

Capstone Foster Care (South East) Limited

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28 The Green, Kings Norton, Birmingham, West Midlands B38 8SD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency was registered in 2016. Its registered office is based in Birmingham and covers the West and East Midlands region. It provides a range of fostering placements, including short term, long term and for sibling groups. There are 80 fostering households caring for 129 children.

The current manager registered with Ofsted in September 2021.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 29 November to 3 December 2021

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 October 2017

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 placed with foster carers in this agency make good progress. Children told inspectors that they are happy in their homes and know that their foster carers are invested in them and their futures. Foster carers' homes are places of nurture where there are opportunities for children to thrive. Supervising social workers carefully consider whether foster carers can meet children's needs before they join families. As a result, these are mostly successful matches. Some children find exceptional security in their foster homes, either through adoption, special guardianship orders or staying put arrangements. As a result of this support and care, children feel settled and at home.

Foster carers understand how important children's families are to them. They readily help children to see them, in line with their plans. Social workers report that foster carers manage these sometimes-complex relationships skilfully. This helps children's time with family and friends to be positive. It also helps children maintain their important links to others.

Children make progress in education. During the period of social restrictions due to COVID-19, foster carers supported children's education. For some children this was a strong period of stability. The agency worked hard to support foster carers' needs during this period as well. They provided practical support as well as resources to enhance well-being. These measures and support helped children to feel safe during a very difficult time.

Children who live out of their home area do not wait long for supportive services. There are times when the agency could push for quicker outcomes, but these occasions are far from the norm. The agency has a clinical support service. This means that, once agreed, children can receive the support they need swiftly in conjunction with their plans. This responsive offer means that children and foster carers can receive support when they need it.

Foster carers and supervising social workers receive training from the clinical support service. Despite this developing support, there are some gaps in training for foster carers. For example, there is insufficient training about complex health needs and children with disabilities, and equality and diversity is not central to the agency's training offer. There are foster carers who have not completed training in the safe management of medication or are not up to date with safe caring. Some foster carers also feel that training is not deepening their skills and understanding. Without this essential training, foster carers may not have the skills to help children meet their full potential. This is a missed opportunity as foster carers are keen to be the best they can be for children.

Children are central to the thinking of their foster carers and staff in the agency. There are regular opportunities for children to share their views about their care. However, the methods for gaining feedback and engagement with children, including

through activities, are largely aimed at literate neurotypical children. Foster carers help children who need more support to contribute their views. Disappointingly, the response provided by the agency on children's views is not accessible to them. As a result, a small number of children are unintentionally excluded. Leaders in the agency have fully understood this and have committed to changing this approach quickly.

Foster carers have a variable experience of assessment, which the agency commissions externally. Due to a lack of oversight, some foster carers experienced significant delays to their assessment and changes of assessor. This has led to some foster carers feeling frustrated. The new registered manager noted this issue soon after her arrival and has made changes. There are early indications that under the registered manager's watchful eye, improvements are being made. This system is in its early days and so the longer-term effectiveness of this is not yet assured.

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

Supervising social workers and foster carers understand children's risks well. Comprehensive safe-caring risk assessments support foster carers with their parenting role. When needed, supervising social workers work with foster carers closely to put in place more guidance. Managers review risk regularly and share their findings with senior managers. As a result, help is there when needed.

Children rarely go missing. When they do, foster carers follow the correct procedures and they look for them. At these times, supervising social workers and managers offer boundless help. Foster carers consider this invaluable. Supervising social workers work closely with foster carers to understand why children go missing in the first place. As a result of this curiosity, foster carers develop measures to help children feel safe.

The registered manager takes all allegations about foster carers seriously. She quickly informs relevant partner agencies, in line with good practice. When needed, the agency undertakes detailed investigations and reviews standards of care. These are then considered by the fostering panel, even if foster carers resign during any investigation. External safeguarding partners have confidence in the registered manager's ability and her collaborative approach. She is transparent in her communication with other professionals. This includes challenging decisions if she is not satisfied. It is clear that children's best interests drive the agency's decisions and practice.

Managers ensure that recruitment of staff is robust and detailed. The agency has adapted their approach to recruitment due to the demand for experienced social workers. But they have not compromised on safer recruitment. Therefore, the staff who help children have the skills, knowledge and experience to safeguard them.

