

Blue Sky Fostering

Blue Sky Fostering Limited

Broadwater House, Broadwater Road, Romsey, Hampshire SO51 8GT

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency is privately owned and operated. At the time of this inspection, there were 219 approved fostering households providing care for a total of 248 children and young people across the south of England, in short-term, long-term, parent and child, emergency, disabled children and bridging placements.

In addition, the agency offers a therapeutically led care (TLC) service through some of its carers. This provides placements for children who have experienced emotional abuse or trauma, or who have behavioural issues. The agency also provides direct work with families, which aims to help some children to return to live with them.

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.

We last visited this setting on 18 and 19 February 2021 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 24 to 28 January 2022

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 23 October 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are looked after by foster carers who are caring, encouraging and compassionate. Children are treated as part of the family and made to feel included. The excellent relationship between all who care for the children means that they make good progress. Professionals are consistent in their views of carers and words such as 'nurturing', 'aspirational' and 'excellent advocates' were used to describe the care they provide to children.

Foster carers receive training to meet the specific needs of children that they care for. Care is individualised and carers feel well supported by the agency to advocate on behalf of the children. Because of this, some children have made significant progress with their health and education. For example, two children are now able to communicate with their carers and eat independently, which they were not able to do previously.

Foster carers who provide therapeutically led care receive in-depth training and therapeutic sessions themselves. This strengthens their skills. They are part of a team that supports the child's emotional and psychological well-being. This results in significant progress and development for children.

Children's views and wishes are well known. There are several ways that these are learned. Supervising social workers make keen efforts to engage and build relationships with children to ensure that their voice is heard. Clear efforts are made to communicate with non-verbal children. A diverse range of participation activities means that children can have fun and learn while also having the opportunity to give their views about their care. This helps children to feel connected to the agency and to know that their views are valued.

Children have high-quality experiences that help to enhance their progress and development. The memory book produced by a TLC worker for 2021 was exceptional in recording the varied experiences offered to a particular child. Throughout the COVID-19 restrictions, a menu of activities offered by the agency to families and children meant that they also had fun while learning; for example, online quiz nights and a Black Lives Matter information evening for children which helped to promote their awareness of the world around them.

Children are well prepared for their futures. Foster carers provide excellent support and in one situation advocated strongly for a child in their education and college. Children are involved in their pathway planning, and this means that they know what will be happening when they leave education or care. The agency offers training and development projects to children that promotes their independence. This enables children to feel involved and in control of their futures.

Foster carers recognise the value of continued family relationships and despite the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, they support children to have time with family and those who are important to them.

The fostering panel is an additional strength of this agency. It consists of suitably qualified and experienced members who contribute effectively. The assessment of prospective carers is analysed to ensure that they are suitable in their role as foster carers. The needs of children are always the focus of assessments and decision-making. Good analysis and exploration of risk factors means that only well-prepared, safe and suitable carers are approved to provide care to children.

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

There is a very sound understanding and identification of risks and the management of this is effective. Risk assessments are individualised and reflect the needs of each child. They are reviewed and updated regularly to reflect the current issues and to highlight areas of changing risk. Additional tools, such as daily monitoring records, are used to give oversight on children receiving therapeutically led care. This provides an opportunity to monitor the stability and effectiveness of this care.

Staff and foster carers report that the agency's practice is safe and that through training they have an enhanced understanding of various aspects of safeguarding. This begins with the matching process and keeps pace with trends through links to specialist experts in a range of fields. For example, agency staff consulted with the child criminal exploitation lead in a national charity in order to increase their understanding of supporting children who may be at risk in this area.

Staff and foster carers work to keep children safe and reduce risk. Consequently, one foster carer tenaciously pursued professionals to take steps necessary to reduce self-harm for a non-verbal child and another carer confidently worked to reduce the episodes of going missing of the child in their care. The agency also uses a range of media productions to educate children about how to keep themselves safe. As a result of this focus on safety, children become increasingly safe.

The preparation of foster carers is thorough and is a strength of this agency. Training from the outset provides a wide range of opportunities to discuss the complexities of safeguarding and child protection. Foster carers are provided with cards that give snapshot guidance on actions to take in specific situations. This means that children are cared for by foster carers who have tools to provide safe care confidently. This also supports the development of learning of children through age-appropriate risk-taking.

Training in the management of behaviour focuses on de-escalation and the use of models that promote secure attachments. This discourages children from negative behaviour. Physical interventions are used infrequently; where they are used, this is in accordance with an agreed plan. Sanctions are monitored by the supervising social worker to ensure that they are appropriate.

Exceptionally strong safeguarding arrangements are in place to protect children and promote their welfare. Weekly safeguarding meetings are in place where concerns about children are reviewed and escalated to the responsible authority where necessary. The fortnightly review of children receiving therapeutically led care and the oversight by the TLC lead mean that children become increasingly safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers model a high degree of ambition for the children in their care, with a focus on ensuring that the right foster carers provide care to the right child. This creates an environment where children flourish. Leaders and managers keep children at the centre of the work that they do and as a result, children make exceptional progress.

Leaders and managers have strong systems in place to monitor the progress of children. They take effective action to ensure that children continue to make progress. All children's achievements are celebrated, and this encourages continued growth and development.

Leaders and managers provide a strong and supportive environment for staff. Because of this, staff morale is high. Staff said that they feel well supported by managers. Leaders and managers are available, which means that staff feel able to access support or advice at any level if needed. Supervisions are consistent and of good quality. Staff induction programmes are exceptional and help them to learn and develop in order to make a consistent contribution and maintain high standards.

There is significant investment in the staff team. Staff strengths are recognised, and they are supported to attend training that strengthens their development and ability to share relevant skills. The assessed and supported year of employment programme equips supervising social workers effectively. Some leave to gain additional experience and then return, which is a testament to the quality and impact of support to staff.

The highly effective monitoring at several levels which is passed to the registered manager provides for an environment where she knows what is always happening and acts if necessary.

Leaders and managers have strong professional relationships both within the agency and externally. All professionals spoken to said, without exception, that their working relationship with the agency was positive. Staff are present at all meetings and know the carers and children in their care well. There is a strong relationship between leaders and commissioners. They meet regularly to review the quality of care provided to children whose care is therapeutically led. The education lead has close links with the virtual school and special educational needs departments.

Leaders and managers actively promote equality and diversity. They provide strong therapeutic support to carers where this is needed. They are currently reviewing

their Fun Days to make these more accessible to disabled children and their 'We Foster Too' group means that children of carers are involved in all the activities provided for fostered children.

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: SC064220

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