

Sussex Fostering & Children's Services

Sussex Fostering & Children's Services Limited
Cop Hall House, Bay Tree Lane, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6QN
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Sussex Fostering & Children's Services is an independent fostering agency which currently has 13 fostering households with 14 children and young people placed. Six new fostering households have been recruited in the past year. The fostering agency is privately owned. The range of services includes short-term and long-term placements.

Inspection dates: 5 to 9 February 2018

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| 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 | outstanding |
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 8 October 2013

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The majority of the children and young people are making good progress in long-term placements.
- The children and young people are placed with committed carers who accept them into their wider families.
- The children and young people are kept safe, and significant incidents are rare.
- The agency has an experienced manager who has transformed the agency.
- The agency operates within the ethos of the statement of purpose and evaluates the quality of care provided to the children and young people.
- The agency panel is a strength, as evidenced by the quality of its recommendations.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The agency should encourage carers to regularly attend training.
- The quality of records maintained by foster carers is not yet good.
- The views of children and young people are not systematically sought or acted upon.

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

Recommendations

- Children's views, wishes and feelings are acted upon, unless this is contrary to their interests or adversely affects other members of the foster care household. (NMS 1.4)
- 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. (NMS 20.8)
- Entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed. Non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information and are signed and dated. (NMS 26.5)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children and young people have made good progress as a result of the support provided by their carers from the agency. The children and young people are matched appropriately with carers who can meet their needs while integrating them into their wider family. The majority of the agency placements are stable, long-term placements.

There were 13 active placements at the time of inspection. Some young people have been placed with the same carer for a number of years and a few for less than a year. Several positive interactions between the agency staff, carers and children and young people were observed on inspection. The children and young people are encouraged by their carers to share their views, as evidenced in the minutes of review meetings. However, there are no clear records showing how the agency captures and acts on the wishes and feelings of the children and young people.

The carers document the progress children and young people make in daily logs. The handwritten notes are scanned into the electronic files maintained by the agency and reviewed by the manager. The logs reviewed on inspection were inconsistent, with some lacking detail and others being difficult to comprehend, making it difficult to review information on the daily lives of the children and young people.

The children and young people are in age-appropriate education. Some newly placed children have recently started nursery. The agency has good communication with education professionals, allowing them to remain up to date on attendance and achievements. Some young people are attending college and doing well in their studies. This is as a result of the support they receive, such as carers transporting children and young people quite a distance to schools and colleges to maintain consistency in their education.

The health needs of the children and young people are met in accordance with their local authority health assessments. The children and young people are registered with the appropriate services, and the agency monitors appointment outcomes. The carers carefully log all medication prescribed, along with observations of its impact on the children and young people. This is an improvement in practice that meets a previous recommendation.

The children and young people develop age-appropriate skills. Several young people are able to complete tasks that will assist with their eventual independence. They participate in activities according to their own individual interests, developing their self-confidence at the same time. The children and young people improve their social skills by engaging with friends in the community and enjoying planned holidays with their carers.

The agency is proactive in assisting carers to support the contact that the children and young people have with their birth families. This positive approach helps young people maintain relationships crucial to their identity and culture whenever possible. The ability of one carer to support contact arrangements three times weekly for a sibling group was highlighted by the agency as a good example of its carers'

commitment to this.

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

The agency's commitment to keeping the children and young people safe is evident by the low number of significant events that have occurred over a three-year period.

A social worker was of the opinion that, 'The agency takes all concerns seriously and promptly addresses any matter.' The agency has provided carers with the tools to confidentially address any concerns that arise through clear policies, procedures and training.

Children and young people are safe and protected by their carers. The agency's ability to monitor placements through routine announced and unannounced visits, along with supervision of carers, has established a good safeguarding reputation among professionals. A social worker complimented the agency for providing safe and secure placements.

The children and young people seldom go missing. The small number of incidents reviewed on inspection had been managed appropriately by the agency. In addition, the agency is knowledgeable about child sexual exploitation and radicalisation, despite no current identified risk.

The children and young people are benefiting from carers who are patient when they exhibit behavioural difficulties. Risk assessments provide guidance to carers to assist with their management of negative behaviours; however, it is their ability to listen and engage with the children and young people that provides the best intervention.

There is a strong response by the agency when dealing with allegations against a carer. There is good cooperative working with all professionals. A recent incident was managed extremely well by the manager, with the children and young people concerned receiving respite care and approval of the carer placed on hold until the matter was concluded.

The manager has evidenced that the agency swiftly addresses concerns about a carer's practice that may place a child at risk. Opportunities are provided for the carer to understand the concerns and work with the agency. When carers are not cooperative, standard of care issues are raised and an extraordinary case review report is independently undertaken. A social worker said, 'I was well informed regarding a recent standard of care investigation and reassured that their primary concern was the children's safety and well-being, rather than maintaining a placement for financial gain.'

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The recently registered manager, who has been in post since late 2016, has many exceptional attributes. She previously managed a larger fostering agency and has utilised her knowledge and experience to improve the quality of care provided to the children and young people. The directors hold the manager in high regard, entrusting in her ability to make sound decisions. The manager has managed 12 of the 13 placements, successfully recruited six carers and provided training, all to a high standard, while also undertaking her management responsibilities and

incorporating numerous positive changes.

Commissioning officers speak highly of the agency and the good quality of care provided to children and young people. The agency communication with placement officers prior to placement gives careful consideration to matching and expectations. Even in emergency situations, the referral process is thorough, concerning information is widely considered and the manager, without hesitation, will refuse placements deemed unsuitable.

The manager has developed good-quality relationships with carers and professionals. New carers speak highly of their engagement with the manager during their recruitment and after being approved. A new carer stated that the manager contacted her within two hours of making an online enquiry and then provided a personal visit a week later, which really helped her to feel at ease about her decision to foster. A social worker documented her views of the agency and stated, 'I cannot find any fault with the agency and the level of professionalism displayed.' A placing officer said, 'We deal with a lot of agencies and I am very impressed with the services provided by the agency. The registered manager has been very helpful and demonstrated she is child-centred.'

The manager is able to monitor each individual placement effectively. As the allocated supervising social worker, the manager has positively influenced the placements. She attends all meetings and regularly visits placements, both announced and unannounced. In addition, the manager has provided consistent monthly supervision to carers and independent supervising social workers. This practice has allowed her to develop an in-depth understanding of how the needs of the children and young people are being met.

The manager provides carers with the required training at regular intervals. The majority have completed the training, support and development standards, as required, and had a review of their care arrangements. The training for carers is made available online and through group training. The face-to-face training classes never reach full capacity, with only 50% of carers attending. The training records for a few carers evidenced that some had not undertaken training for some time. The manager was aware of the concern; however, efforts to engage the carers in training were not sufficiently robust.

The panel has become a strength of the agency since being completely overhauled by the manager. The successful recruitment six months ago of a panel chair and new members with a high level of expertise has allowed for informed recommendations that the agency decision-maker rarely disagrees with. The panel meticulously analyses all information presented and reconvenes to consider updates prior to making any recommendations.

The manager ensures that the agency is operating within the ethos outlined in the statement of purpose. The document remains current and, combined with the agency website, provides useful information to external stakeholders. The recruitment of carers is very well managed and their assessments are completed by an experienced independent social worker.

The manager has provided a comprehensive quality of care report that clearly provides an overview of the agency, outlining strengths and weaknesses, along with action points. Quality and performance information is submitted to Ofsted annually

by the managers.

The manager has met the recommendations made at the last inspection. As a result of this inspection, there have been only three minor recommendations made to improve the quality of service.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC062839

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Inspector

James Harmon, social care inspector



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