

Capstone Foster Care (South West)

Capstone Foster Care (South West) Limited

Unit 5, Scott Law House, Lynch Road Business Park, Lynch Road, Berkeley, Gloucestershire GL13 9TA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is part of a national independent fostering agency. It recruits, assesses and approves foster carers in the south-west of England. It provides emergency, short-term and long-term foster care for children and provides parent and child and 'staying put' placements. At the time of this inspection, there were 98 fostering households providing placements for 123 children. The agency operates from two offices, situated in Berkeley and Frome.

The registered manager has been in post since June 2020 and is suitably qualified and experienced.

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: 21 to 25 February 2022

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: 27 November 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 benefit from living in settled and stable family homes with foster carers who ensure that the children feel loved and very much part of the family. Many children stay with their foster carers for many years. If a child wishes to stay with their foster carer beyond the age of 18, they can remain in a 'staying put' arrangement whereby they continue to receive support from their foster carers until they are ready to live independently. This gives children a sense of stability and belonging.

Foster carers report that they are very well supported, supervised and trained. Supervising social workers know the foster carers and children very well and provide foster carers with an appropriate mix of challenge and scrutiny alongside extensive support.

The healthcare needs of children are met. Foster carers ensure that children attend all healthcare appointments, such as visits to the dentist's or optician's. The agency has a therapeutic service that offers effective behaviour management strategies and support to carers. This ensures that appropriate support is given to foster carers so that they can continue to care safely for a child.

The agency operates an effective out-of-hours service. Foster carers report that they can obtain help and support at any time of day or night and at weekends. Foster carers also feel supported by the availability of foster carer groups. These groups continued virtually throughout COVID-19 restrictions and foster carers felt supported during these periods of restrictions when it was not possible to meet in person.

All children are making progress with their education. They are placed in educational placements that are meeting their needs. The agency education adviser provides effective support and advice to supervising social workers, who then support foster carers, so that children receive the educational services they need. Supervising social workers liaise effectively with virtual heads and education authorities to ensure that children receive, for example, the pupil premium or an education, health and care plan.

Children's views and wishes are obtained and acted upon during visits by the supervising social workers, at events that are regularly held by the agency throughout the year, and through the children's champions group. Children know how to complain and are confident that any complaints will be listened to and acted upon by the agency.

Parent and child placements minimise delay and disruption for children. Current court delays are affecting parenting assessment timescales and are out of the control of the agency. However, the agency monitors these placements closely and there are clear expectations of the placement and the role of the foster carer.

The assessment of prospective foster carers is comprehensive, timely and of a very good quality. Assessment reports submitted to panel clearly identify strengths and vulnerabilities and give panel members the information they need to make a decision about a prospective foster carer's suitability.

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

Children report that they feel safe living with their foster carers. The agency acts promptly and comprehensively if there are concerns about the safety of a child or concerns about the quality of care provided by a foster carer. Foster carers and staff are clear about safeguarding procedures and feel confident to use them. They receive regular safeguarding training and training in associated topics, such as internet safety, to equip them with the skills they need to keep children safe.

Incidents of children going missing are rare. If an incident does occur, foster carers take effective action. The agency ensures a proactive multi-agency response to find the child and then find out where they have been, who they have been with and what they were doing while missing. However, records held by the agency do not always reflect that the child has been able to speak with an independent person on their return, so that they have the opportunity to share any worries or concerns they may have about their carer and why they went missing.

Behaviour management strategies for each child, assessment of risks and a safer caring plan are in place to guide foster carers about how best to promote positive behaviour. However, behaviour management strategies are recorded in different documents, rather than in a single document so that foster carers have effective and easy-to-access strategies and guidance.

Restraint training is undertaken by foster carers so that they know how to use authorised and safe holds. There is a no-restraint policy in the agency unless specifically agreed by the placing authority as necessary to keep an individual child or others safe. The use of restraint is minimal and any incidents are comprehensively evaluated for training and learning.

Recruitment procedures for staff and foster carers are robust and ensure that only suitable people are employed and approved by the agency. Thorough health and safety checks of foster carers' homes are undertaken prior to approval, at supervising social worker visits and at annual reviews to ensure that children live in a safe and suitable environment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

In the last 18 months, the agency has appointed a new registered manager and is implementing new policies and procedures in line with the agency development plan to further improve the quality of care. Staff and foster carers acknowledge that the recent changes have led to an improvement in the agency. They praise the support given to them by leaders and managers during these changes and comment

positively about the effective virtual working arrangements implemented by the agency during COVID-19 restrictions.

Staff benefit from regular supervision and training that is focused on children's needs. The agency promotes the learning of student social workers and regularly liaises with Winchester University to inform the agency's practice.

The quality of matching is mixed. Many matching documents evidence thorough and comprehensive processes to ensure that a foster carer has the necessary skills and experience to meet a child's needs. However, records do not always document how a foster carer's skills and experience match a child's needs.

There is a clear management footprint in records and documents. Management oversight takes place through a system of audits and quality assurance processes. However, although managers know each child well and can anecdotally report the progress of children, this is not clearly tracked and documented to evidence that children are making progress and what action is being taken by the agency if they are not. Learning and outcomes from all unplanned endings are not clear and are often not easily obtainable.

The recruitment of foster carers takes place in line with the agency's statement of purpose. The agency recruits a diverse range of carers who can meet the needs of the children requiring a fostering placement. Feedback from foster carers about the agency is overwhelmingly positive and the turnover of foster carers is low.

The agency fostering panel meets regularly and provides an effective quality monitoring function. Panel minutes are clear and concise and provide evidence of why decisions have been made. Clear recommendations and reasons for the recommendations are documented and evidence that safe and suitable decisions are consistently made by the panel.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children are carefully matched to a foster placement and that foster carers have full information about the child prior to placement. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 11.2)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers receive support and guidance on how to manage their responses and feelings arising from caring for children, particularly where children display very challenging behaviour. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.7)
- The registered person should ensure there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This includes any serious incidents, allegations or complaints about the service and ensuring the quality of the service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.1)

In particular, ensure that assessment of risk information and behaviour management strategies are contained in one document, such as the safer caring plan.

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: SC032760

Registered provider: Capstone Foster Care (South West) Limited

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

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Inspectors

Tina Maddison, Social Care Inspector
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