

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 charity which provides a wide range of services for children and families. The Family Breaks service currently has nine fostering households and nine children. The Fostering Southwest Peninsula fostering service currently has 16 fostering households and 20 children.

Inspection dates: 28 to 31 May 2024

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: 28 March 2022

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 living in settled and stable foster homes where they are loved and are very much part of the family. There are few unplanned endings, due to very careful matching. Children develop a strong sense of belonging. Many children remain with their foster carers when they reach 18.

The agency understands the importance and value of providing high-quality short breaks for children and their families. Foster carers understand the importance of sensitive introductions. These are undertaken at the child's pace and children are fully involved. For example, to support children to feel confident about staying away from home on a short break, they are encouraged to choose their bedding and are given a welcome rucksack by their foster carer.

The agency has high educational aspirations for children. All children are in education, training or employment and are making progress. Agency staff know the children very well. If a child is refusing to attend school or college, a support worker will spend time with the child to understand why the child is reluctant to attend and to put strategies in place. This includes attending meetings with education professionals and visiting schools.

Foster carers and supervising social workers promote the physical and emotional health of children. A strength of the agency is how the emotional health needs of children are met. Foster carers can access specialist psychological services that support them and their children. They can be given strategies and support to ensure that children make progress with their emotional needs.

Foster carers are valued by the agency and work very much as part of the professional team around the children. Turnover of foster carers is low. They attend relevant meetings and are fully involved in planning and decision-making for children. Foster carers report that they are well supported by the agency. In turn, they support their children effectively to achieve positive outcomes and make progress.

Parent and child fostering arrangements meet the assessment needs of the family and the role of the foster carer is clear. The work undertaken by the agency and foster carers is high quality and ensures that the parent receives a fair assessment of their parenting skills. The foster carer always ensures that the main focus of the assessment is the safety and well-being of the child.

All foster carers spoken with commented positively about the ease of accessing effective and prompt support, including out of hours. Supervising social workers successfully achieve a balance of providing challenge and scrutiny to foster carers with maintaining very positive relationships with them.

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

Children say they feel safe and secure living with their foster carers. There is an effective and prompt response from the agency when there are concerns about a foster carer or child. Foster carers and the staff know the children very well and are vigilant to any changes in a child's behaviour that may indicate they are worried or upset. Foster carers and staff promptly report any concerns to safeguarding professionals.

Incidents of children going missing are rare. If a child does go missing, foster carers follow a comprehensive missing-from-home procedure. There is curiosity to find out where a child has been, who they have been with and what they have been doing. A return home interview is always undertaken when the child has returned home.

Foster carers and the staff benefit from regular safeguarding training and are confident about the action they need to take if they have a safeguarding concern about a child. Any safeguarding incidents are evaluated for learning and this learning is implemented in agency practice.

The agency is developing a system to ensure that if children stay with their foster carers after the age of 18 that foster carers are trained in safeguarding adults. This system is not yet fully embedded.

Recruitment processes for staff are robust and ensure that only suitable people are employed. Rigorous checks of foster carers are undertaken before their approval. Health and safety checks are carried out of a foster carer's home and again at their annual review to ensure that their home remains a safe place for a child to live.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The leadership and management of this agency are strong. The manager provides clear leadership to foster carers and staff, who comment positively about the support that he gives them. A strength of the agency is the consistency and stability of the management and staff team, and foster carers. Foster carers report that they benefit from the 'family feel' of the agency.

The agency provides staff and foster carers with an extensive training programme that ensures that they have the knowledge and skills to undertake their roles. Foster carers say they can request specific training to meet the care needs of a child.

The staff and foster carers receive regular, good-quality supervision. Foster carers say their supervising social workers go 'above and beyond' to provide them with the support they need. This includes an effective out-of-hours system of support that foster carers say they can access with ease if they need it.

Management oversight is apparent in records and documents. The agency uses outcome trackers and feedback from foster carers and children to monitor children's

progress and achievements. However, it is not always evident how these trackers and feedback are then used to plan children's care.

A strength of the agency is how careful and sensitive matching with the agency's skilled and experienced foster carers ensures that there are a minimal number of unplanned endings for children, and most remain settled and make progress. If there is an unplanned ending, the reasons are thoroughly evaluated and any learning is implemented.

The fostering panel performs an effective quality monitoring function, led by an experienced and suitably qualified chairperson. The panel is challenging and curious and gives the agency decision-maker the information that she needs to make suitable decisions.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 9, paragraph 1.7)
- The registered person should ensure that children's safety is promoted in all fostering placements. In particular, if a child reaches 18 years old and is remaining in the foster carer's home, that the foster carers receive training in safeguarding adults. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 14, paragraph 4.1)

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

Registered provider address: Action for Children, 3 The Boulevard, Ascot Road, Watford WD18 8AG

Responsible individual: Colette Ferns

Registered manager: James Johnson

Telephone number: 01392 360865

Email address: james.johnson@actionforchildren.org.uk

Inspectors

Tina Maddison, Social Care Inspector
Carla Simkiss, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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