

Fusion Fostering South East

Fusion Fostering Limited

Unit C3b, Knoll Business Centre, 325-327 Old Shoreham Road, Hove, Sussex BN3 7GS

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a small independent fostering agency based in the south east of England. It covers a large geographical area. At the time of the inspection, the agency had 31 foster families caring for 46 children. It offers one parent and child placement.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since the agency was registered in August 2021. This is the first inspection of the agency.

Inspection dates: 6 to 10 March 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: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Most children make very good progress. This is due to the wonderful relationships that foster carers support them to build. Children who spoke to the inspector said that their lives have improved significantly due to the care, love and support that their carers give them. Children said they felt part of the family.

Children's moves to new foster homes are generally well planned and children are well prepared. Children already living with carers are asked how they feel about having a new child come to live with them before decisions are made.

Matching documents are clear and detailed and fully assess the risks associated with the child's behaviour and any trauma they have experienced. The skills and knowledge of the foster carers are clearly matched to the needs of the child. There is very good management oversight from the outset that identifies the support that is required to help establish and maintain stability for the child.

All children engage in education through school, college or online learning. Some do very well and have aspirations to go to university. Others struggle and are making limited progress. However, in these cases, there are clear plans in place to support children to do well.

Children have opportunities to do a lot of enjoyable activities and have days out with their foster carers. Some have been on holidays abroad, others have joined Scouts, go to swimming clubs or are learning to play the piano. Carers encourage children to take part in events and clubs that they would otherwise not have the opportunity to experience. This helps children build self-confidence and resilience.

Children have opportunities to participate in activities organised by the agency. Some families attend regularly, and children enjoy these events. Children's achievements are rewarded at awards presentations.

The agency considers the identity of children with diverse cultural and religious needs and these needs are well met. Carers support children to continue to experience food, traditions and language from their countries of origin. However, children with more subtle cultural needs have not been fully considered. Children's identity needs are not well recorded in their safe care plans. Children's evolving identity needs are not reviewed regularly to ensure that they receive the support they need.

The agency takes a proportionate response to supporting children's evolving independence. Children's move to independent living is well planned and 'staying put' arrangements are provided when they meet the needs of the child.

Children's health needs are being consistently met. They have access to universal health services such as doctors, dentists and opticians. When children have more

complex health needs, carers advocate for children to ensure that specialist medical care is provided.

The agency provides complex packages of support for children whose placement is at risk of breakdown. This is a multidisciplinary approach, underpinned by a therapeutic model. The agency had 15 unplanned endings up to November 2022. However, there has been significant analysis of these and learning has taken place to support a reduction. Generally, when there has been an unplanned ending, significant measures have been taken to ensure that the impact on children is reduced.

Few children have access to good-quality and meaningful life-story work. The agency does not yet provide this work when local authorities do not have the resources to carry it out.

The agency does not currently have a robust respite care resource. One set of foster carers reported they would have to travel 100 miles to take advantage of the break offered. This weakness is acknowledged by the agency and there is a planned recruitment drive to try to resolve this issue.

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

Children report feeling safe living with their carers. They know who to speak to if they are worried or have a concern. Those spoken with told the inspector that they could speak to their foster carer, supervising social worker or their support worker.

Safe care plans are useful documents that clearly set out how carers should meet children's needs effectively. Risk assessments are detailed, identify the level of any risks to the child and outline how these can be mitigated. Clear guidance is given to foster carers on how they should respond to keep children safe.

Children rarely go missing from their homes. When one child was repeatedly missing from home, the episodes were managed effectively by the foster carer. The carer made consistent attempts to locate them and to communicate with them via phone and texts. They spoke with family to identify known places they would go. Work was undertaken with the child to understand the risks of going missing and to prevent further incidents.

Most supervising social workers challenge and explore poor practice with foster carers. However, there have been occasions where this has not occurred. The registered manager is aware of the learning needs of the team and responds with performance learning support plans when appropriate.

Supervising social workers undertake unannounced visits to foster homes. They speak with children alone and gain their views about the care they receive. When speaking with the inspector, children were clear that they felt comfortable speaking with the supervising social workers and knew them well.

