

Capstone Foster Care (South East) Limited

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10 Twisleton Court, Priory Hill, Dartford DA1 2EN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned independent fostering agency registered with Ofsted in June 2003. The manager registered with Ofsted on 7 January 2021.

Foster carers provide long-term, respite and permanent care placements. The fostering service also provides placements for children with disabilities, as well as parent and child placements. At the time of this inspection, there were 105 approved fostering households, providing care for a total of 101 children.

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: 13 to 17 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: 22 May 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 are looked after by foster carers who are warm and caring. Care is individualised and carers receive good support from the agency to meet the varied and diverse needs of the children in their care. As a result, there are several long-term and successful placements where children have made good progress.

The quality of the relationships between foster carers and the professionals who care for the children is good. Regular reviews of the care provided involve children as well as professionals. Having their voices heard helps children to feel part of the process. In one case, when a child did not wish to remain in placement beyond the age of 18, the supervising social worker and foster carer advocated strongly for them to start on an independence programme. However, it is acknowledged that preparation for this process could have started a lot sooner, thereby reducing any possible anxiety for the child.

Foster carers are skilled and are well prepared for caring for children. The training that they receive and the regular supervision from experienced supervising social workers mean that foster carers promote progress for children in all areas of their lives. Foster carers work well with schools and colleges to promote positive behaviour and learning, enabling children to achieve good attendance and to be well prepared for the future.

Children have good opportunities to share their views and wishes. The activities provided by the agency create opportunities for children to talk to staff about where they live and also about their day-to-day experiences. Supervising social workers meet with the carers every month and speak to children to get their views, wishes and feelings. Children's views are taken into account when for example, they are anxious about meeting with members of their family.

Children have positive experiences that prepare them for the future. Foster carers encourage children to take part in a range of activities, such as sport. The agency provides bespoke activities, such as parent and child coffee mornings, workshops on the dangers of knife crime, and information on children's rights.

The agency helps carers to prepare children for moving on. Children have given their views on the content of welcome packs, drawing on their own experiences of moving into foster care. Children are supported well to develop their confidence and to prepare for the future. The manager is committed to ensuring that children move on in a positive and planned way and will confidently challenge placing authorities if there is a likelihood of this not happening.

The fostering panel is well organised and is a strength of this agency. The panel is diverse and panel members are appropriately skilled. The quality of assessments is good and recommendations for approval are well considered.

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

Children's needs are well understood by supervising social workers and foster carers. Clear and detailed risk assessments are updated as required, and professionals work together effectively if an increase in risk is identified.

Carers receive a wide range of training in safeguarding and protecting children. Training is regular and, if required, specific to the needs of the children being cared for. Carers receive training on what to do when a child goes missing and feel supported by their supervising social workers to manage such episodes. Children have 'return to placement' discussions to ensure that they are safe and well.

Carers receive training in behaviour management, including de-escalation training to defuse potentially volatile situations. The training prepares them for caring for children whose behaviours might challenge the care provided. Following a number of calls to the police as a result of a child's behaviour at home, the manager invited a police officer to attend a carers' support group. This helped carers to consider the wider implications of police involvement and whether behaviour could be managed in a different way. This had positive benefits for the child in question and reduced the likelihood of criminalisation.

Staff know what to do and who to inform if they are concerned about a child's welfare. Clear procedures are in place, including how and when to notify relevant professionals about safeguarding incidents. The agency has a strong commitment to keeping children safe. The agency's children's champion also works with the children to enable them to express their views effectively on both personal and national issues.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is ambitious in her vision for children. She has high expectations about what children can achieve and models these expectations to her staff. The manager ensures that opportunities are provided to children that help them to progress. Leaders and managers have high expectations of staff and how they support foster carers and, as a result, foster carers say that they feel well supported. During the COVID-19 restrictions, the manager ensured that carers received suitable and appropriate training.

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the progress that children are making. They use several tools to monitor progress, including an outcomes tracker. The manager ensures staff attend meetings where information on children's progress and achievements is shared. The manager reviews documents regarding foster carers and children to gain further information on progress. As a result, leaders and managers identify areas where additional help is needed and take appropriate action to meet children's needs.

There is good supervision practice in this agency. The three elements of administration, practice, and support and development are included in every record.

Recording is detailed and relevant. The manager also receives effective supervision. New staff spoke positively of the induction process. Training is of a good standard and staff said that a good range of training is available to them.

Leaders and managers actively challenge when the responses from other services are not helpful for children. For instance, the manager confidently challenged a placing authority on the way that they were planning to move children from a foster placement. The manager kept the children at the centre of all negotiations and escalated her concerns appropriately to senior personnel within the authority.

Leaders and managers actively promote equality and diversity. Staff and carers receive this as core training, including training in cultural competence. Participation activities for children create an opportunity for staff to learn from them and hear their voices. For example, a workshop activity in relation to writing their experiences of care was well received and, as a result, a book was published, sharing the children's work. This helped children to feel engaged and valued.

Leaders and managers know and understand the agency's strengths and areas for development. They take action to prevent shortfalls. However, while training offered to carers includes specific training about the needs of children, the implementation of this learning is not being sufficiently considered in carer supervision and support groups. In some instances, foster carer supervision is not used effectively to address or prevent the potential breakdown of a placement. In addition, there are some shortfalls in records maintained by foster carers regarding the children placed with them.

Leaders and managers, while generally responsive to the needs of children, did not in one case have adequate oversight of a child's placement. This meant that no one in the service knew what was happening with this child when they were taken out at weekends by external support workers.

While leaders and managers are actively involved in the recruitment of new staff, in one instance, the reasons for a worker leaving childcare employment were not effectively established.

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>This is with specific reference to ensuring that foster parents receive adequate support when a placement is unstable to prevent breakdown, and that this support is reflected in foster parent supervisions.</p> <p>Also, with reference to ensuring that foster parents understand the needs of children and, with the support of their social worker, prepare the child for their future.</p>	15 February 2022
<p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (3)(c) - schedule 1 (4))</p>	15 February 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings 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. In particular, ensure that

children's needs are well known and that the foster carer is adequately supported to meet these needs. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.8)

- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service has and implements a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the fostering services files, on the child's files and on case files relating to foster carers. In particular, ensure that guidance relating to the quality and regularity of recording on children's files is followed by foster carers and that the recording is monitored by their social worker. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.1)
- The registered person should ensure that there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence. This includes appropriate training and support to foster carers caring for young people who are approaching adulthood. Arrangements should be consistent with the young person's care plan, including their placement plan, pathway plan and transition plan for children with disabilities and special educational needs. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 12.3)

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: SC038134

Registered provider: Capstone Foster Care (South East) Ltd

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Inspectors

Vevene Muhammad, Social Care Inspector
John Pledger, Social Care Inspector

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