

Action for Children Family Breaks Devon & Fostering Southwest Peninsula

Action for Children

8 Powderham House, Park Five, Harrier Way, Exeter EX2 7HU

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is operated by a national registered charity which provides a wide range of services for children and families. The Family Breaks service currently has 11 fostering households and 14 children. The Fostering Southwest Peninsula fostering service currently has 23 fostering households and 20 children.

The service provides a range of fostering services. These include a short-breaks service and short-term, long-term and emergency care for children who may have complex care needs.

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: 28 March to 31 March 2022

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: 5 February 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency has managed the impact of COVID-19 well. Carers have felt well supported throughout the pandemic, despite the implementation of national lockdowns. Many of the carers who inspectors spoke with provided positive feedback regarding the good standard of support they receive from staff at the agency.

Children go to school or college and engage in their education. One child who is in a longer-term foster home is not in school or further education. The child is being supported to develop a small business.

Two young people are benefiting from remaining with their carers post the age of 18. The manager told inspectors that carers are provided with the appropriate support and training to meet the needs of these young people.

There are very few unplanned endings for children. Moves are well planned and ensure that children experience positive changes with the support of foster carers.

Overall, children are seen and spoken with during supervising social worker visits to carers. Good narratives of children's lived experiences can be seen in recordings. Staff know children well, which is reflected in considered and insightful care planning.

Children's views are regularly sought and acted on. The agency has a skilled participation lead who works with children. They help them to share their experiences and their thoughts on how to improve the service for children.

The Children's Guide is a detailed document that includes everything that a child needs to know about moving to a foster placement. However, its format is not child-friendly.

Multi-agency working is of a good standard. A local authority social worker commented, 'Action for Children have gone above and beyond to support the placements to achieve placement stability, allowing the children to feel secure and belonging.'

A new approach towards psychological input was implemented in April 2021. A clinical psychologist is in the process of completing formulation assessments on all children. This helps to promptly identify any therapeutic needs and to support carers to promote children's mental well-being. Feedback received from some carers highlights the positive impact this has had on their parenting.

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

Safeguarding practice is of a good standard. Any allegations or concerns are managed well and are acted upon in a timely way. Furthermore, supervising social

workers escalate matters when the local authority does not respond promptly to concerns or requests for support.

Overall, safer care planning is of a good standard. When required, risk assessments are completed to ensure that significant issues are carefully explored and purposeful risk reduction measures are outlined. This supports carers to meet the individual needs of children and keep them safe.

Physical interventions are rarely used. However, the child's perspective of an incident has not always been sought. This means that the child's experiences are not fully considered when assessing the appropriateness of each response or when understanding how to prevent further incidents.

Carers know how to use the out-of-hours system when children are at risk of harm. They receive prompt and practical support from the agency to ensure that children are kept safe. Carers told inspectors that the staff always offer immediate support that is useful, particularly when other emergency services are slow to respond.

When children go missing from care, carers follow a clear and prompt plan of action to ensure that children are located and returned home safely. There is good communication with other agencies to ensure that children are kept safe. Carers respond sensitively and compassionately when children return home.

Care planning for children with complex health needs is of a good standard. Restrictive practices, such as the use of stair gates for older children, are fully considered and reviewed in line with children's needs. This ensures that the least restrictive approach is taken.

The agency has developed safe practices within parent and child placements. Supervising social workers understand risks well, and concerns are immediately discussed with the local authority. Plans are reviewed regularly to ensure they continue to keep children safe. Foster carers are experienced and skilled in managing the needs of the family. Parents with learning needs are well supported. Foster carers ensure that parents fully understand what is expected of them.

There is inconsistency regarding the completion of matching assessments. The impact of a new child moving into a home is not always explored from the perspective of all children and the subsequent capacity of carers to meet each child's individual needs. Some good examples of matching children on an individual basis with their carers can be seen.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is a strong advocate for children. They have an encyclopaedic knowledge of each child in the agency's care. The best interests of children are at the centre of their practice. They set high expectations for every child and adult involved with the agency. This ethos leads to good outcomes for children.

The assessments of new carers are thorough and analytical. New applications are carefully considered by a skilled panel, and any vulnerabilities are drawn out. The use of independent social workers to complete assessments of potential carers has increased due to staffing issues. However, no significant impact on the quality of assessments has been seen to date. All recommendations made by the panel are carefully considered for approval by a conscientious agency decision-maker.

Supervising social workers receive frequent and good-quality reflective supervision sessions. These sessions focus on the needs and progress of children and discuss ways to improve practice. Concerns about the care that children receive are considered and plans to escalate these concerns to the local authority are reviewed in subsequent sessions. This ensures that plans for children do not drift.

The agency has recently struggled to recruit new social workers. Subsequently, there are two staff vacancies. The registered manager has carried out additional roles to ensure that there is no reduction in the quality of the provision. Foster carers reported that the situation is not impacting on the support they are receiving.

The recruitment of new staff meets the requirements of safer recruitment practice.

Staff receive good-quality and diverse training. This ensures that they have the skills and knowledge to support foster carers to meet the individual needs of each child. Foster carers also have access to good-quality training, online and in person. However, oversight of the completion of training is not robust. This means that some carers are not completing the required training within timescales.

At times, the language used in recordings is not child-centred. This detracts from the child-centred approach which can be seen within practice.

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 in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>before making any decisions affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parents due consideration is given to the child’s wishes and feelings (having regard to the child’s age and understanding). (Regulation 11 (1)(b)(i))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that when incidents of restraint have occurred, the child’s perspective of this experience is sought and considered.</p> | 28 May 2022 |
| <p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> | 28 May 2022 |

Recommendations

- The registered person must ensure that children are carefully matched with a foster carer and that all children within the placement have their individual needs considered. (‘Fostering services: national minimum standards’, page 32, paragraph 15.1)
- The registered person should ensure information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. (‘Fostering services: national minimum standards’, page 52, paragraph 26.6)
- The registered person should, subject to the child’s age and understanding, ensure the child receives the Children’s Guide at the point of placement and that

the foster carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 33, paragraph 16.3)

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: SC064273

Registered provider: Action for Children

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Responsible individual: Debbie Tomlinson

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Inspectors

Penelope Kutz, Social Care Inspector

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