

Sussex Fostering & Children's Services

Inspection report for Independent Fostering Agency

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Sussex Fostering and Children's Services is an independent fostering agency which operates from Cop Hall House on the outskirts of Polegate, East Sussex. The agency was previously known as Banya Eastbourne and was then part of a larger London agency. Sussex Fostering and Children's Services became independent in 2005 and relocated to their present administrative centre at Cop Hall House. The service is small, having 20 approved fostering households and 18 foster carers. A total of 20 young people had placements with the agency at the time of this inspection. Six foster carers and one young person were met with during the inspection; all contributed their views about the service.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This was an announced full inspection in which all key national minimum standards were assessed. This is a satisfactory service, with some good and some outstanding features.

Carers feel well supported by this agency and speak highly of the staff and management. They report that the agency strives to provide them with a high level of support which allows them to care for young people well and ensure that their needs are met. There are, however, some shortfalls in the organisation of the service that do not fully promote young people's welfare. The agency's staff recruitment policies and procedures are not robust and do not fully promote young people's well-being. Checks do occur, however these do not fully comply with fostering service regulations. Annual reviews do not occur on time, consent to medical treatment is not always clearly understood and there is no written child protection policy.

In other areas there is good practice. This includes: ensuring that young people's health needs are well promoted; ensuring that there are good arrangements for consultation; and preparing young people for independence. The agency works particularly well at ensuring that young people enjoy and achieve. There are excellent arrangements for ensuring that diversity is valued and for ensuring that young people's particular interests are encouraged. Education is valued and strongly encouraged. Staff benefit from good training and development opportunities.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the registered provider was asked to make improvements to the recruitment process for staff and carers. Positive action has been taken to ensure

that correct checks are made regarding the recruitment of carers and this promotes young people's well-being, however, shortfalls remain regarding checks on agency staff and this does not fully protect young people. The registered providers were also asked to ensure that annual reviews for carers occur on time. This has not happened and this does not fully promote young people's welfare.

The registered provider was asked to ensure that all staff receive an annual appraisal, to review the Statement of Purpose and young people's guide and to ensure that carers keep clear records of all measures of control used. Positive action has been taken in all these areas and this goes some way to ensuring that young people are kept safe. The registered provider was also asked to fully record how complaints are handled, to review the carers handbook, to number the pages in the restraint log and to keep an accurate record of medication administered. Action has been taken to improve practice in all of these areas and these steps help to keep young people safe.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people have their health needs promoted and protected through good support from the agency. Carers say that they are given the information they need about young people's health needs and this helps them to meet these needs. One young person said that agency staff had been good at helping him keep healthy. Health needs are reviewed annually at the looked after children's review. The agency has close links with the children and adolescent mental health service which helps to ensure that specific emotional health care needs are met. Carers say that young people are registered with a local General Practitioner and dentist and see these professionals where necessary.

There are safe arrangements for handling medication and this includes keeping a clear written record of any medication administered to young people. Supervising social workers monitor these records at monthly supervisions sessions with carers. Foster carers are trained in first aid and are required to keep a first aid box in the home. The agency provides training to foster carers and staff regarding a range of health care issues such as self harm, alcohol and drugs.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency's staff recruitment policies and procedures are not robust and do not offer good protection to young people using the service. The majority of the staff team do have full recruitment checks, other than references being verified, however, the agency has chosen to use Criminal Records Bureau checks from past employers for two new staff members and furthermore did not see sight of one of these. The

agency has made applications for Criminal Records Bureau checks for both of these employees, however, there have been delays in these being processed. Other checks have occurred regarding these staff members, however, these are not fully in line with fostering regulations, for example, references have not been verified and documentation for one has been lost. The agency has taken positive steps as a result of these shortfalls being identified including obtaining retrospective verification of references and ensuring that staff without a new Criminal Records Bureau check do not work with young people unaccompanied.

The service is managed well in other areas, by suitably qualified and checked individuals. There is an effective panel that serves to monitor the quality of the fostering service and review assessments made of potential foster carers. This helps to ensure a consistent approach in assessment across the service. The panel is made up of professionals from a range of social care backgrounds who have access to medical expertise should this be necessary. The agency is currently making efforts to recruit a panel member who has a background in education. Young people's comfort and safety is promoted as the agency has good systems in place for carrying out health and safety checks in carers homes. These checks occur annually and monitor issues including the warmth, decoration and maintenance of homes. The agency makes good efforts to ensure that young people are appropriately matched with foster carers who can meet their needs. One carer said, 'Sussex Fostering match up families really well to their foster children so there is a really positive and good chance that the placement will be successful.' Placement decisions take into consideration young people's ethnicity and cultural backgrounds. Where young people are placed with families with a different culture than their own, good efforts are made to enable the young people to be provided with care that helps them to develop a positive understanding of their heritage.

