

Foster Care Associates South East

Office 17, Fleming Court Business Centre, Leigh Road, Eastleigh, Hampshire SO50 9YN

Monitoring inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Foster Care Associates (FCA) South East is a regional branch of a large, privately owned independent fostering agency FCA. The agency provides emergency, short-term, long-term and parent-and-child placements for children of all ages.

The manager became registered with Ofsted on 19 April 2018.

Inspection date: 3 November 2020

Date of previous inspection: 13 August 2018

This monitoring inspection

This inspection was undertaken in response to concerns being identified by Ofsted, for the welfare and safety of children at another of the provider's services. The purpose of this inspection was to establish whether the failings identified at the other service were potentially systemic, leading to the safety and well-being of children placed by this agency being compromised.

The inspection was conducted remotely because of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. The inspector reviewed documentary evidence submitted by the registered manager and responsible individual. In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with the registered manager, the responsible individual and two members of staff. Two foster carers were also spoken to, and two local authority social workers provided their professional views about the quality of care being provided.

The senior leadership team and the registered manager have taken prompt and effective action to assess the strengths and weaknesses of this agency. A new responsible individual became registered with Ofsted on 9 October 2020, and he quickly established whether the practice that led to children being put at risk of harm at the other service were being repeated here. This was followed up by on-site monitoring activity, led by senior managers and an independent person, to identify

areas for development. These processes effectively established that children were not likely to come to harm because of poor practice within the agency.

There has been a well-coordinated approach to ensuring that lessons from the failures at the other service have been disseminated to managers, staff and foster carers. Care has been taken to ensure that staff and foster carers are familiar with changes in policies and procedures. They have been provided with advice, guidance and access to resources to assist in developing their knowledge and skills in some aspects of childcare. Despite this overall good practice, one recently updated policy, pertaining to the observation of babies' sleeping arrangements, lacked clarity regarding timescales. This was addressed by the responsible individual during this monitoring inspection.

The agency's quality assurance and monitoring systems are fit for purpose and are being implemented effectively. The monitoring of serious incidents is particularly strong and provides a clear record of concerns and actions taken. The registered manager ensures that recommendations resulting from service monitoring processes are acted on in a timely way. The registered manager also promotes a strong culture of learning from mistakes and provides clear guidance and expectations of staff to ensure that any mistakes are not repeated.

Action has been taken to improve the quality of child-specific safe care plans. The focus has been on ensuring that the shortfalls identified elsewhere in the organisation are not repeated here. Safe care plans have been reviewed, and recent updates made indicate that staff maintain appropriate professional curiosity and anticipate emerging and potential risks to children's safety.

There has been less of a focus on children's individual risk assessments and developing effective strategies to mitigate against risk. Some risk assessments fail to specify clear strategies and make statements about the risk, rather than what can be done to minimise the impact. In one case, an assumption of a young person's view of risk has been made in the risk assessment. Some risk assessments do not reflect the measures that are being taken to support children reduce their unsafe behaviours. The quality of the individual risk assessments undermines the overall impact of effective risk management.

Shortfalls in the quality of risk assessments were identified at the last full inspection in August 2018 and a requirement was made. This requirement has not been met and is now repeated.

The staff and foster carers spoken to during this inspection gave a positive account of the guidance and support that they receive to be successful in their role. The support to foster carers providing parent and child placements is particularly effective and provides many opportunities for developing practice and sharing learning. The support given to the registered manager has been variable. Although the registered manager feels supported, there has recently been a period of five months when formal supervision was not provided. In the most recent supervision

notes there is no indication that safeguarding concerns were explored in detail. The registered manager's annual appraisal is also overdue.

The new responsible individual acknowledged the shortfalls in relation to the registered manager's supervision. During this inspection, he was able to demonstrate that action had been taken to improve practice in this area. The responsible individual also provided information regarding plans to further strengthen monitoring and evaluation processes within the organisation.

This was a focused monitoring inspection and four new recommendations have been made in respect of areas of practice reviewed during the process. As not all aspects of practice were examined, the requirements and recommendations made at the last full inspection are also repeated in this report.

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.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals.</p> <p>The use of any measures of control, restraint or discipline in respect of children accommodated in a foster home. (Regulation 35(1)(a) Schedule 6(8))</p>	31/10/2018
<p>Ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that risk assessments and associated documents detail all known risks and vulnerabilities and are explicit about the strategies to be used to support children to keep safe.</p>	07/12/2020

Recommendations

- Children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. (NMS 1.3) In particular, ensure that action is taken in response to children's expressed concerns.
- 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) In particular, ensure that where training is identified as a need for foster carers in the matching process this is achieved in good time.
- Foster carers encourage children to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up. Children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe, including when outside of the household or when using the internet or social media. (NMS 4.4) In particular, ensure that where there are restrictions in place there is evidence that all required parties have been involved in the decision-making and that the restriction has been reviewed to ensure that it remains appropriate.
- Assessment and appraisal of all staff involved in fostering work takes account of identified skills needed for particular roles and is used to identify

individuals' learning and development needs. (NMS 23.5) In particular, ensure that the objectives set focus on staff development and include timescales.

- Being able to promote positive behaviour and manage children's behaviour well are central to the quality of care provided in any foster home. Negative behaviour should usually be managed through building positive relationships with children. Foster carers need to be able to respond positively to each child or young person's individual behaviour and to be skilled at both defusing difficult situations and avoiding situations escalating. The child's placement plan must set out any specific behavioural issues that need to be addressed or approaches to be used. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4, paragraph 3.96)
- The manager exercises effective leadership of the staff and operation, such that the fostering service is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible childcare that meets the individual needs of each fostered child and of foster carers. (NMS 17.5) In particular, consider whether there is a potential conflict of interest in the registered manager acting as decision-maker.
- Panel/s provide a quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented to panel. (NMS 14.2) In particular, develop a formal system for the assessment manager to receive feedback on the quality of assessments from the panel.
- The wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. (NMS 1.7) Specifically, ensure that documents specifying children's views are an accurate reflection of what the child has said.
- Suitable arrangements exist for professional supervision of the agency's registered person or manager of a local authority fostering service. (NMS 24.3) Specifically, ensure the registered manager's supervision takes place within the timescales specified in the agency's statement of purpose, and that safeguarding matters are explored within the supervision sessions.
- All staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually and, where they are working with children, this appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for. (NMS 24.6) Specifically, ensure that the registered manager's annual appraisal is completed in a timely way.
- There are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This includes the financial viability of the service, any serious incidents, allegations or complaints about the service and ensuring the quality of the service. (NMS 25.1) This is with specific reference to ensuring that organisational policies give clear direction on the timescales for suitably qualified members of staff to see children, and their sleeping arrangements.

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this visit was to monitor the action taken and the progress made by the independent fostering agency since its last Ofsted inspection.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC039271

Registered provider: Foster Care Associates Limited

Registered provider address: Malvern View, Saxon Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 4AD

Responsible individual: John Platt

Inspector

Stephen Collett, social care inspector

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