

Heath Farm Children's Services

Heath Farm Family Services Ltd

144B Kings Road, Herne Bay CT6 5RG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Heath Farm Children's Services is a privately owned independent fostering agency. Since 2016, it has been a part of the National Fostering Group.

At the time of this inspection, there were 67 active fostering households and 117 children and young people in placement. The agency provides short- and long-term living arrangements for children and has access to an education provision and therapeutic services.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since March 2023.

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 November 2025

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: 9 January 2023

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 speak positively about their experiences with their carers and the support they receive from the agency. Children say that they have someone to talk to if they are unhappy or worried, and have good relationships with their carers.

All foster carers are committed to promoting children's education. Carers are supported by the agency's specialist education colleagues, who provide advice and support to ensure that children are suitably progressing. When children are facing challenges at school or their education placements are at risk, these staff intervene to find the best solutions and ensure that children are receiving the right help to achieve in education.

Children are making good progress and demonstrate this through their accomplishments and aspirations. Carers demonstrate dedication and commitment to supporting children, while staff work alongside carers and children's networks to ensure that children receive consistent care. The relationships that are built through the agency's therapeutic model of care cultivate a sense of stability and security for children.

The agency uses an evidence-based fostering service model that organises fostering families into micro communities and allows them to build supportive relationships, similar to that of an extended family. As a result of the connections that fostering families build, placement moves are smoother and carers within the network start to develop relationships with children from the outset.

Carers prepare children for moving on and building their independence skills for the future. Staff support foster carers to offer staying put arrangements for children who want to remain after their 18th birthday.

Children benefit from mentoring, therapeutic and direct work offered by the agency's staff. Some children have learned strategies to manage their emotions, while others are being supported to understand their life story or to explore future career options. One social worker commented, 'Reparative parenting that the carers have provided have supported [name of child] to achieve a sense of stability and feel safe enough to engage in therapy.' This is a notable development for this child.

Children's views and wishes are taken seriously and inform the agency's development. Children are actively involved in the recruitment of new members of staff and helped to design the feedback survey that children use.

There are clear and effective systems in place to obtain documentation from local authorities when this is missing from the child's file. On occasions where information has not been successfully obtained, managers escalate the issue so they can ensure that they are offering care that is aligned with children's current needs. In addition,

supervising social workers attend children's statutory meetings and take their own minutes.

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

The agency's safer care plans and risk assessments consistently detail identified risks and provide clear guidance to foster carers about the steps that they should take to respond to concerns. Since the last inspection, managers have increased their level of oversight to ensure that guidance is comprehensive, up to date and focused on children's safety in the home and community.

Foster carers are up to date with mandatory training. Foster carers undertake bespoke training to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to meet the wide-ranging needs of children in their care. They use clear boundaries and nurturing practices with children and are trained to de-escalate challenging situations when they arise.

Restraint and restrictive measures are rarely used by carers. There is a procedure in place for carers to follow when they use any form of restraint or restrictive practice. Carers have completed training that promotes the use of de-escalation and supports them to feel more confident in their application of these methods. Children's views are sought following these incidents.

When children go missing from home, carers search for children and encourage them to return. They follow the correct procedures and work alongside other agencies, including the police, to ensure that children are found. When there are concerns about children harming themselves, carers support children to access therapeutic interventions and offer them a safe space to talk.

Carers understand the children who they care for and demonstrate both resilience and commitment to their role. This is particularly important when distressing incidents occur, as the success of the response that carers provide often hinges on the strength of the relationships that they have with children.

Allegations against members of the fostering household are reported to the local authority designated officer and are notified to Ofsted. When concerns are substantiated, the supervising social workers work with carers to ensure that recommendations are met and training is delivered to improve practice.

Staff and carers are recruited safely, and the required checks are completed to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. However, the verification of references for panel members lacks consistency, and references do not always adequately explore suitability for the role.

On a small number of occasions, staff did not fully address signs that carers required additional support. While practical assistance was provided, managers did not fully consider or take action to address the carer's vulnerabilities. In addition, there was a missed opportunity to explore this at their annual review. Although there has been

no clear negative impact on the care provided to children during this period, unresolved matters could affect the children's long-term stability.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers have ensured that the requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection have been met.

The registered manager demonstrates a good understanding of both the children and the carers and has established positive relationships with them. She prioritises the needs of the children and is a committed advocate for carers, helping them to feel valued and supported. Managers are well-respected by staff and external stakeholders, owing to their transparency and reflective approach.

Managers demonstrate a commitment to promoting staff professional development and training. Staff report positively about the opportunities that they receive to further their learning, and plans to do so are reflected in their annual appraisals.

The agency has recently revised the arrangements for, and composition of, its panel. This has enabled the agency to access more frequent panels and expanded the range of diversity and expertise of the members. The independent panel chair has a keen understanding of the agency. Panel members offer sensitive scrutiny and appropriate challenge to ensure that recommendations to the agency are proportionate.

Managers provide timely and regular supervision to staff. However, there is no record of agreed actions when concerns about carers' practice or support needs are discussed. This undermines the monitoring of follow-up actions to ensure that the issues are being raised and addressed with carers consistently by supervising social workers during home visits.

Carers' logs and children's records clearly reflect accurate and meaningful information regarding their personal circumstances, developmental progress and the support offered by carers. However, some records do not clearly explain the rationale for important decisions that have impacted children. This limits the records' value to children who may wish to read them in the future.

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

Recommendations

- The registered manager should ensure that areas of concern, or need for additional support, that are identified between reviews are addressed. Such matters identified between reviews should be addressed at the time they are identified, where appropriate, rather than waiting for a review. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 13.9)
- The registered manager should ensure that meetings with approved foster carers 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', 21.8)
- The registered manager should ensure that the fostering service consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 19.2)
- The registered manager should ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way that will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. In particular, the registered manager should ensure that decision-making that affects children's experiences is clearly expressed in the child's file in a way that is helpful to children's understanding of their life story. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.6)

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: SC060386

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Inspectors

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