

South Coast Fostering Limited

South Coast Fostering

Ground Floor, Building 1000, Lakeside North Harbour, Portsmouth, Hampshire
PO6 3EZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a new independent fostering agency. It is part of the Positive Aspirations group, which provides central support and functions to the agency. Staff and carers at the agency have transferred from another agency also operated by the group. The agency offers a range of fostering opportunities for children from birth to 18 years. This includes emergency, short-, medium- and long-term homes for children. The agency has four foster carers, who provide homes for six children. This is the first inspection of this agency.

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 December 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit from committed and loving foster carers who welcome them as part of their family. Children say that they feel safe, happy and loved. Foster carers have a good understanding of the children's needs and their previous experiences, and their care for children is informed by this knowledge. The supervising social worker is highly valued, as much by the children as the foster carers. The supervising social worker has become a trusted adult who children can talk to. Some children also have an advocate. Local authority social workers are positive about the difference that foster carers have made to children's lives.

Children's voices and opinions are important to all who work for the agency. Children have regular opportunities to express any thoughts or concerns and are asked for their views. The most recent example is that children were each asked to provide a question that they would like prospective foster carers to answer. The agency plans to use these questions throughout the recruitment and approval process.

Most children are thriving in education and making good progress. When a child refuses to go to school, or needs specialist/additional support, a range of initiatives are tried and tested, with the support of the agency education consultant. However, in one case, leaders and managers did not further escalate their concerns when the local authority did not offer a timely response. While this caused a delay in accessing education and support the young person was well supported by their foster carer to explore education and meaningful activities.

Children enjoy various activities in and out of school. These support them to learn new skills while having fun and socialising. Foster carers encourage children to develop independence skills at a pace that reflects their age, willingness and ability.

Foster carers are determined that children in their care are offered the same opportunities as other children. This includes continuing to live with them after they are 18 years old if they wish and giving them the chance to return to their care when this is the right thing for the children.

Foster carers do all that they can to promote the health and well-being of children and ensure that they attend routine healthcare appointments. However, in one case, the agency's challenge to the local authority/relevant health professional has not achieved the required outcome and this has not been escalated to more senior managers in the relevant agencies. This means that specific healthcare needs have not been confirmed or addressed for one child.

Foster carers understand the importance of developing positive relationships with professionals and the adults who are important to the children in their care. Foster carers are largely successful in this, which enables children to be open and accepting of the different roles these adults play in their lives.

Children benefit from the foster carers' understanding of the importance of family time. The flexible support that foster carers provide enables children to keep in touch with family members. This meets the needs of the child and is in accordance with their plans.

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

Children feel safe and each have someone they trust and can confide in. All the children who spoke to inspectors confirmed that they have someone who they can talk to about their worries and concerns.

Fostering staff and carers complete training which informs their knowledge and understanding about a range of risks to children and how these can be managed. Risks are identified and the responses are appropriate. Consequently, children's safety is promoted. Experienced foster carers have good knowledge and understanding about what is needed to help keep children safe and how to help children learn about potential risk. However, the quality of safe care plans that support them in their understanding of individual children's needs and potential safeguarding risks is variable. Some plans are not sufficiently detailed or explicit regarding historical risk, current risk and what is needed to minimise or manage risk. Plans do not ensure that all carers, those with experience or those new to fostering, have clarity about what is needed to support individual children. However, due to the experience of current foster carers, they have ensured that children's needs are met.

Children are supported to learn age-appropriate skills that will help them to stay safe, such as swimming and travelling independently on public transport.

There have been no reported missing-from-care episodes or safeguarding concerns raised since the agency registered. Foster carers, staff and supervising social workers have completed the required training. The updated, detailed and accessible policies and procedures in the foster carers' handbook provide foster carers with clear guidance about the action to take if they have a concern. Foster carers also have access to 24-hour support and advice from staff they know and trust.

