

Capstone Foster Care (South West)

Capstone Foster Care (South West) Limited
Suite 5, Zealley House, Greenhill Way, Kingsteignton, Newton Abbot, Devon TQ12 3SB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is part of Capstone Foster Care, an independent fostering agency with branches across the United Kingdom. It recruits, assesses and approves foster carers in the south west of England. It provides emergency, short- and long-term carers for children and young people and also supports parent and child assessments. At the time of this inspection, the fostering agency provided 150 fostering households for 130 children and young people. The south west office is situated in Kingsteignton, Devon. There are branches operating in Frome, Bristol and Ringwood.

Inspection dates: 27 November to 1 December 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: 9 October 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children and young people benefit from being cared for and nurtured by child-centred foster carers who are carefully recruited, assessed and prepared by the agency. The foster carers build trusting relationships with children, many of which last long after the young person has grown up and left their care. One foster carer described working with the agency as: 'It feels like an extended family.'
- Children and young people are making good progress with their education, physical and emotional healthcare needs and social skills from their starting points. Children described their foster carers as: 'comforting and kind' and 'amazing'.
- Foster carers are very well supported. Supervising social workers have a relatively small number of foster carers to support and so they know the carers and their families very well. This helps to achieve permanency for children.
- The fostering panel is led by a highly effective and experienced panel chair. The panel is challenging and curious. Together with the agency decision-maker, the panel ensures that only suitable people are approved to foster.
- A strength of the agency is how the young people are supported to learn independent living skills. An independence worker is employed by the agency. This worker supports the young people to gain relevant skills and qualifications that equip them for when they live independently. The agency owns and operates a training flat where the young people can go to gain experience of living independently while being supported by the staff.
- Introductions of the foster carers to the young people and children are planned and carefully managed whenever possible. When carers are struggling with children's behaviour, the organisation implements lessons learned.
- The children and young people benefit from being given child-friendly booklets written by the foster carers prior to their arrival. The books contain lots of photographs of the foster carers, their house and their pets so that children and young people have as much reassuring information as possible about where they are moving to.
- Managers, supervising social workers and foster carers strongly challenge other professionals if they think that a decision is not in the best interests of the child or young person.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development :

- Foster carers do not receive comprehensive information or training that supports them to understand when they may physically restrain a child. Similarly, training does not help carers understand the emotional impact of physical restraint for a child who may have previously suffered physical or sexual abuse. On one occasion, a foster carer physically restrained a child when this was not part of the child's safer caring plan. Records of this restraint were not evaluated by

managers.

- Individual outcomes for children and young people are well known to the supervising social worker and foster carer. However, there is not currently an outcome tracker that gives an overview to managers of what progress children are making in all areas of their lives and how this compares with their peers. The agency recognises this shortfall and plans to introduce an outcome tracking system early in the New Year.
- Quality monitoring systems are in place but are not currently being sent to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector at least annually, as required by the regulations.
- Children's and young people's voice is not evident in areas of the agency's operations, such as foster carer recruitment and foster carer reviews.

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
Ensure that the registered person provides the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any quality monitoring review provided by the fostering agency. The monitoring must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents and their placing authority. (Regulation 31(1)(a)(2)(3))	29/12/2017
The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that restraint is used on a child only where it is necessary to prevent injury to the child or other persons, or serious damage to property. (Regulation 13(2)(c))	29/12/2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that, having regard to the child's age and understanding, their views, wishes and feelings must be known, listened to and acted upon in all aspects of their care in the foster home, unless to do so would be contrary to their interests or adversely affect other members of the fostering household; in particular, that their wishes and feelings are evidenced in the recruitment and review of foster carers. (NMS 3.32)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people make progress in all aspects of their lives as a result of living with foster carers employed and supported by the agency. They spoke warmly about their foster carers. One young person said: 'My foster carers are funny and I feel safe there.' Another young person said; 'They (foster carers) are kind and we are lucky to live there. She is always saying, "are you ok" if I have a sad face.'

