

ISP Teynham

Castlewood Farm, Conyer Road, Teynham Sittingbourne ME9 9EA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a privately owned independent fostering agency. The fostering service registered with Ofsted in September 2017 to become a separately registered branch of the ISP company.

The company is a part of a much larger organisation, Polaris Community, comprising of several independent fostering agencies.

Foster carers provide long-term, short-term, respite and permanent care placements. The fostering service also provides placements to disabled children, as well as parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, there were 54 approved fostering households, caring for 79 children.

The manager registered with Ofsted in July 2019.

Inspection dates: 28 November to 2 December 2022

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

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

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: 30 July 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children benefit from living with foster carers who are empowered by the agency to provide trauma-informed, attuned and loving care to children. As a result, the children experience care that helps them to heal and build on their resilience for future success.

Several children continue to live with their foster families as they become young adults as part of 'staying put' arrangements. One foster carer said, 'My door remains open. Sunday dinner is always ready and waiting.' The longevity and relationship-based ethos promoted by the agency provide the children with a sense of belonging and stability.

The foster carers enjoy supportive and professional relationships with the agency. The agency is well resourced to meet the needs of foster carers and children. Foster carers feel connected to the agency and with each other.

Agency staff and the foster carers promote a culture of high aspiration and lifelong learning. Specialist support is made available quickly to the children, such as access to an educational psychologist and speech and language support.

The agency's education advisory teacher is relentless and effective in helping to drive up education engagement and attainment. Academic and vocational achievements made by the children, taking into account their starting point, are exemplary.

Foster carers encourage the children to follow their interests and hobbies. The children have access to a broad range of opportunities to try new activities. The agency provides the children with a full activity programme held at the agency's farm setting, as well as theatre and theme park trips. These experiences provide the children with fun and life-enhancing personal growth opportunities. Consequently, the children's self-esteem improves, and they become more confident.

Supervising social workers and foster carers support the children to maintain and develop their relationships with their families and other people who are important to them. Supervising social workers and foster carers advocate in the children's best interest to ensure that family visiting is meaningful and safe.

Unique to the agency is the innovative role of fostering advisers who are previous foster carers. The fostering advisers provide an extra layer of emotional and hands-on support for the children and foster carers, alongside a purposeful remit to help to encourage the practice and professional development of each foster carer.

Children are introduced by the agency with thoughtful and sensitive planning to new fostering families. Potential referrals are shared with the lead in-house therapist and school adviser for their oversight and input. This ensures that the children's educational and emotional health and well-being needs are considered as early as possible. This careful matching is effective and contributes to the stability of fostering households and the retention of foster carers.

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

Agency staff and foster carers are alert and curious about risks to children. Staff share child protection concerns quickly with relevant safeguarding agencies. This ensures effective working relationships between professionals to help to support, protect and reduce risks for the children.

Supervising social workers have small caseloads and have time to build meaningful relationships with the children. The trusted relationships that children develop with the supervising social workers and fostering advisers help them to feel safe and be confident to share any worries that they may have.

Supervising social workers visit foster carers on an unannounced basis at least once per year and regularly spend time alone with the children. Annual health and safety checks and monthly supervision visits ensure that the foster homes are safe places for children to live in.

The fostering service's response to allegations is effective and prompt. There is a clear distinction between allegations of harm and discussions and investigations relating to standards of care. A sensitive but honest challenge is provided to the foster carers, ensuring the focus stays on the children's well-being and safety.

The agency provides regular support groups and training. Foster carers are proactively encouraged to take care of themselves and learn to recognise the signs of when they may need extra support. This approach flows down to the children, who are encouraged to talk through problems or difficult feelings and seek help when they need it.

The agency panel chair and a diverse fostering panel membership, including care-experienced adults, provide strong safeguarding oversight and quality assurance to the agency. Thorough scrutiny by the panel and the agency decision-maker means that the foster carers are only approved if they have the necessary skills, values and experience to provide safe and caring homes for the children.

Supervising social workers and foster carers understand how to identify and manage risk. Risk assessments and the children's plans address the children's individual needs, and supervising social workers keep these up to date. However, plans and assessments do not consistently contain the children's views. This is a missed opportunity to gather the views of children and their perception of presenting risks, and an understanding of their vulnerabilities.

Minor shortfalls were found in some records, such as missing records of the children's last annual health review. This means that foster carers may not have the most-relevant health information. In addition, some annual reviews of foster carers did not take account of the views of the children's local authority social workers. This was addressed during the inspection. However, in practice, the foster carers have a good understanding of the health needs of the children. Administration staff have good systems in place to chase up and escalate concerns about children's missing documentation with local authorities.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

An experienced, enthusiastic and ambitious management team runs the agency. The registered manager is unwavering in his determination to enhance and improve the lives of children. Research-informed practice continues to develop from a strong and relevant evidence base to continually seek improved outcomes for the children.

Consultation with children by the registered manager and the staff is a strength of the agency. Children share their views and experiences of being cared for. The registered manager responds in a meaningful way to use these views to shape the service. This shows that the children's views are listened to and valued.

Supervising social workers benefit from regular supervision, appraisal and development opportunities. The registered manager uses a range of effective monitoring processes to ensure that a high quality of care is achieved. Weekly child-focused meetings help to ensure tight management oversight so that the children are provided with the right environment in which they can thrive.

Leaders and managers provide high levels of support, while holding high expectations of the staff and foster carers. The learning ethos of this agency means that when mistakes are made, managers are open to taking forward new learning to inform and improve future practice.

Leaders invest in high-quality training and resources. This means that the staff and the foster carers are equipped to provide the best possible support for the children. The result is an impressive record of placement stability and permanence for the majority of the children.

The introduction of the new in-house therapeutic pathway training has been a significant development in the agency. Ongoing training is followed up with space for discussion, reflection and consolidation. Leaders are committed to supporting the continued professional development of the staff and each foster carer.

Managers and leaders draw on an ongoing national and local recruitment strategy to attract new foster carers, reviewing and acting on the current trends and patterns to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Leaders and managers promote an inclusive and welcoming culture within the agency. The registered manager has taken effective action to address the previous

requirements. Robust action is taken to address complaints and all issues of concern. Leaders and managers identify strengths and areas for improvement and implement clear development plans that continually seek to improve the experiences of the children.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person must ensure that each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances and health needs. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.9)
- The registered person must ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way that 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', 26.6)
- The registered person must ensure that the reviews of each carer's approval include the views of the children's placing social workers. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.6)

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: 1256563

Registered provider: ISP

Registered provider address: Partnerships In Childcare Services Ltd, Wavendon Tower, Ortensia Drive, Wavendon, Milton Keynes MK17 8LX

Responsible individual: Joanne Savage

Registered manager: Pradeep Heera

Telephone number: 01795520200

Inspector

Anne-Marie Davies, Social Care Inspector

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