

Three Circles Fostering Limited

Dean Row Court, Sommerfields Village Centre, Dean Row Road, Wilmslow, Cheshire
SK9 2TB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is privately owned. It currently provides foster placements for 126 children in 98 fostering households. The agency provides long-term, short-term, parent-and-child, emergency, bridging and respite foster placements.

There is a registered manager who has been in post since the service was registered in 2012.

Inspection dates: 9 to 12 March 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

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

Date of last inspection: 24 April 2017

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 make very good progress because they are placed with this agency. They feel part of their fostering families and have good relationships with their foster carers.

There is a strong focus on children. Placing authorities, agency staff, children and external professionals all expressed this view. This helps the children to feel that they are cared about.

There is good support for foster carers to help them to provide stable and caring homes in which children can flourish. Foster carers spoke about how included and valued they feel. Some carers described the agency as being 'like a family'. The foster carers are treated as professionals. Foster carers' own families are fully included in the support and activities of the agency.

The agency and carers help the children to learn independence skills. The agency has a specific programme to help with this. Many children can stay with their foster families after they become 18. There is a 'staying in touch' programme in place for those young people who do not want to stay with their foster families, so that they get some continued support. The agency has a strong and ongoing commitment to children after they reach the age of 18 years. One young person spoke about the real difference that the ongoing support has made to them and their mental health.

Children have normal, caring, family experiences. The foster carers encourage and support the children to take part in community-based activities. Several children identified this as one of the things that they like about the agency.

There is a children's engagement team that works innovatively with children and young people in the agency. Because of the work that the team does, the children feel included and listened to. The team also provides support and signposts children and young people to resources on topics such as sexual orientation and diversity. This is a real area of strength.

The engagement team, the wider agency and foster carers advocate for the children, including those who are very vulnerable, such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, to make sure that they get the services that they need and that they are listened to.

The agency has strong links with an education support service that is part of the same organisation. Representatives from this service support children and attend all education meetings. They help the children with CVs and university applications. Their input makes a significant difference to the children's and young people's educational outcomes. Children who are excluded from school get education support immediately. This helps them to maintain their educational achievement and supports their placements.

New foster carers feel welcomed and supported. This includes carers who are new to fostering and carers who have chosen to transfer from other agencies.

In the recent past, a foster carer was using closed-circuit television (CCTV) in their home. There was some agency oversight of this. However, there are no clear guidelines on how CCTV may be used and how its use should be reviewed to make sure that children's privacy is not unnecessarily affected.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

The children said that they feel safe in their foster homes. They have people whom they are comfortable to talk to, and supervising social workers see the children regularly. This all helps to protect the children.

Risk assessments are in place and are mostly used appropriately, although there are a couple of exceptions to this. In one case, the risk assessment of a child who had previously made false allegations did not address the possibility that future allegations may be true. In the other case, the potential impact of an adult [part of a parent-and-child placement] on other children already in placement was not included. In most cases, risk assessments are being used to protect children effectively, but the shortfalls above do limit this.

Several designated officers said how well the agency manages safeguarding concerns and works effectively with them. In general, foster carers feel confident in responding to safeguarding concerns. However, in one case, a foster carer had begun to ask the child questions before referring the concern to the agency, and in another case, a foster carer did not pass on information in a timely way. If everyone does not know and follow the procedure, there is a potential for delays in investigating concerns. This limits the safeguards for children.

The agency supports foster carers well to manage children's risk-taking behaviour, including going missing, being at risk of exploitation, drug misuse and radicalisation. Foster carers appreciate the additional training that they receive and the advice from the agency, which they said is always available. Some children's risk-taking behaviour has reduced significantly because of the work done by their foster carers and the agency.

Foster carers help the children to take age-appropriate risks in a safe and controlled way. Examples of this include going to camps with groups such as army cadets, and going away to university. When children have struggled with managing risks, the carers have supported them and got them into a position from which they can try again. This gives the children a good level of independence and helps them to learn how to keep themselves safe.

The agency provides support for foster carers to help them when children's behaviour may put strain on their placements. The agency uses external clinical support to help carers to understand specific behaviours, so that they do not feel

overwhelmed. Carers appreciate the advice that they get from their supervising social workers.

In one case, the need for physical intervention has been agreed with the placing authority and is included in the child's plans. The carers have had training so that they can hold the child safely. All incidents are recorded and copies are sent to placing social workers so that there is good oversight. Supervising social workers speak to foster carers after incidents of physical intervention. In one case, the records of the discussion between the supervising social worker and the foster carer were not sufficiently detailed to show that all issues had been discussed.

Managers make sure that recruitment checks on potential staff are comprehensive. They follow up fully any issues that arise and use risk assessment to help them to decide whether applicants are suitable and safe to work with children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The leaders and managers in this agency want really good outcomes for the children. They are ambitious for, and passionate about the children whom they look after. Several external professionals spoke about the agency's strong focus on children.

Commissioners from placing authorities spoke about how well the agency matches children with foster carers and shares information. This helps to make sure that children have fewer moves due to placement breakdowns. Commissioners also spoke about how the agency will try to find suitable foster carers for children who may be harder to place, giving these children the chance of family life.

There are strong working relationships between the agency, designated officers and placing authorities, but this does not stop the agency from challenging placing authorities in a professional way when it needs to.

Foster carers feel very well supported by the agency. This helps them to sustain placements and achieve good outcomes for the children. Agency staff provide regular supervision for foster carers, but sometimes the recording is not detailed enough to provide a clear record of expectations. This is part of a more general theme relating to records. Mostly they are good, but in a minority of cases, they do not provide enough detail. Some foster carers have not kept regular records of children's daily lives. This limits the effectiveness of monitoring and oversight, and limits the information that is available for any children who wish to see their records now or in the future.

Supervising social workers have regular supervision themselves and feel very well supported. As with foster carer supervisions, some of these supervision records do not detail clearly enough the discussions and ongoing expectations. This has the potential to hamper staff development.

The quality of foster carers' training is an issue that the manager had identified as needing improvement. Several foster carers said that they have seen a notable

improvement in the quality of training. Supervising social workers said that they have good training opportunities. If there is training they need, they can access it. This attention to good training helps to equip staff and foster carers to work effectively and promote good outcomes for children.

The manager has good oversight of the service. He carries out regular monitoring and identifies areas for improvement. Several external professionals commented on how the agency is proactive, 'constantly trying to evolve and improve practice'. Because of this, the outcomes for children are good.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Recommendations

- Foster carers respect the child's privacy and confidentiality, in a manner that is consistent with good parenting. (National Minimum Standards 3.5)

In particular this relates to clarifying the arrangements for the use of any CCTV in foster homes.

- The service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. (National Minimum Standards 4.5)

- All foster carers, fostering service staff and volunteers understand what they must do if they receive an allegation or have suspicions that a person may have:

- behaved in a way that has, or may have, harmed a child;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
- behaved towards a child in a way that indicates he or she is unsuitable to work with children.

(National Minimum Standards 22.1)

In particular, this relates to passing on information in a timely way.

- Staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and to take action when needed. (National Minimum Standards 26.2)

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: SC443768

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Inspectors

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