

# Foster Care Associates South Western

Foster Care Associates Limited

Unit 1, Delamore Park, Cornwood, Ivybridge PL21 9QP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency has 99 fostering household across Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, caring for 113 children. This is the service's first full inspection since it was suspended in September 2020. Its office is in Ivybridge, near Plymouth.

The agency's manager has been registered with Ofsted since January 2021.

### Inspection dates: 31 July to 4 August 2023

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>good</b>
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:** 29 July 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

### Enforcement action since last inspection:

The agency was suspended after an assurance visit by Ofsted on 29 September 2020. Following a monitoring visit when Ofsted found that sufficient action had been taken to address the previous concerns, the suspension was lifted on 10 December 2020.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children build warm and loving relationships with their foster parents. They told inspectors that they are happy and feel part of their foster family. Foster parents value and nurture the children in their care, and help them to learn that adults can be trusted to keep them safe.

Foster parents give children a range of enjoyable experiences. They support them to join clubs, go on holiday, and have days out. They encourage children to try new things and widen their experiences. Some children have completed Duke of Edinburgh expeditions, and others have travelled abroad.

The agency considers the identity needs of children well. When children have diverse cultural and religious backgrounds these are explored, ensuring that children have access to appropriate support and community resources. One child's emerging sexual-identity needs were very well considered within their plan, and their conversations with their foster parent reflected the adult's understanding and empathy. Foster parents value children's unique qualities, encouraging children to feel proud of who they are.

Children are supported to engage well with education. They achieve and do well. When appropriate school or college places are not available, the agency advocates for children to get these put in place. When children do not attend school, their foster parents involve them in meaningful educational activities at home and in the community.

Supervising social workers and foster parents access support from an experienced therapist. This helps carers to develop therapeutic parenting so that they can respond to children in the most appropriate way. The therapist provides targeted, bespoke support when placements are at risk of breakdown. This has led to children remaining with carers when they might otherwise not have. Inspectors saw evidence of responsive and attuned support from the therapist during complex situations.

A significant number of children who have reach adulthood continue to live with their foster parents under staying-put arrangements. The agency ensures that appropriate safeguarding procedures are followed. Children are supported to develop their independence and move on when they are ready to do so.

Children's records are generally of good quality, and some are excellent, but there are some inconsistencies. Foster parents do not always bring the child's lived experiences to life. This means that for some children who access their files as adults, the recordings may not be as meaningful as they could be.

Children are given many opportunities to provide their views to help to shape the agency. They are invited to participate in a range of events organised by the agency. These are well attended, and children give feedback to help to plan future events.

The agency also has a very child-friendly complaints process that provides an accessible way for children to share their views and concerns. Children's views are also gathered through more-informal ways by their foster parents and social workers.

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

There is a strong focus on safeguarding within the agency. There is good oversight of safeguarding practice on all levels. Staff and carers respond swiftly and effectively when children may be at risk of harm. There is good communication between carers and the agency. The external professionals supporting the child are informed and play a key role in creating plans that keep children safe. Children are involved in their care planning when it is appropriate for their age and understanding.

Supervising social workers visit children in their foster homes and speak to them alone. This gives children opportunities to share their concerns and worries. All households have had unannounced visits within the last year, but these are not always completed within 12 months of each other. Managers are aware that this is not best practice, and they are monitoring this to support visits being completed in a timely way.

There has been significant progress in the safety of parent and child placements since the last full inspection. Risks are well known and managed. The safety of babies and young children, particularly their sleeping arrangements, is fully assessed and monitored. The foster carer logs are very detailed and specifically linked to parenting capacity, safety, and the progress of the child's development.

The agency has good systems in place for the administration and recording of medication given to children. Manager audits have noted when foster parents have not recorded when non-prescription medication has been administered.

Carers are skilled in responding to children's behaviours that may challenge them. They use de-escalation to defuse situations. Supervising social workers predominantly create detailed and clear plans that support foster carers in knowing the child and their needs. However, this is not consistent.

Restraint has been used on one occasion since the last inspection. This was not used proportionately and de-escalation techniques were not used effectively, if at all. This led to a placement move for the child. This was fully investigated by the agency and lessons were learned.

Allegations are investigated fully and in a timely way. However, on one occasion, the agency did not record effectively its significant concerns regarding a child remaining in a potentially unsafe home over a weekend, despite raising these with the local authority. The agency insisted that the local authority agree to the terms of a risk assessment to mitigate potential harm; however, this did not include an unannounced visit to the foster home. The child was moved two days later.

Children rarely go missing from home. When children go missing, carers follow clearly defined processes to help to locate the child and return them home. There is good management oversight of incidents, plans are revised promptly, and support is put in place when appropriate.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

Leaders and managers have made significant improvements to the service since the last inspection. This has led to children receiving very good levels of care and achieving good outcomes. The agency has an experienced registered manager, who has high expectations for children and sets high standards for the staff and carers. They have excellent oversight of the service and there are outstanding monitoring and quality assurance systems in place. This leads to constant learning from reviews to improve practice.

Children's outcomes are constantly monitored and recorded in a variety of ways. The management team has an exceptionally good understanding of each child's journey and their progress. This means that children's achievements are noticed and celebrated. Simultaneously, vulnerabilities are clearly explored so that the right support can be put in place to help children to succeed.

There are excellent systems in place to help to find the right homes and families for children. This process is led by a proficient referrals manager, who drives best practice. Information about children's lived experiences and past trauma is carefully gathered from a range of sources. This is collated through thorough meetings and discussions with the local authority, past and current carers, educational professionals, and birth families. This has led to stability for children and a low rate of placement breakdowns.

Leaders and managers work well with other agencies to safeguard and promote the best interests of children. This is firmly driven by the agency. They bring together multi-disciplinary teams to create a comprehensive picture of children's experiences, needs and vulnerabilities. This leads to plans that work for children and help them to succeed.

There is evidence of managers challenging other professionals effectively when plans do not meet children's needs. For example, a two-year-old child's local authority recommended restraint training for their foster parent due to the child's behaviour. The registered manager strongly objected to this. Their no-restraint policy was firmly adhered to and more-effective and proportionate measures were put in place.

The agency has an experienced panel chair and coordinates a diverse and knowledgeable panel that covers a number of regional services. There is good oversight of the quality of assessments and constant feedback to the agency. There are excellent systems in place to ensure that learning is shared and recommendations of the panel and agency decision-maker are acted on prior to children being placed with carers. Annual reviews are conducted in a timely way, as are reviews due to conduct concerns.

Generally, the agency has a stable staff team in place. In most areas, relationships between foster parents and the team are strong. Foster carers have confidence in the team and value the support that they receive. However, in one geographical area, recruitment issues continue to negatively impact both supervising social workers and foster carers. This is due to the additional travel that social workers undertake to support foster parents who live outside of their usual area. It has also led to some foster parents having a significant change in supervising social workers. Leaders are aware of these shortfalls. One vacancy has recently been filled and another is being advertised.

## 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>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))</p> <p>In particular, when safeguarding concerns have been raised about the child’s foster parents, the agency should put measures in place to ensure the child’s safety. This may include a visit to the home.</p>	<p>13 November 2023</p>

### Recommendations

- 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. Records are clear, up to date, stored securely and contribute to an understanding of the child’s life. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 52, paragraph 26.6)
- Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer’s work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child’s needs, taking into account the child’s wishes and feelings, and

offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 43, paragraph 21.8)

## **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:** SC038012

**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:** Naomi Pollard

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## **Inspectors**

Penelope Kutz, Social Care Inspector

Carla Simkiss, Social Care Inspector

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