

Fostering Solutions Limited South

Fostering Solutions

Suite 3, Poles Copse, Poles Lane, Otterbourne, Winchester, Hampshire SO21 2DZ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fostering Solutions Limited South is an independent fostering agency, established in 2011. The agency provides a wide range of foster placements, including short- and long-term, parent and child, disability, short breaks, staying put and placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

At the time of this inspection, there were 92 approved fostering households and 96 children placed.

Inspection dates: 18 to 22 February 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 7 March 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- Children and young people make exceptional progress in all areas of their lives, due to the care and support provided to them by the foster carers and agency staff/managers.
- Children and young people achieve extremely well in relation to their education and training needs.
- Children and young people feel central to the care and support they receive. They have a clear voice in their care and in how the agency provides services to them.
- Foster carers feel highly valued and involved in the agency. Many have remained with this agency for a significant number of years and are highly skilled.
- Agency staff similarly feel highly valued. They report that they are exceptionally well supported by the managers and they take great pride in their roles.
- Children and young people increase in confidence and gain a sense of belonging. Their foster carers and agency staff place a commendable emphasis on safety and protection.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children and young people receive personalised care. They make significant and positive progress in all areas of their lives. They flourish in their placements and feel part of the fostering family. Several have remained living with their carers under staying put arrangements.

There is an emphasis on the education and training needs of all children and young people placed. This includes monitoring and tracking of their progress. All school-aged children are receiving education. Their attendance and attainment are excellent. A dedicated education officer oversees educational needs and issues. She is implementing a new online tool for children and young people to use. This will elicit their views and feelings about their education and social needs. This is an imaginative and positive innovation.

Foster carers and agency staff know their children and young people extremely well. They act as strong and positive advocates for them at all times. They want children and young people to have the best possible experiences. Children and young people feel valued and part of their local and wider community.

Several children and young people have very complex healthcare needs. Carers receive bespoke training to ensure that they can meet those needs. As one placing social worker stated, 'The foster carers are doing a fantastic job. The children are very settled in the placement and feel it to be their home.' The agency also receives support and consultation from an independent psychotherapist. She meets with carers to discuss specific needs. Her guidance provides additional strategies for carers and staff to use.

Staff and managers actively involve children and young people in their care. A participation strategy is now in place. Young people have helped devise a set of interview questions for prospective carers. These have been used, with very positive feedback being received. The agency is keen to place the needs of children and young people at the centre of its practice at all times. Research informs practice in relation to participation. This is worthy of wider dissemination.

Children and young people try out new things and develop skills and confidence. One young person is preparing for a trip to the Amazon with a national group. Others have met government ministers at the Houses of Parliament to share their views. A local mayor recently judged a poetry competition and invited the winners for afternoon tea. Such imaginative practices really promote the sense of belonging and being valued.

Several young people remain living with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday. Many young people wish to remain with their carers and in the local area. This is testament to the skill of carers in ensuring that young people feel part of their families and are welcomed to remain with them into adulthood.

How well children and young people are helped and protected:

outstanding

Children and young people receive excellent support and help to keep them safe. Detailed risk assessments reflect their current and changing needs. Agency staff review and update the risk assessments as necessary. A new system is being developed where children and young people will help to create their own risk assessments and plans. The new system is informed by research and a Signs of Safety model. It is worthy of wider dissemination.

Managers consider patterns and trends for risky or concerning behaviours. They devise plans and undertake targeted work to ensure that children and young people become, and remain, safe. The manager completed work on the specific missing from care protocols of all placing authorities to make the information easily accessible. This reflects an agency and managers who place a significant emphasis on safety and child protection. The recommendation set at the last inspection, in relation to updating risk assessments, has been fully met.

Carers receive a wide range of training relating to safeguarding and child protection. This includes training on recognising and managing bullying, exploitation, social media/internet safety and radicalisation. Carers present as knowledgeable and skilled in working to support children and young people to keep safe.

Commissioning officers, the designated officer and placing social workers speak highly of the agency's focus on safeguarding. There is excellent consideration and recording of all actual and potential safeguarding issues.

Agency staff and independent assessors carry out detailed assessments of applicants. A team of assessment managers supports the agency. They oversee those assessments completed by independent social workers. Supervision, training and support are provided, as well as robust quality assurance.

The recruitment of agency staff and independent assessors is robust. This helps to prevent unsuitable adults from working with vulnerable children and young people. Some young people have helped devise interview questions and been part of the process. This further provides them with an opportunity to influence recruitment in this agency.

The manager considers all concerns and allegations relating to foster carers seriously. There is evidence that all necessary policies, protocols and procedures are followed. Independent support is offered to carers during any investigation by the agency. Close and positive working with police and designated officers is evident. The fostering panel considers carers following an allegation. The requirement and recommendation set at the last inspection relating to allegations have been fully met.

Carers understand the complex needs of the children and young people living with them. They ensure that clear behaviour management strategies are in place. Managers audit and review the use of restraint, which is minimal. They consider any patterns or trends and support carers, alongside the independent psychotherapist, to devise or revise support plans. Children and young people report feeling safe and well protected from harm.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager has been in post for over eight years and is inspirational. She is ambitious for the children and young people and sets high expectations for staff and carers. Her staff and carers respect her skills and commitment. She leads by example and inspires staff to do their very best to improve outcomes for children and young people. She knows the children and young people well and constantly strives to enhance the care and support they receive.

She carries out audits to better understand any areas of concern. She works with her managers and staff to create improved monitoring and recording systems which reflect the progress and needs of children and young people.

Managers ensure that carers have the support and training necessary. They provide excellent support to carers. One carer said of their supervising social worker, 'She is our rock; we could not have kept going at times without her. She makes us feel safe and valued all the time.'

Agency staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals. They feel valued, well supported and motivated. Feedback is sought from children and young people, carers and involved agencies to inform the appraisal process. Agency staff have access to a wide range of training and online seminars. They also attend non-agency training and conferences.

Carers complete mandatory training post-approval. They have access to classroom and online training throughout the year. The managers consider training needs of all carers through supervision with agency staff. They audit the compliance of carers with the training expectations prior to annual reviews. The recommendation set at the last inspection relating to training needs has been met.

Managers and staff challenge placing authorities appropriately. A new escalation policy is being implemented. This will strengthen the process of securing missing documents from authorities. Staff and managers appropriately challenge authorities about transition plans for young people. They advocate for children and young people at all times.

Carers feel fully involved in how the agency runs. Some act as forum representatives and meet with managers regularly. This enables them to share their views and issues. They also learn of developments in the agency and the wider organisation. This role is integral to the success of the agency and excellent carer retention.

Carers also assist staff with the Skills to Foster training and initial visits. This provides applicants with a clear insight into the role, from an approved foster carer perspective. The agency recruits carers who can meet the diverse needs of the children and young people they support.

The fostering panel provides a rigorous quality assurance function. A diverse range of members forms the central panel list. They diligently consider all applications and relevant reviews. They are supported by a very experienced and competent agency decision-maker.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC423396

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Registered provider address: 1 Merchants Place, Bolton BL2 1BX

Responsible individual: John Keane

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Inspector

Tracy Murty, social care inspector



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