Birth children of the foster carers are also very well supported by the agency. They are invited to join in all events organised by the agency and can attend foster carer training if appropriate, to give them an understanding of the children living in their home. One birth child said: 'I think Capstone is amazing. I feel fully involved. If there is a problem they help fix it... it is like a big family.'

Foster carers report that they feel very well supported, supervised and trained. This is a strength of the agency. Supervising social workers have relatively small numbers of foster carers to supervise and as a result know each family really well, many of whom have successfully fostered for many years. All foster carers spoken to during the inspection reported that they would recommend the agency to others thinking of fostering. They are involved in the recruitment of new foster carers and treated by the agency with respect and as fellow professionals.

Children and young people live with their brothers and sisters whenever possible. When this is not possible, foster carers support regular visits, if this is appropriate. This means that important family relationships are maintained.

Children and young people are encouraged to participate in a number of events that are run through the year for them by the agency. The agency is sensitive to the fact that some young people do not wish to be labelled as 'children in care' and do not wish to attend these events.

Young people are generally healthy. All children and young people have a 'health passport' that details all identified healthcare needs and details of doctors and dentists. This helps to ensure that all medical checks and immunisations are up to date. The staff and foster carers ensure that any specialist healthcare needs are fully met. The agency employs psychologists that foster carers can consult. The psychologists deliver training to new foster carers on topics such as therapeutic parenting and attachment. Many of the supervising social workers are trained in therapeutic interventions such as therapeutic play, 'theraplay' and life story work.

Managers, supervising social workers and the foster carers recognise the importance of the children and young people attending and achieving well at school. There are high aspirations for all the children and young people. Many young people have achieved very good grades in their GCSE examinations and children have made very good progress from their starting points. The agency employs an education coordinator who monitors educational outcomes effectively, accompanies foster

carers to school meetings and liaises with education professionals. For example, she recently successfully challenged a school when a young person had been illegally excluded from school. This challenge meant that the young person was not out of education for long and returned to school. Foster carers also benefit from the training that she provides in topics such as pupil premium and understanding how to apply for an educational and healthcare plan.

A strength of the agency is how young people are prepared for independence. The young people benefit from being supported by a practitioner who focuses on 'stability'. The practitioner works with the young people who need extra help with learning the skills necessary to successfully live independently when they leave foster care. The agency also supports young people to remain with their foster carers after their 18th birthday. The young people benefit from individually designed courses. The agency operates a training flat in a town centre, where the young people can live for a short time, learn what it is like to live alone and identify what extra skills they need to learn.

Whenever possible, comprehensive information about the young people is gained from placing authorities prior to placement. Managers understand the importance of gaining this information. On occasion, this has not been possible and has led to a small number of disruptions and a safeguarding incident. The agency has a good knowledge of its foster carers and so knows whether a child will be a good match with a family and other children. Unless it is an emergency, children and young people meet their prospective foster carer and visit the house prior to moving in.

Managers complete a matching criteria form that clearly evidences why it is thought that a child and foster carer will be a good match. Birth children are also considered in the matching process and how a child coming to live in their home will affect them.

One young person who needed a foster carer stated that she would like a family who owned animals and horses and as a result of listening to her wishes, the agency has very successfully matched her with a family who own a farm and horse livery yard. Before being placed there, the young person refused to eat properly and attend school. She is now eating properly, is attending and achieving well at school and is very happy.

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

The agency has a no physical restraint policy unless a child or other person is at risk of serious harm. Incidents of physical restraint are very rare. However, on one occasion a foster carer physically restrained a child unnecessarily to manage their behaviour. The report of this incident was sent to managers. The report did not contain a detailed description of the incident or the duration of the restraint. Managers failed to investigate and evaluate the incident and put in place training for the foster carer to ensure that the incident was not repeated.

