

Fusion Fostering South West

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number 1226630
Inspection date 06/02/2017
Inspector Ms Maddison
Type of inspection Full
Provision subtype Independent fostering agency

Setting address Fusion Fostering, Richmond House, Taunton TA3 6BY

Telephone number 01823 491010
Email gdawkins@fusionfostering.com

Registered manager Miss Julie Billington
Responsible individual Mr Gary Dawkins
Date of last inspection N/A

Service information

Brief description of the service

The South West office of Fusion Fostering undertakes the recruitment, assessment, approval and training of foster carers who care for children aged 0–18 years in the South West region. The agency has 40 foster carers, who are currently caring for 50 children and young people. The agency also operates offices in other regions of England.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency demonstrates significant strengths in its operation and practice. The agency creates and maintains stable and successful placements that meet the diverse needs of the children and young people.

The vast majority of children and young people are making good progress. Children and young people speak highly of their foster carers and report that they feel safe and listened to. Foster carers speak very highly of the exceptionally high-quality support offered to them by the agency.

The quality and stability of placements are recognised by placing authorities and other agencies that value the child-focused and flexible approach of the agency.

Feedback from placing social workers, commissioners and other involved professionals is very positive. One commissioner said, 'This agency is my favourite

provider. They are flexible and child-focused. They put the children's interests first. They offer carers lots of support so placements are stable and do not break down. I can't think of anything they could do better.'

The agency is committed to continual improvement. The minor breaches of national minimum standards found at this inspection have no impact on safeguarding or promoting the welfare of children.

Areas of improvement

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Ensure that when a child needs it, the children's guide is available in an accessible format and that it is available on the internet. (NMS 16.6)
- Ensure that the final assessment reports presented to the fostering panel following the foster carer assessment process are evaluative and robust, rather than descriptive. (NMS 13.4)
- Ensure that regular feedback is obtained from children, young people and foster carers regarding the quality of service being provided by the agency and that this feedback informs the development plan of the agency. (NMS 25.1)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people fostered benefit from stable, appropriate placements where they make progress in all areas of their lives from their starting points. The agency tries to place siblings together if this is their plan. For example, recently the agency provided excellent support to a foster carer to ensure that six siblings were able to be placed together. The effective support provided by the agency involved supplying the foster carers with an additional vehicle, a support worker and daily contact with the foster carers to offer advice and support.

Foster carers report that they receive comprehensive information about the children and young people that are placed with them prior to them moving in. If the placing authority does not provide this information, the agency actively pursues this shortfall to ensure that the foster carers have all the necessary information about the child as soon as possible. This helps the transition of the child or young person into the foster carer's home.

Young people report that they are very happy living with their foster carers. One young person said, 'I love it here. I give my foster carers 10 out of 10.' The agency expects that foster carers ensure that children and young people are fully part of family life and take part in family activities. This helps children and young people to form positive attachments. One young person told the inspector that he was very excited to be going that week with his foster carers to collect a new family puppy that he had helped to name.

The behaviour of young people and children is well managed by the foster carers, with support and assistance from the agency. A psychologist employed by the agency effectively supports foster carers to put effective strategies in place to address any behaviour from children and young people that they are finding difficult to manage.

The healthcare needs of children and young people are met. Foster carers are proactive and seek out specialist services in order to meet their foster child's healthcare needs. For example, by obtaining support and services to address a child's continence needs or self-harming behaviours.

All children and young people are making progress within their individual educational provision. The agency has effective links with virtual headteachers and will actively pursue an educational placement if there is not one when a child arrives in a foster placement. Children and young people are encouraged to join clubs and take part in community activities, for example, swimming, horse riding, army cadets and scouts. This involvement in the community gives them a sense of belonging and promotes their self-esteem.

A strength of the agency is how well all staff know the children placed and their foster carers. Very regular contact is in place between the workers in the agency and the children and foster carers. Foster carers said that they feel listened to. However, the views of children and foster carers about the service are not yet fully captured through formal consultation.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Foster carers work as a valued part of a team of professionals around the child. They attend relevant meetings and are fully involved in planning and decision making. The agency care partner, or supervising social worker, works with the foster carers throughout the process of their recruitment and assessment and so knows the foster carers very well. Foster carers say that they really value this continuity. There is very little turnover of care partners and so the relationships between foster carers and care partners are strong and consistent. These effective working relationships contribute to the good progress and outcomes of children and young people in placement.

The support offered to foster carers is a major strength of this agency. The care partners supervise a maximum of 10 foster carers, so have the time and resources to offer a quality service. Foster carers report, 'There is loads of support. They really go above and beyond. My care partner has stayed in my house until the early hours of the morning to support me to care for a child when we had difficulties.'

