

# Action for Children Fostering South East

Action for Children

Dundee House, 23-26 Albion Place, Ramsgate, Kent CT11 8HQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Action for Children is a family placement project run by a national charitable organisation. The agency is one of several fostering services that this organisation has registered with Ofsted. Action for Children offers a range of families to meet the needs of children who have experienced difficulties and disruption. At the time of the inspection, there were 17 approved fostering households looking after 12 children.

The manager was registered with Ofsted in February 2013.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

### Inspection dates: 18 to 22 October 2021

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **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:** 4 July 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**

The children are well cared for by carers who are trained and supported by staff and managers whose focus is on the children's safety and well-being.

The children take part in a wide range of activities and develop a broad set of interests. They are encouraged to take part in communal events, such as charity work during the COVID-19 restrictions. The children enjoy agency-run participation events, which offer them the opportunity to share their experiences with other children in a similar situation to their own.

The children are helped to engage with professionals outside of the agency, such as advocates and independent visitors. They are encouraged to express their views, wishes and feelings through contributions to foster carers' annual reviews and their care plan reviews. This ensures that they feel listened to and know that their views matter.

The children are well prepared for their futures. The agency's transition worker has been instrumental in providing children with guidance and practical help to apply for employment, college and university. Children have benefited from a high level of support, for example, helping them move into semi-independent living during the pandemic. This has reduced the negative emotional experiences during the restrictions. The positive impact of the transition worker was demonstrated with one child who was disengaging. He is now enrolled at college and socialising with his carers and friends again.

The number of unplanned placement endings has reduced. The children are carefully matched with their foster carers and, overall, this is successful. However, some records are very brief and do not provide evidence of the information shared with foster carers. This is being addressed by the agency. The records have been revised and a clinical psychologist's initial assessment now informs the matching process.

The fostering panel is provided with thorough and detailed assessment documentation relating to prospective carers. This process is quality assured to ensure that there is consistency and continual improvement. The agency decision-maker is experienced in undertaking this role and is able to challenge decisions made if necessary. Only well-prepared, safe and suitable carers are approved to provide care for children.

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

Children's needs are understood by supervising social workers and foster carers. They identify risks, which are mitigated by safety plans, and agree safety measures. They work closely with external professionals to protect children from accessing risky internet sites. However, they are not risk averse and allow children to take responsibility, to demonstrate they are able to use social media safely.

Foster carers have all been trained in de-escalation techniques to prevent the need for physical restraint. However, if this is necessary, and as a last resort, they are trained to intervene safely. The revised behaviour management policy clearly states the parameters and expectations of the agency.

The children rarely go missing from foster households. When they do, carers quickly respond, to search for and locate the children. They liaise with people known to the children and report them missing to the authorities in line with the child's missing-from-home protocol. The children are welcomed on their return and are given the opportunity to talk to an independent person.

The agency places an emphasis on safeguarding, ensuring that there are systems in place to keep children safe. Any safeguarding matters are investigated and lessons learned exercises undertaken. However, there is not a running record which allows information to be easily accessed. This makes the process of internal and external monitoring difficult.

The agency staff follow safer recruitment practices which are overseen by the manager. People employed by the agency are checked as suitable. The carers are involved in the interview process which enhances this process and gives the carers a sense of involvement and ownership in this process.

Each fostering household has a safer care policy, which reviews any risks or areas to address. Plans and written agreements regarding supervision levels are agreed with parents in parent and child placements. However, these agreements are not always revised to reflect new arrangements.

Professional relationships between agency workers and external professionals ensure that children are safe, and are generally positive. The managers share information, undertake investigations and feed back the outcome. Appropriate safety measures are taken to protect the child and consider the safety of any other children in the household. There have been some occasions when there has been a delay in notifying Ofsted. In addition, in a case where the social worker was aware of a complaint and an allegation that were retracted, a consultation with the designated officer had not been initiated. In these instances, children have been safeguarded. However, good practice has not been followed.

The introduction of weekly safeguarding meetings between the manager and operations manager is an additional quality assurance process which has improved oversight of safeguarding matters. In addition, a safeguarding tracker tool highlights any trends, to inform training gaps.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The agency is managed by an experienced registered manager who knows the carers and children well. He monitors the progress of the children and can support carers when supervising social workers are absent.

The senior management team is instrumental in developing the service. The quality assurance role has brought about improvements in a number of areas, including carers' assessments and training. The training for carers and staff in therapeutic responses is in its early stages. However, this has been well received by staff and carers. The senior management team is ambitious, with a good insight into how to improve the service.

Foster carers receive regular formal supervisions in addition to regular, sometimes daily, contact in times of crisis. All carers spoken to report a high level of effective help and support from the supervising social workers. The support was described as 'phenomenal' and 'an incredible amount of back-up'. The consultation with the clinical psychologist has been an additional asset to carers, who value the insight into trauma and attachment issues.

Foster carers have continued to meet monthly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual meetings have been well received and attended by the foster carers. The use of foster carer ambassadors, who meet with senior managers on behalf of the carers' group, is effective in bringing about positive change. This is a forum for foster carers to have input and improve the agency.

The agency has identified that training is an area for them to develop. All carers have engaged in a range of training, including in equality and diversity. There are now additional resources for carers to use with children regarding safe social media use. The foster carers stated that the training has been plentiful and readily available during the pandemic.

Senior managers respond appropriately to allegations or complaints made about carers. However, there was one occasion when there was significant delay in a matter being reviewed at the fostering panel, which meant that the carer had an unacceptable wait for the outcome. This shortfall was recognised by the senior managers and improvements in oversight by the quality assurance processes are in place to ensure that this is not repeated.

## 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
If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the person or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))	31 December 2021

### Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children are carefully matched to a foster placement. Foster carers should have full information about the child (as set out in standard 3.9). This is with specific reference to ensuring that records clearly demonstrate how matching decisions have been made. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 11.2)
- The registered person should ensure that a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a particular member of the fostering household, or staff member, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken and the decisions reached, is kept on the person's confidential file. This is with specific reference to ensuring that there is a clear chronology on file following safeguarding issues and serious incidents. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.7)
- The registered person should ensure that as soon as possible after an investigation into a foster carer is concluded, their approval as suitable to foster is reviewed. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.8)
- The registered person should support foster carers to play an active role in agreeing the contents of each child's placement plan, in conjunction with the responsible authority. This is with specific reference to ensuring that a written agreement is in place confirming contact arrangements and the process for any changes. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 31.1)

## **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:** SC038534

**Registered provider:** Action for Children

**Registered provider address:** Action for Children, 3 The Boulevard, Ascot Road, Watford WD18 8AG

**Responsible individual:** Debbie Tomlinson

**Registered manager:** Kevin White

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## **Inspector**

Suzy Lemmy, Social Care Inspector

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