Young people are protected from abuse and neglect. All carers and agency staff members have received training in child protection and abuse and are clear about their responsibilities regarding this. However, the agency does not have a written child protection policy and this does not fully promote young people's welfare. Carers are given clear information about appropriate behaviour management and safe care. Some carers say that they have received formal training in behaviour management and that this was interesting and helpful. Management systems are in place to ensure that good practice is followed in relation to any allegations of abuse and to monitor the action taken in relation to this. The agency keeps bullying on the agenda in order to ensure that any incidents of bullying are well handled. Clear guidance is given to carers regarding young people going missing and this helps to keep young people safe.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There are outstanding arrangements in place for helping young people to enjoy and achieve. The fostering service values diversity. Foster carers are made aware of

young people's individual needs and this helps to ensure that these needs are met. Some staff and carers attend training in multi-culturalism and this helps them to be able to promote the needs of young people. There are currently no trans-racial placements. Good practice has been followed by the agency in relation to past trans-racial placements. This has included training for carers and the celebration of young people's cultures. Agency staff maintain professional communication with young people's social workers in order to promote young people's well-being. The agency values young people's individual interests and hobbies and makes excellent efforts to ensure that young people are able to pursue these. Current young people enjoy a wealth of hobbies such as sailing, bowling, ballet, gym, horse riding, street dance and cooking club. The agency provides staff to enable young people to participate in leisure interests and to pursue talents and it runs a variety of activities for young people, including birth children.

The agency values education and strives to ensure that all young people receive education that meets their needs. All current young people are in education. Young people are supported with their homework and some young people visit the office to receive such support from staff. If necessary, staff are made available to sit in class with young people who are struggling at school. Staff work in partnership with local education providers to support young people and this has a positive effect on their learning and well-being. One such partnership has enabled young people to access a virtual school to help them with their education. Staff are available to transport young people to their education where necessary. One carer said, 'They have attended every personal education plan meeting I have been to and have encouraged after school clubs.' Suitable arrangements are in place regarding short breaks.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people's welfare is enhanced through the promotion of appropriate contact by the agency. Carers are clear about contact arrangements as this information is clearly recorded. The agency has recently provided training for foster carers regarding contact.

The agency is good at ensuring that carers and young people are consulted with about the service they receive. Positive relationships have been developed between the agency, carers and young people and this means that there is good informal communication and consultation. A foster carer said, 'I am never scared to pick up the phone.' Another foster carer said of the agency, 'they have been open with us throughout.' And another said, 'they ask if there are things that the foster children would like to do and welcome any suggestions.' Young people often visit the office to meet with staff informally. One young person said, 'I like visiting the office and seeing the staff.' Foster carers, their birth children, placing social workers and foster children are consulted with prior to each fostering service annual review through feedback forms. Their views are then considered by the panel and this helps to

ensure that placements remain appropriate and successful. A supervising social worker said of carers, 'we always allow for questioning and we listen to this.' The agency has recently carried out a questionnaire to gain the views of foster carers and the professionals they work with.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

There are good arrangements for ensuring that young people are prepared for adulthood. All carers are provided with a hand-book that includes information about preparation for independence. Young people have individual independence plans and these help provide them with a wide range of skills to prepare them for adulthood. Support workers, carers and young people are all involved in this process. Training has been provided for some staff regarding helping young people manage their money and training is planned for carers regarding preparation for independence.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

There is satisfactory organisation of this service. This judgement has been made as a result of shortfalls in the management of staff recruitment, however, in other areas there is a strong commitment from the registered provider to providing a high quality service to young people and foster carers. One foster carer said of the agency, 'they are outstanding and have given me great support'. Another carer said, 'they are extremely good and offer very good training to help with everyday issues that occur when fostering.'

There is a Statement of Purpose and young people's guide which provides stakeholders with the information they need about the service. There are good systems of communication between the fostering service and the young people's social workers. One case worker said, 'we talk on the phone a lot, decisions are made jointly'. Staff report good organisation and management in the agency and say that they receive regular and effective supervision. There is on-going training and development for both foster carers and staff members. There is a thorough foster carer recruitment process and this helps to ensure that only suitable people are recruited to care for young people. This is a small agency and this enables staff to provide a high level of support to carers. This support is provided through regular supervision, support groups, training and telephone communication. Staff are always available to attend any professional meetings relating to young people's well-being. A foster carer said, 'they are always on hand to help with any problems, they are wonderful.' The agency reviews each foster carer to ensure their continued suitability to care for young people, however, reviews continue to be scheduled late and this does not fully promote young people's welfare.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Young people are treated as individuals and this ensures that individual needs are met. The matching process pays close attention to young people's needs in relation to their culture, ethnicity, religion and sexual identity. There is generally good monitoring of quality in the service through document checking and obtaining feedback from stakeholders.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
15	ensure that recruitment checks are carried out for all staff members in line with schedule 1 (Regulation 20, Schedule 1)	09/10/2010
12	ensure that a record is kept detailing the arrangements for giving consent for medical or dental examinations or treatment to young people (Regulation 34 (3) Schedule 6)	07/11/2010
17	ensure that foster carers annual reviews are scheduled on time (Regulation 29 (2))	07/11/2010
9	ensure that there is a written policy regarding child protection. (Regulation 12)	07/11/2010

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that the fostering panel has clear written policies and procedures. (NMS 30)