The recruitment, assessment and training of foster carers are effective and well established in the service, with clear structures and procedures in place. Most recruitment is achieved through word of mouth, with existing foster carers recommending the agency to others. The agency succeeds in recruiting high calibre foster carers who stay with the agency. The experienced panel chairperson oversees the panel effectively and demonstrates robust decision making and appropriate challenge. The panel and agency decision maker fulfil a quality assurance function which largely ensures robust assessments. Overall, the quality of assessment and annual review is good. However, a very small number of assessments are largely descriptive, rather than being challenging and evaluative.

All carers receive regular supervision and are completing, or have completed, the relevant training requirements in a timely manner. In response to comments from foster carers that training was sometimes not located conveniently, the agency now provides training in a variety of locations. Foster carers report that if they have a particular training need, they can request this and it will be put in place. Additional training has taken place with regard to autism, incontinence and around child sexual exploitation. The care partner assigned to the foster carer holds their own training budget and so any bespoke individual training need can be swiftly assessed and put in place.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people feel safe in their foster home. Safeguarding is given a high priority within the organisation and the agency has robust safeguarding policies and procedures in place. Foster carers are able to refer to clear safer-caring policies and risk assessments to ensure that the children and young people in their care are kept safe. The safeguarding knowledge of foster carers and staff is kept up to date through regular attendance at relevant training.

The agency has strong links with the local authority designated officer for safeguarding, who reports that he has no concerns about the safeguarding actions taken by the agency. Allegations and suspicions of harm are managed well and reported to the relevant authorities as required.

Foster carers spoken with during the inspection demonstrated their good understanding of issues such as those around child sexual exploitation and could report how they would manage these issues. Foster carers have a good understanding of the need to balance the management of risks with ensuring that young people are able to learn from their mistakes as part of growing up. When other agencies are not swiftly reacting to safeguarding issues, the agency and individual foster carers are proactive in pursuing agencies and ensuring that measures are put in place to keep children and young people safe.

Few children and young people go missing. When they do, swift action is taken to try to understand why they are going missing and measures put in place to address this. Foster carers ensure that a return to the home interview is undertaken by an independent person on a young person's return when they have been missing, in accordance with local missing from care protocols.

Foster carers receive at least two unannounced visits to their household each year, in part to look at the safety of the household and to gain an understanding of the child's or young person's experience of living in the home. A report is compiled by the care partner following this visit to inform any risk assessments or plans.

Children, young people and foster carers know how to complain and all commented positively about the open and approachable culture of the service. Any complaint is robustly investigated and the outcome reported back to the complainant to ensure that they are satisfied.

Recruitment procedures have recently been reviewed and subsequently improved to ensure that only suitable persons are employed by the agency. Checks are now thorough and all references are verified. Any gaps in employment are thoroughly checked.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The service is very well led and managed. Foster carers report that the agency has a 'family feel'. The registered manager is suitably qualified and experienced for the role, and demonstrates a very good understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the service. The registered individual, operations manager and registered manager all have a clear vision for the development of the service and are strongly child-focused.

The agency has recently separately registered offices in other parts of the country. The office in the Midlands region has submitted an application to be separately registered with Ofsted and this is underway. It is not yet complete and so the Midlands office and the foster carers there have been scrutinised as part of this inspection.

The agency operates an innovative 'care partner' system. The care partners fulfil the role of supervising social workers but hold their own budgets and are responsible for accompanying people on their fostering journey, from initial introductions to the panel and then when children are placed with them. They hold a budget for the training of foster carers and can buy in specialist services. Foster carers were very positive about this system and really liked the continuity of worker because of the quality of support that it offers them. One foster carer said, 'It is like having your own 999 service. There is always someone there whatever the time who knows you and your situation.'

The service has addressed the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection and there is evidence of continuous improvement in policy and practice. The manager undertakes monthly monitoring to identify patterns and trends. Following this, she produces a report which is part of the quality monitoring process. Any significant events are notified in a timely manner to Ofsted as required by the relevant regulation.

Progress of children and young people is monitored by the manager, who knows all of the children and young people well. The agency does not yet produce an overall report regarding the progress of children and young people placed within the agency, to further inform the evidence about the undoubtable progress each of the children is making.

Supervision, appraisal and performance management systems for staff are in place. The quality and regularity of these systems ensures that staff have the appropriate skills and knowledge to effectively undertake their roles in the agency. Staff turnover is very low, and staff spoke highly of the agency and the very positive morale among both the staff and foster carers, in what is a sometimes very challenging role.

Records are safely kept on the agency's electronic database. This ensures that records are up to date, comprehensive and easily accessible. Currently, work is being undertaken in the development of an app, which will be used to obtain feedback from children, young people and foster carers.

The agency has an up-to-date statement of purpose and children's guide, which children and young people said that they received when they moved into their placement. However, the children's guide is not yet available on the internet or in a format that is accessible to children who have a disability.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.