Foster carers very rarely use restraint, and only within agreed agency policy. When this happens, supervising social workers reflect with foster carers to help their development. If necessary, the agency's physical intervention trainers support foster

carers to develop de-escalation techniques. This means that restraints are only used as a last resort to keep children and others safe, and they are rarely repeated.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The newly registered manager is ambitious and respected. Along with the new senior leadership team she has raised the bar for standards of practice. The registered manager is aware that there has been a period of staff instability and is recruiting staff who share her values. This means that foster carers and children have the support they need and deserve.

Staff in the agency have deep respect for the foster carers they support. Staff worked hard during the period of social restrictions due to COVID-19 to help foster carers manage children at home. Now that restrictions have eased, the agency has put on an appreciation event for foster carers to emphasise how much they value them. One supervising social worker told inspectors, 'The dedication our foster carers have for our children is just amazing. It is a privilege to work with them and be there to help them achieve what they do with the children.'

The fostering panel is challenging and effective. It provides a good-quality assurance function. The agency decision-maker makes reasoned decisions, with clear qualifying determinations. The agency decision-maker, the fostering panel chair and the registered manager meet regularly. This adds to the strong quality assurance. The panel includes a good range of professionally curious, qualified and experienced professionals. As a result, they make recommendations based on the strengths and vulnerabilities of foster carers. Panel members undergo training to help them fulfil their roles and responsibilities. This ensures that they keep up with developments in practice.

The registered manager is developing monitoring systems to ensure that there are consistent good outcomes. These systems are not yet fully effective, notably in relation to commissioned services. For example, one independent reviewing officer has been significantly delayed in providing foster carer review paperwork to the agency decision-maker. There is also minimal staff involvement in the skills to foster course, where prospective foster carers learn about the role. The registered manager has made some changes to address these issues. But these are not yet embedded.

Children make progress through their relationships with caring and attuned foster carers. Managers make sure they have oversight of children's day-to-day experiences. However, the regular progress monitoring uses an unclear scoring system. This makes it hard to understand true progress over time. The reports also do not make it clear how foster carers and supervising social workers will help children to stretch their progress. In addition, the agency does not have essential statutory documents for several children. This means that the agency does not have the guidance they need to fully inform foster carers about their overarching plans.

Managers develop the staff who help foster carers. They have regular supervision, where managers challenge and support practice. Staff have access to training from the clinical team, which develops their skills. However, staff do not have training relevant to all types of fostering that the agency has in their statement of purpose. They have also not completed training relevant to children's specific needs. This means that foster carers do not always receive informed support. Despite this, foster carers feel emotionally supported by staff and this helps them to be there for children.

Staff and managers have excellent relationships with important professionals in children's lives. Managers provide excellent child-centred responses to the rare complaints they receive. As a result, children benefit from cohesive networks that work well together.

Leaders and managers are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. They have plans in place to address the shortfalls. The registered manager's knowledge and approach gives confidence to partners, foster carers, children and the regulator.

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 fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>In particular, the registered manager must ensure that foster carers are suitably trained to support the children they care for, both in terms of training specific to children and in general.</p>	24 January 2022
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (3))</p> <p>In particular, the registered manager must ensure that all statutory documents are in place for each child and, if not, escalate this at pace to ensure they are received.</p>	24 January 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children's wishes and feelings are sought in a way that is accessible and inclusive of all children, including those with additional needs. The registered person should also enable all children to be able to access and understand the outcomes of any surveys and ensure that activities take account of all children's needs so they can be fully included.
(‘Fostering services: national minimum standards’, 1.7)

- The registered person should ensure that staff complete training relevant to their role to support carers and children. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 23.1)
- The registered person should ensure that they have oversight of all services that are commissioned to fulfil a function of the agency. This includes assessments of foster carers' suitability, foster carer reviews, training and specialist support services. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the monitoring of outcomes for children is clear to understand for foster carers, external professionals and children. This should include how children's progress will be supported to achieve those outcomes. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 31.7)

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: 1237336

Registered provider: Capstone Foster Care (South East) Ltd

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

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Inspectors

Karol Keenan, Social Care Inspector
Dawn Bennett, Social Care Inspector
Christy Wannop, Social Care Inspector

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