Children and young people report that they feel safe living with their foster carers

and could name a person they would speak to if they felt worried or unsafe. The agency promotes the safety and well-being of children and young people through sound safeguarding policies and clearly written guidance for foster carers. Safer caring plans and risk assessments are comprehensive and offer foster carers clear strategies of how to safely manage behaviour and risks. Foster carers receive training on topics such as child sexual exploitation, radicalisation and self-harming. This ensures that foster carers have the skills and knowledge necessary to support young people.

The agency has established working relationships with safeguarding agencies and professionals. This is a learning agency that promptly acts upon any advice given to improve the protection of children and young people.

Foster carers spoken with during the inspection demonstrated a good understanding of possible signs of abuse or child sexual exploitation and what action they would take to keep children safe. Foster carers achieve a good balance of allowing children and young people to take risks and learn from mistakes, while keeping them safe.

Prospective staff and foster carers are subject to a rigorous recruitment procedure that helps to ensure that only suitable people are employed by the agency. Staff records evidence that extensive checks are made and references are obtained by the agency and followed up by telephone.

Foster carers report that if they are subject to allegations they are well supported. The agency takes prompt action to safeguard children when an allegation has been made. Managers are not afraid of making decisions that promote the safety of children. For example, a recent independent review recommended that a foster carer should remain registered with the agency, after the agency raised concerns about their suitability to foster. Concerns about the foster carer remained and so the agency decision-maker did not accept the recommendation and continued with the original decision to de-register the foster carer.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is managed by an experienced and well-qualified registered manager. Following a long period of stability in the agency, there have been some changes of staff and changes in the management structure, particularly in one office. This has led to some foster carers and members of staff feeling unsettled. Senior managers are aware of this and are supporting the foster carers and staff through the changes.

Managers, the staff and foster carers have high aspirations for the children and young people in their care. A strength of the agency is the child-focused approach that the agency ensures is the driving force behind any decisions and changes. For example, managers, supervising social workers and foster carers challenge other professionals if they think that decisions are not being made in the best interests of the child. A placing local authority wanted to move a young person, who was settled in their foster home and making progress, to residential care. A strong challenge was made by the agency to the placing authority and the young person remained in

foster care.

Managers are aware of the strengths and areas for improvement in the agency. A development plan details how the agency intends to improve its service in the next 12 months. One area for development is the tracking of children's outcomes. This is already completed by individual supervising social workers, but there is no agency overview of children's outcomes. The agency intends to address this shortfall through the introduction of a computer programme that will track outcomes for children and young people.

The staff report that they feel well trained, supported and supervised. One supervising social worker reported: 'There is always a manager to contact. We have manageable caseloads. We are supported by managers and have regular supervision.' Another supervising social worker said: 'Support is strong. There is more clarity now, expectations are clear and formalised. I am part of a strong team, lots of trust and respect. It is a child-centred organisation with a clear theoretical underpinning.'

Foster carers report that they are extremely well supported by their supervising social worker. One foster carer said: 'Whatever I need they help me with.' Foster carers also report positively about the extensive training they receive that equips them with the skills and knowledge they need to care for their child or young person. One foster carer said: 'On my fostering journey, the training has been instrumental.' Another foster carer said: 'Capstone is very supportive, we get lots of training and it is good.'

Managers swiftly address any complaints in line with the agency's complaints procedure. Complaints and concerns are thoroughly investigated and any learning is disseminated through the agency. The staff comment positively on the supportive and learning environment that the agency provides for them. There is a thorough evaluation and analysis of times when things go wrong. However, disruptions are rare because of effective matching between children and foster carers.

Managers prepare regular quality monitoring reports. These have not been sent to Ofsted in line with the regulations.

A strength of the agency is the quality of the fostering panel, led by an experienced and well-qualified chairperson. The panel promotes thorough assessments and provides a rigorous quality assurance function. Panel members are carefully chosen for their knowledge and skills in areas such as health and education, and the panel includes people who were previously in care. Panel reports are comprehensive and rigorous and provide comprehensive information that supports the agency decision-maker to make effective decisions.

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 differences 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. Whenever possible, they talked to children and 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 whom 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: SC032760

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Inspector

Tina Maddison, social care inspector



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