

Capstone Foster Care (South East) Limited

Capstone Foster Care (South East) Limited
Bridge House, High Street, Dartford, Kent DA1 1DJ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Capstone Foster Care (South East) Limited is an independent fostering agency (IFA) established in 2003. The agency is based in Dartford, Kent. The agency operates in London and the South East with staff based in local offices in Eastcote, Dartford, Luton, Ashford and Burgess Hill. Capstone Foster Care Limited owns the agency.

Inspection dates: 22 to 25 May 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be 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: 8 February 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection
None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children are safe.
- Children are suitably matched with foster carers, promoting stable placements and improved outcomes for the majority of children.
- Carers are committed to the children who they care for and actively meet their needs.
- Young people feel welcomed and part of their carer's family.
- The new registered manager is bringing stability to the management team.
- Positive changes have been made to improve the agency.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Some safe care plans and risk assessments are not of adequate quality.
- Specialist training to meet the needs of the children placed has not been provided to all carers.
- Fostering panel minutes are not clear enough and do not provide a clear record of panel discussion and reasons for recommendations made. There is no clear record or audit of safeguarding events.
- Some of the concerns arising from the previous inspection have persisted.

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 in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))</p> <p>This is with specific reference to ensuring that: all risk assessment and safe care policies are of an adequate quality and are implemented on every occasion; and, young people subject to 'Staying Put' arrangements and, unable to obtain a DBS, have appropriate signed declarations of safe care.</p>	22/08/2017

<p>The functions of the fostering panel in respect of cases referred to it by the fostering service provider are to consider each application for approval and recommend whether an applicant is suitable to foster and where it recommends approval to recommend any terms on which the approval is given. (Regulation 25 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>This is with specific reference to ensuring that clear minutes are kept of panel meetings.</p>	<p>22/08/2017</p>
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring and improving the quality of foster care provided by the agency. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>This is with specific reference to ensuring that a clear log of safeguarding concerns is kept by the agency, and that the agency ensures effective timely reporting of safeguarding concerns.</p>	<p>22/08/2017</p>

Recommendations

- Support and training is made available to foster carers, including hard to reach carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or expect to be caring for. (NMS 20.8) This is with specific reference to ensuring that carers receive specialist training when the particular needs of children placed merit this.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children progress well and enjoy residing in their respective placements. They build positive relationships with their carers who know and listen to them while providing age-appropriate opportunities for leisure and personal development.

The care of the children is guided by their local authority care plans and the agency persistently request documentation that is overdue, such as review minutes. The foster carers are involved in the children's day-to-day planning and actively contribute to the review meetings for children. Carers have good engagement with professionals and all social workers which assists in consistent messages being given to children. However, some children's identified needs are not always addressed in a timely fashion. For example, sexual health awareness for a disabled young person was identified in 2016 but has yet to be addressed.

Children benefit from stable placements. Sibling groups are able to remain together, which provides continuity and consistency in their lives. There is strong support for 'Staying Put', (which allows those passing the age of 18 to remain with their foster families), in the agency, enabling children to experience long-term family life. This is a strength of the agency.

Carers and staff come from a range of diverse backgrounds, promoting diversity in the religious and cultural heritage of children in placement. Children feel accepted as part of the wider family of their foster carers. A small group of young people were spoken with on inspection and expressed their opinions regarding the agency and carers. 'I do not use the term carer, I say family because that is how I feel and get treated', were the highly positive words expressed by a young person. Children confirm that their wishes and feelings are always taken note of. They know how to complain while being encouraged to speak freely, so their views can influence their day-to-day routines.

The health needs of children are met in accordance with their health plans, and specialised assistance is sought as necessary. The agency has access to therapeutic services for children through two therapists and, when required, referrals are made to the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

The majority of children are in suitable education placements. The agency is developing a new system of tracking the children's progress. Educational training for staff and carers is scheduled on the upcoming training programme, although most have yet to complete this training. An education specialist has recently been recruited and is due to start soon.

Children receive support from their carers to develop their independence. Inspectors found that carers were providing their own training for children in their care through an 'independence skills builder', which is provided to foster carers to guide their efforts.

Children enjoy a wide range of age-appropriate activities that promote the development of confidence, social skills and social relationships. Some children go on yearly holidays out of country with their carers, and some children participate in local football and rugby clubs. A children's champion has recently been appointed and she has already starting building relationships with the children.

Children are able to maintain family ties and this helps them to maintain and feel pride in their identity. Their carers and the wider agency actively supports their relationships with family members and others significant to them. Contact is well supported, which enables children to safely spend time with their family and friends. A particularly positive initiative is the 'siblings together' holiday scheme that has afforded family members additional memorable time together.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Children are safe. Those spoken with on inspection expressed no concerns for their safety and well-being. Children placed long term have developed trusting relationships with their carers, while other children are in the process of developing a positive rapport with them. Carers are committed to meeting children's needs and allowing them to take age-appropriate risks.

A review of children's risk assessments highlighted that despite recent risk assessment training for staff, some assessments lacked information on known risks and did not consistently include clear actions for carers to take. In addition, some safer care plans were poorly constructed, with no management overview and these examples did not align with the risk assessments. This concern was previously highlighted in the inspection of February 2016.

