

## Sunbeam Fostering Agency

12 Waterside Drive, Langley, Slough SL3 6EZ

# Assurance visit

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Sunbeam Fostering is a privately owned independent fostering agency, one of three fostering agencies operated by this organisation. The agency provides a range of foster placements for children who are unable to live with their birth families. The agency provides emergency, short-term, bridging, respite, long-term and parent and child placements. The agency is specifically able to meet the needs of unaccompanied children from outside the UK.

At the time of this inspection, the agency was providing placements to 296 children in 220 fostering households.

**Visit dates:** 24 to 25 November 2020

**Previous inspection date:** 23 July 2018

**Previous inspection judgement:** Good

## Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Findings from the visit**

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

### **The care of children**

Children have been well looked after during the COVID-19 pandemic. Committed carers have been supported effectively by the agency to ensure that children's needs are met. Children have benefited from empathic care from experienced carers. Children's cultural needs are well understood and sensitively responded to by carers. Foster families have been thoughtful in the way that they have adjusted their day-to-day living in response to the COVID-19 restrictions. This has included recognition of the significant impact of these restrictions and additional health and safety measures for unaccompanied children arriving in the UK.

The agency has provided focused support for children's learning. Education workshops that were provided by agency staff are an excellent example of this. Children were helped to re-engage with their learning following a period when schools were closed. Staff recognised the potential impact of this and ensured that there was a clear focus on supporting children's emotional well-being as well as supporting them with their learning needs.

Agency staff have provided individualised support both virtually and in person. In addition, therapeutic consultations have also been provided to support children and carers. Professionals shared excellent feedback on the quality of care provided to children. Children's views and feelings are well understood by staff and are used to help to inform the quality of care provided.

The effective use of interpreters helps children to voice their views. Children have been supported by independent advocates to raise concerns and make complaints. The limited number of complaints received were unfounded and a detailed response was provided to children in order to let them know that their concerns had been fully investigated.

### **The safety of children**

Assessments of children's known vulnerabilities and risks are appropriately undertaken prior to them being matched with foster carers. There are clear safety plans in place to mitigate identified risks. These plans are completed in collaboration with the child's allocated social worker and are regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain effective. Children are consulted with regard to their safety plans and their views help shape the support provided to them.

Allegations in relation to carers and/or members of fostering households are well managed. In one example, the agency worked effectively with the designated officer and followed the advice that was provided. Thorough internal investigations were

undertaken and additional safeguarding measures put in place, which included increased supervision and support provided to carers.

When the agency became aware of a significant concern in relation to one carer, this was responded to immediately and action was taken to make sure that children were protected from harm. The agency continued appropriate oversight in relation to the foster carer's practice through the fostering panel. The agency response to allegations that were unsubstantiated is equally thorough. This includes reflection on practice and improved support to foster carers, such as increased training and extra visits to the fostering household by the agency social worker. This ensures that children receive safe care.

### **Leaders and managers**

The registered manager and the senior leadership team have ensured an appropriate use of the flexibilities permitted by the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. The agency has focused on continuing to maintain high standards of care throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Foster carers consistently shared excellent feedback with inspectors with regard to the support, training and care provided by the agency to fostering families. Foster carers valued the support received during the pandemic, including virtual support groups that focused on their emotional well-being. Carers acknowledged the child-centred approach of the agency, with one comment encapsulating this well: 'Sunbeam has the welfare of the children as their first and foremost priority and they support me to make sure the child is safe and happy and all aspects of well-being are met.'

The staff team feels supported by the registered manager. Staff receive good support and challenge from managers and this enables them to deliver high-quality services to children and foster carers. Staff reported that they felt particularly well supported to cope with the pandemic.

Staff and foster carers alike referred to the agency as being like a 'family' when describing their experiences. The registered manager consults well with carers and staff, incorporating their views when monitoring the quality of care provided to children. The registered manager has good audit systems in place and maintains good oversight of practice.

The quality of internal investigations in response to complaints and practice concerns is generally good. However, in relation to one fostering household, there were historical concerns relating to training and record-keeping. These concerns had previously been discussed at the fostering panel with clear actions agreed. However, these actions were not carried out. This meant that practice that had a detrimental impact on the well-being of children was not challenged at the earliest opportunity.

The fostering panel provides good challenge to the agency. This helps to contribute to the overall safeguarding culture within the agency and the quality of care

provided. The requirements and recommendations from the last inspection have been met.

## 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, ensure all foster carers undertake the relevant training, continued learning and development to support them in their role.</p>	31 January 2021

### Recommendations

- Staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. (National Minimum Standards 26.2)

## Independent fostering agency details

**Unique reference number:** SC035026

**Registered provider:** Sunbeam Fostering Agency Limited

**Responsible individual:** Karamjit Dhull

**Registered manager:** Alison Lamb

## **Inspectors**

Maria Lonergan, Social Care Inspector  
Anne-Marie Davies, Social Care Inspector

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