The agency trains foster carers and staff effectively in the chosen approach to behaviour management. Foster carers are kind and calm in their approach to children. When children are distressed and upset, carers support them to calm down, using agreed strategies. Foster carers reward and celebrate children's achievements and only use agreed consequences; such use has been very minimal. This approach helps children to learn how to manage their behaviour and feelings safely. Training in physical intervention is only provided if this is an identified need in a child's plan. This has not been necessary.

The fostering team has effectively established links with other key safeguarding agencies. There have been no allegations made or safeguarding investigations needed since the agency registered.

Foster carers' homes are safe and well assessed. The required checks are carried out regularly to ensure that safety is maintained.

The recruitment and assessment of potential foster carers are thorough. The application of good systems ensures that a strong focus on protecting children is maintained.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registration of this agency was in part driven by the desire of some foster carers in an agency also within the Positive Aspirations group to have an office closer and more accessible to them. When the registration was complete, foster carers could choose to move, and some have. The manager in post at the time of registration has since resigned.

The current manager's application to register with Ofsted has been received. The manager and the responsible individual have a clear desire and ambition to provide children, foster carers and staff with what they need to be the best they can be. They have a wealth of personal experience that they use to inform the development of the agency. The training, interventions and support available and provided are focused on equipping staff and foster carers with what they need to help children aim high from a foundation of a safe, stable home environment. As a result, children make progress in significant aspects of their lives.

The agency has transferred the tried-and-tested management information and monitoring systems from the parent agency, and the manager is seeking to refine these further in conjunction with the responsible individual and a director.

There has been one meeting of the panel so far, to consider the approval of the transferring carers. All the forms, including checks and references, were thoroughly updated by the manager under the supervision of a central recruitment, assessment and referral manager. The decision-making was passed to a different nominated agency decision-maker. This level of scrutiny ensured that the whole process to approve was subject to objective oversight. However, one recommendation from the panel about specific training, also made by the first panel at the parent agency, has not yet been achieved. This means that the foster carers are still awaiting some identified training to further supplement their skills and knowledge.

The manager and responsible individual have an in-depth knowledge of the strengths of the agency and the areas that they want to develop. They are working alongside the other agencies in the Positive Aspirations group on their clear and aspirational development plans. The manager uses robust systems to ensure that she maintains effective oversight of the work of the agency.

Staff receive regular, purposeful supervision which supports them to be reflective while exploring casework and identifying any actions needed. Staff have access to a wide variety of training opportunities, which supports their professional development. The agency demonstrates practically how it values staff by giving

them a day off on their birthday and an allowance to spend on something of their choice to maintain their own well-being. This is appreciated by staff.

The agency's statement of purpose has recently been updated to reflect its aims and objectives, alongside the aspirations for the future. It is only a few months since the carers have been approved under this agency, so it is too soon to state if they are meeting all their aims and objectives. However, foster carers report that they continue to be very well supported and there has been a seamless transfer to the new agency, as they all know the manager and the responsible individual and continue to be supported by the same supervising social worker.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. This particularly relates to the information in children's safety plans. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.5)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their developmental needs and experience. This particularly relates to the implementation of panel recommendations in a timely way. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.5)
- The registered person should ensure that all foster carers have access to adequate social work and other professional support, information and advice to enable them to provide consistent, high-quality care to the child. This includes assistance with dealing with relevant services, such as health and education. Consideration is given to any help or support needed by the sons and daughters of foster carers. In particular, this relates to challenging local authorities when they are not providing the necessary support to meet children's education and health needs. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.6)

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: 2580767

Registered provider: South Coast Fostering

Registered provider address: Building 1000, Lakeside North Harbour, Western Road, Portsmouth, Portsmouth PO6 3EZ

Responsible individual: Melanie Yearwood

Registered manager: Post vacant

Telephone number: 02394 210919

Email address: info@southcoastfostering.co.uk

Inspectors

Máire Atherton, His Majesty's Inspector Social Care
Amanda Maxwell, His Majesty's Inspector Social Care

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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