Foster carers respond swiftly when concerns are raised about children's safety and welfare. They follow the agency guidance and procedures to ensure that the relevant professionals are made aware. This helps plans to be put in place that can meet the needs of the child effectively and keep them safe.

The agency has one parent and child placement. The foster carers support parents to improve their parenting skills and demonstrate their competencies. Records are detailed and factual, providing valuable evidence for the court process. However, there has not been enough consideration given to how information is presented to parents with learning and processing difficulties.

When allegations are made against carers, the agency responds swiftly and involves external safeguarding agencies. Reviews and investigations are thorough and learning takes place when appropriate. The agency has commissioned one standards of care report in the last 12 months. This was detailed and balanced, with findings outlining clear learning points.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency has an experienced and knowledgeable management team that continually drives improvements to ensure the best outcomes for children. They are passionate and innovative and their focus is always on the needs of children. They have high expectations for staff, foster carers and children. The registered manager is inspirational and aspirational. She is a well-respected professional who has created a foundation of excellent systems to manage and audit practice.

The agency has excellent safe recruitment practices for all staff. Checks are thorough and information is verified.

The agency has excellent administrative support that provides crucial support to staff and foster carers, at both regional and national level. Resources produced for children, such as welcome packs and children's guides, are of a high standard and are child-focused.

The agency has a diverse and varied quorate panel. Members change constantly as they are taken from a pool of national members. The panel chair has significant relevant experience that means that panel meetings are thorough and efficient. Records are detailed and the prospective carers' strengths and vulnerabilities are clearly explored. This leads to only the most suitable candidates being approved.

The agency has an experienced agency decision-maker who provides robust decisions regarding the approval of foster carers. The agency ensures that outstanding recommendations from the agency decision-maker are followed up and fed back when completed. There is evidence of excellent communication and challenge between the agency decision-maker, registered manager and panel chair. This helps the panel to approve the most appropriate adults as foster carers and monitor their skills and knowledge through regular reviews.

Staff feel very well supported by the agency. They have access to a wealth of training that is useful and relevant. They have regular and very good reflective supervision that identifies learning needs. Records of this are outstanding and provide clear actions for development and progression.

Local authority social workers report that the agency communicates well with them and that incidents are reported swiftly. They stated that managers and supervising social workers advocate fiercely for children and have high expectations.

There are outstanding management systems in place to review practice. Management oversight involves excellent procedures that support clear responses to concerns and follow-up of outstanding issues. Learning is followed up in supervision sessions and further information is distributed through team meetings and weekly catch-ups. There is a closed circle approach to oversight, to ensure that all issues raised are acted on in a timely way to promote the best outcomes for children.

Managers take swift action to resolve concerns about practice, and complaints and allegations from children. There is excellent liaison with external agencies and matters are escalated when required. The agency has positive relationships with other professionals and is well respected.

The registered manager is outstanding in her knowledge of the needs of the children being cared for by the agency. There are new systems in place to track children's progress and these are being embedded. The management team analyses children's development and provides focused, holistic strategies to support progress and put in targeted support for children who are struggling.

The registered manager is fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the agency. Leaders and managers respond well to critical feedback and are open to new initiatives and ideas that could improve outcomes for children. They fiercely drive improvements in foster care and want all children to reach their full potential.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity. This relates to children having access to quality life-story work. This also relates to the agency fully understanding the child's identity needs. These should be recorded on the child's plan and reviewed when appropriate. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 2.1)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are provided with breaks from caring to take account of the needs of any children placed. In particular, the agency should ensure that sufficient and suitable respite care is available. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.5)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers can meet the child's assessed needs. When gaps are identified, the service should work with the responsible authority to ensure that the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. In particular, the agency should ensure that any information provided by the foster carer to parents during parent and child placements is clearly understood by the parents. Foster carers should be confident that parents have understood what is expected of them to meet the needs of their child during the placement. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 15.1)

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: 2593058

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Inspector

Penelope Kutz, Social Care Inspector

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