

Foster Care Associates South East

Foster Care Associates Limited

Office 17, Fleming Court Business Centre, Leigh Road, Eastleigh, Hampshire SO50 9YN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Foster Care Associates (FCA) South East is a regional branch of a large, privately owned organisation, Polaris. The agency provides emergency, short-term, long-term and parent-and-child placements for children of all ages. The agency also maintains placements for those who have moved on to independence and remain with their foster carer. There are currently 87 fostering households and 97 children in placements.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since April 2018.

Inspection dates: 26 to 30 June 2023

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	outstanding
---	-------------

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 13 August 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit from trusting, open relationships with their foster carers and they experience placement stability. This helps children to make good progress. Supervising social workers know the children and their life experiences extremely well. This means that children and foster carers benefit from support from a well-informed team.

Robust matching processes effectively assess foster carers' experience and ability to care for a child or a sibling group of children. Careful matching contributes to the stability of placements and the agency's retention of foster carers.

Some children's files do not contain the necessary documentation and not all supervising social workers use the agency's escalation policy to obtain it. This can result in drift and, in one example, insufficient information to reliably inform a child's care plan. However, the agency undertakes their own thorough review of each child on a regular basis, and their findings reflect the inspectors' findings about children's progress.

Children who are new in placement are welcomed sensitively and with careful and considered planning. When children leave the foster home, staff help them to have positive endings. As a result, children move on to the next chapter of their lives feeling optimistic and confident.

Inspectors found plentiful evidence of staff and foster carers promoting an inclusive culture that supports equality and diversity. Children's curiosity and views in relation to their culture, religion and sexual identity are age-appropriately explored and supported. Consequently, children feel safe to develop a sense of their own identity.

Organised activities and outings are available for children and their foster carers. However, they could be better planned and promoted to improve participation. This would increase opportunities for children to enhance their social skills and meet new people.

Children experience special occasions in the same way as birth children in a fostering household. In one example, a child received the same gift when they also reached a milestone birthday. The child said that the warmth and care that they received from their foster carer made them feel loved and included.

Staff and foster parents promote children's health and well-being. They ensure that children's health needs are met and seek specialist advice and resources when needed. All children attend education. This means that children receive a coordinated response to ensure that their basic needs are met.

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

The agency has a sharp focus on safeguarding children because there is a skilled and experienced safeguarding manager.

Supervising social workers and foster carers are alert to and curious about risks to children. Staff share safeguarding concerns quickly with relevant safeguarding agencies. There are proactive and effective working relationships between professionals to help to support and protect children.

Managers provide regular opportunity for the team to discuss children's progress and their roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children from harm. Supervising social workers value this time and say that it gives them space for reflection to enhance their own safeguarding practice.

Detailed risk assessments enable foster carers to manage children's behaviour and better understand the management of risk. Some documents are written from the child's perspective. Kind and caring language is used, which helps children to learn how to manage their own risks. This contributes to their protection and sense of security.

Missing-from-care episodes are rare. When they do occur, there is a robust, well-coordinated response to ensure that children return safely.

Foster carers have a good practical understanding of providing safer care to children to reduce harm and risk. However, some plans are generic and do not reflect children's individual needs. This means that some foster carers do not readily have access to guidance to ensure the safety and well-being of all children and adults living in the fostering household.

All children and foster carers are regularly seen in placement by supervising social workers. Foster carers receive monthly supervision, but the quality of these sessions is inconsistent in relation to opportunities for reflection. Additionally, not all foster carers' ongoing training and development needs have been clearly identified and recorded. As a result, children may be receiving care from adults who are not as well informed as they could be. Staff are appropriately qualified and have the necessary skills to support foster carers to effectively safeguard children.

Standards of care investigations are robust. Allegations or suspicion of harm are shared with the appropriate agencies and handled fairly, quickly and in accordance with statutory guidance. However, records do not distinguish between the two. This has the potential to lead to inaccurate information being stored regarding foster carers' ability to care safely for children.

Managers notify Ofsted as required when serious incidents occur. This enables the regulator to ensure that there has been a robust response.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency is led by an experienced, committed and inspirational registered manager, who is supported by two equally knowledgeable and professionally nurturing fostering service managers.

The stability of the leadership team is a strength of this agency, including the productive, tenacious administration manager who is the driving force behind implementing initiatives and actions set by senior managers.

The registered manager and senior leaders share the same vision, and they all strive for excellence. Managers and leaders create a culture of aspiration and positivity. They inspire supervising social workers to improve the lives of children. The cohesive and transparent nature of working relationships aids the vision of the agency to come to fruition. For example, this is evident in the stability and long-term care planning for children.

Leaders and managers know the agency's strengths and weaknesses and can provide evidence of improvement over a sustained period. For example, unplanned endings are reviewed and the learning from them is embedded into practice. As a result, the number of disrupted placements has reduced and is below the national average.

Monitoring systems are effective, creative and enable the whole leadership team to have oversight of compliance, practice and learning within the agency. The leadership team had already identified the shortfalls found during the inspection and are taking steps to address them.

The registered manager regularly completes their own thorough quality of care review. Additional scrutiny is provided by senior managers. As a result, the focus is clear, and actions are monitored and completed in a timely way.

Extremely valued supervising social workers receive practice-related supervision. Additional reflective sessions enable them to continually develop and improve their practice. These sessions are well attended and are beneficial to managers because they provide valuable information about areas to strengthen.

The fostering panel is organised and well established. It is chaired by a proficient independent person. Collectively, the knowledge and experience of panel members are excellent. As a result, effective and informed challenge is well recorded and ensures that children are cared for by appropriate and skilled foster carers.

The agency decision-maker offers clarity and scrutiny in decision-making. The timely sharing of information and reports by the team enable recommendations or decisions to be in line with the agency's overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

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

Recommendations

- Prior to the placement of each child, the foster carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information is provided in a clear, comprehensive written form and includes the support that will be available to the foster carer. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority any gaps in the information provided to them on the child or the child's family that may hinder the foster carer in providing a safe, caring environment that meets the child's needs and enables them to keep the child, other children in the fostering household, and the foster carer safe. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 15.2)
- The fostering service has a clear statement of purpose, which is available to and understood by foster carers, staff and children, and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. It is available to the responsible authority and any parent or person with parental responsibility. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 16.1)
- Foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.5)
- Support and training are made available to foster carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.8)
- The supervising social worker ensures that each foster carer that he or she supervises is informed in writing of, and accepts, understands, and operates within, all regulations and standards and with policies and guidance agreed by the fostering service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.9)
- Fostering services ensure that a clear distinction is made between investigation into allegations of harm and discussions over standards of care. Investigations that find no evidence of harm should not become procedures looking into poor standards of care; these should be treated separately. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.10)
- The foster carer is given a copy of the child's placement plan as soon as this is provided to them by the responsible authority. If provision of the care plan by the responsible authority is delayed, the fostering service follows this up with the responsible authority. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 31.2)

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: SC039271

Registered provider: Foster Care Associates Limited

Registered provider address: Malvern View, Saxon Business Park, Hanbury Road,
Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 4AD

Responsible individual: John Platt

Registered manager: Caroline Ellis

Telephone number: 02380 383800

Email address: caroline.ellis@thefca.co.uk

Inspectors

Jill Sephton-Wright, Social Care Inspector

Alphie Khumalo, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

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

© Crown copyright 2023