

Pathway Care South West

Pathway Care South West Limited

Glentor, Balland Lane, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7DA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is operated by the Outcomes First Group, which is a national provider of independent fostering services.

At the time of this inspection, 72 foster families were registered with the agency, caring for 80 children and young people.

The manager registered with Ofsted on 21 October 2015.

Inspection dates: 17 to 20 October 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 17 December 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

In the main, children make good progress because they live with foster carers who understand and meet their needs. Foster carers provide nurturing care and support children to develop trusting and secure relationships. This helps children to feel loved and cared for, and to be a part of the family.

However, in the past 12 months, too many children have moved on from their foster carers in an unplanned way. Leaders and managers have completed a review relating to unplanned endings. Key themes have been identified but actions to improve children's experiences are not yet embedded. This includes strengthening processes to ensure that all children are matched with foster carers who have sufficient experience and skills to meet children's complex needs.

All children are in education, training or employment. Children's educational needs are reviewed regularly. Many children make good academic progress and achieve qualifications. Two young people have made exceptional progress and are achieving at university.

Children's health needs are met. The introduction of a 'therapeutic hub' has increased interventions offered to carers and children to ensure that children's emotional needs are understood and met.

This agency is child-focused. Since the previous inspection, there has been a drive to ensure that children's voices are heard and responded to. Their views are gathered in various ways and influence the agency's development.

Children are supported to participate in a range of activities that develop their emotional well-being and confidence. Children are helped to take age-appropriate risks and make a positive contribution to the wider community.

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

The agency responds promptly to allegations and complaints. Procedures are followed to ensure that children are safe. Children are spoken to independently to gain their views as part of any investigation. However, systems are not in place to ensure that complainants, including children, are informed about the investigation outcome.

Children rarely go missing. When children do go missing, foster carers know how to respond. There is a coordinated response and return home interviews are completed promptly. In addition, foster carers have access to an effective out-of-hours support system.

There is robust safety planning in place for parents and children who live together in foster care. This includes parents and foster carers being provided with up-to-date

information relating to safe sleeping. Safer care plans provide foster carers with appropriate strategies to manage risk in the home.

Safer care plans for individual children who live in foster care are not always comprehensive. They do not always reflect current risk factors or ensure that strategies are proportionate to reduced risk.

Foster carers complete training that is necessary to care for children. However, training to increase their knowledge and skills about children's specific needs is not always undertaken before children move into the home. While it is planned for foster carers to have training in vulnerable adult safeguarding, this has not yet progressed. This is to ensure that foster carers are supported to meet the needs of young people who remain living with them post-18.

The agency has a no-restraint policy. When a child has needed to be restrained by their foster carer to keep them safe, conflicting guidance has been provided by the agency. In addition, the recording of restraint, including details relating to the measures used, is not comprehensive.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

COVID-19 has not had a significant impact on the agency's capacity to continue delivering good support. During this period, foster carer recruitment continued and children moved in with foster carers.

The fostering panel provides an effective quality-assurance function for foster carer assessments. Assessments are of good quality. They are completed and reviewed in a timely way. There is an experienced agency decision-maker in post who provides safe and suitable decisions. They contribute to learning and development of this agency.

A strong leadership team is in place. Leaders and managers use learning from practice to improve the experiences and care of children. This includes the development of projects to meet the needs of children. Some children experience drift and delay in their care planning. When this occurs, the agency does not always intervene to challenge the placing authority in a timely way.

There is a well-established staff team. Team morale is good. Staff offer a wealth of experience and skills to support foster carers effectively. Feedback from staff includes that they would benefit from additional training that equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to continually provide high-quality support to foster carers and children.

In the main, records are up to date. Staff visit foster carers and children regularly. However, interventions by staff are not consistently reflected across records. At times, the language used is not helpful to children's life stories.

Leaders and managers use systems such as audits and quality assurance processes to monitor progress across the service. Systems that track children's progress, individually and collectively, could be improved to ensure that progress discussed with inspectors anecdotally is captured and monitored more effectively.

Arrangements for recruitment are robust. A diverse range of foster carers are recruited. Overall, feedback gained from foster carers is that they feel supported. New foster carers feel valued and welcomed to the agency and many stay with the agency for a long time.

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 must before deciding to place a child with foster carers take into account all matters set out in schedule 3 in making their decision under regulation 17 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that positive matches are made to prevent unplanned endings for children.</p>	3 February 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children. This specifically relates to the agency ensuring that all safer care plans are comprehensive and that foster carers have clear guidance about the use of restraint. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.2)
- The registered person should ensure that there is a good-quality learning and development programme that equips staff with the skills required to meet the needs of the children and keeps them up to date with professional, legal and practice developments. This specifically relates to the agency ensuring that staff are provided with additional training that equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to provide high-quality support to foster carers and children. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 23.1)
- The registered person should ensure that 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. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. ('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: SC367941

Registered provider: Pathway Care South West Limited

Registered provider address: Atria, Spa Road, Bolton BL1 4AG

Responsible individual: Catherine Rioda

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Inspectors

Louise Bacon, Social Care Inspector

Tina Maddison, Social Care Inspector

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