the children's age ranges. The best needs of the children are made when considering matching decisions.

The registered manager has taken effective action to address previous requirements and recommendations. The registered manager ensures that robust action is taken to address complaints and all issues of concern. Leaders and managers identify strengths and areas for improvement and implement clear development plans that continually seek to improve the experiences of the children.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person must ensure that foster carers respect the child's privacy, in a manner that is consistent with good parenting, and ensure that the monitoring or surveillance is no more intrusive than necessary, having regard to the child's need for privacy. In particular, the registered person must ensure that any CCTV system is operated within regulatory guidelines and subject to regular review and consultation with the children's placing local authority. The regulations and guidance relating to CCTV are covered by the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA18). This legislation is regulated by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.5)
- The registered person must ensure allegations against people that work with children or members of the fostering household are reported by the fostering service to the LADO. 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. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.6)
- The registered person must ensure that each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. In particular, ensure children's risk assessments are updated to reflect changes in the household and significant events. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.9)

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: SC423396

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