The agency has not challenged some decisions by placing authorities that are not in the best interest of a small number of young people. For example, the agency accepted a social worker's agreement to a young person, aged under 18 years, keeping alcohol in his bedroom. This placed the carer in the difficult position of having to manage an inappropriate situation.

Going missing from care has been an area of concern for the agency. Some carers of children with extensive missing, or consistently late to return, behaviours have not had recent training in how to manage this. This has left a small number of carers uncertain as to how to respond. The agency does not always challenge the local authority to complete return home interviews.

Safeguarding training for carers and staff is valued by them. They believe that the agency has improved greatly in this area. Carers and staff demonstrate good awareness of child sexual exploitation, radicalisation, female genital mutilation and other safeguarding issues. Staff have undertaken training in supporting carers who are subject to allegations.

Some carers' training records did not always reflect children's specific needs. Carers in some instances rely on their own personal awareness to care for children with

complex safeguarding needs. A small number of carers have failed to report suspected or actual safeguarding issues to the agency. This means that the agency does not have a clear overview of all safeguarding issues and is not able to verify that concerns have been reported to the appropriate agencies in a timely manner.

The requirement (of the previous inspection) in relation to the agency ensuring that the policy on restraint is implemented correctly has been met. Some children and their carers have received excellent behavioural management support that has enabled carers to continue with very challenging placements. All restraints are in accordance with regulation and used only in exceptional circumstances.

The agency has reported a high number of incidents that needed a response from the police. Carers are encouraged to develop effective relationships with police in respect of their children's needs. The successful engagement has led to some noteworthy examples such as escalating the high risk of one young person and supporting a non-molestation order to be put into place.

The agency has successfully recruited new staff to work with the young people directly and indirectly. In addition, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) information is now closely monitored by the agency. However, not all young people subject to 'Staying Put' arrangements have an appropriate DBS or safe care plan signed by all relevant parties.

Health and safety checks are undertaken annually. Inspectors were informed that the agency has improved health and safety practice by linking this to carer reviews. However, the documented reviews, and discussion with the reviewing officer, indicate that this has not happened on all occasions.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency places the diverse needs and well-being of the children at the heart of its practice. Foster carers and staff have positive views about the agency and the improvements it has made over the last year. A development plan with a steady management team in place is bringing about positive change. At this inspection, the main area of weakness related to a lack of rigorous management oversight in a small number of cases.

A new manager with experience in foster care has been in post since January 2017 and has completed the process of registration. She demonstrated good knowledge and is gradually developing her insight into all children placed with the agency. The manager is working with the responsible individual and a consultant contracted by the agency in December 2016 to improve the service. This is a strong management team to take the agency forward.

Placement matching procedures are well structured. Carers feel that they are given good information prior to placement and that the agency seeks further information as required to support good matches. The agency is committed to providing stable placements for children. Extra resources are provided when required to promote placement stability.

Carers are provided with consistent supervision that has assisted in the development of good and trusted relationships with supervising social workers. Foster carers value the support that they receive from the agency during and outside of office hours. A high percentage of carers have completed core training. Some specialist training has not been provided to meet children's additional complex needs in a small number of cases seen by inspectors. In addition, foster carer logs are not always submitted to the agency as required and this is not consistently challenged.

Foster carers are provided with appropriate respite arrangements to support the long-term continuity of placements. Respite arrangements are child-centred and are arranged between carers so that children are provided with consistency from respite carers known to them.

The agency has a consistent staff team in place that benefits from regular, individual, reflective supervisions and team meetings. They maintain very manageable caseloads and view the agency as supportive. A member of staff said, 'We have strong relationships with each other and work effectively as a team.' Staff training is up to date. The majority of staff adjudge that training has improved over the past year based on the quality and range of training available. A survey of staff opinions gave extremely positive findings and their views are clearly listened to by managers.

Internal monitoring within the agency is evolving. A monitoring report covering October 2016 until the end of March 2017 provided information in relation to the agency's activity. Some current systems do not allow effective monitoring. For example, safeguarding reports are stored in different places, so it can prove time consuming to get a clear safeguarding chronology. Managers recognise that processes and management oversight need to improve further, and have implemented new systems to address this. However, it is too early to assess the full impact of this change.

The fostering panel should promote safe and secure placements. However, there are shortfalls in the panel minute taking process. This means that minutes do not document carer's terms of approval at the time of panel nor do they clearly document discussions in relation to any issues of concern identified by panel or how this influenced the recommendation of the panel. Reviews of approval are annual. However, recommendations from reviews are not always followed up, and this detracts from the value of the review process.

Complaints are addressed appropriately. Those that are considered complex are passed to an external investigator. The agency keeps in touch with the complainant throughout the process so that they feel heard and agree with the actions taken to resolve the matter.

The agency has a very high presence on social media. It has developed an excellent interactive website containing the statement of purpose, updated in January 2017. The aims and objectives of the agency are outlined and presented in a clear manner. The children's guide is an age-appropriate document that offers guidance and information to those placed with the agency.

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 difference 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, 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 who 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: SC038134

Registered provider: Capstone Foster Care (South East) Limited

Registered provider address: Beech House, Wootton St Lawrence, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG23 8PE

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Inspector(s)

James Harmon: social care inspector

Lucy Chapman: social care inspector



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