

Sunbeam Fostering Agency

Sunbeam Fostering Agency Limited

12 Waterside Drive, Langley, Slough SL3 6EZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

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, including emergency, short-term, bridging, respite, long-term and parent and child placements. The agency also offers placements for unaccompanied children from outside the UK.

At the time of this inspection, the agency was providing placements to 281 children in 232 fostering households.

The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2021.

Inspection dates: 6 to 10 March 2023

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: 23 July 2018

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 continue to make good progress, with several children making excellent progress. Many children are in long-term stable placements, with some children wanting to remain with their carers once they reach independence. This creates stability and enables children to continue to make life choices supported by committed foster carers.

Older children successfully move on to the next chapter of their lives, supported by a dedicated network of supervising social workers and foster carers. Children told inspectors that they were happy and well cared for by their foster carers.

Younger children are given a positive start in life because of empathic and compassionate foster carers. For example, a foster carer patiently taught independent skills in self-care to one parent and the ability to risk assess and keep themselves and their baby safe. As a result, they successfully moved to their supported accommodation.

Many children are making better than expected progress in education. Some go on to university and most secure good grades in their exams. Foster carers support children to achieve because they are committed to good outcomes for the children they care for. One foster carer is supporting a child to achieve his dream of attending university, by funding extra subject tuition.

The agency has a significant number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in placements. The information available to unaccompanied minors, particularly the children's guide, is broad and in several different languages. This enables vulnerable children to understand the immediate care being provided to them, with the appropriate information to contact relevant agencies for support.

Foster carers support children with disabilities and ensure they have the knowledge to provide informed care. For example, a foster carer is learning sign language, enabling more effective communication between them and the child to understand the child's wishes and feelings.

The placement of children is well thought through. Information is gathered from all available sources. However, when this is not provided, for example health plans, there is insufficient escalation beyond the initial request. Therefore, children may not receive fully coordinated care planning, for example for their health and well-being.

In addition, there is a lack of diversity among the recruited foster carers, resulting in a team of carers that does not fully represent the communities they serve. For example, children may feel unable to explore their sexuality and openly discuss their emotions.

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

Children are kept safe and are well cared for by proactive foster carers. When safeguarding concerns have been identified, leaders and managers take appropriate action. This includes liaising with other agencies and carrying out standards of care investigations when necessary. These investigations are well recorded and identify areas for development, for example, further training and support to meet the needs of children in their care.

Managers keep clear records of safeguarding incidents, including all contacts and follow-up actions taken. This means that information is readily available for effective oversight of emerging risks and identification of any patterns that may arise over a period of time. Managers and staff have strong working relationships with foster carers, professionals and stakeholders. The effective communication has helped to prevent the behaviours of one child at risk of child exploitation from escalating.

Individual risk assessments do not clearly identify strategies for foster carers to follow. Supervising social workers discuss these in supervision but the recording is limited. Foster carers know the children well, however, clear strategy and guidance would benefit new foster carers or staff and prevent inconsistent management of behaviour.

When children have not returned home to their foster carers at an agreed time, appropriate action is taken. Foster carers and staff follow the procedure and work closely with agencies such as the police to ensure children's safe return. Supervising social workers are proactive in visiting the child on their return to ensure their well-being when other agencies fail to do so. This means concerns can be shared promptly and further measures to reduce risk can be put in place.

Unannounced home visits to foster carers' homes promote the children's safety and well-being. Any concerns are followed up in a timely manner and are thoroughly considered by managers. However, when foster carers fail to complete refresher training, this is not always followed up to ensure compliance with agency policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding.

Records of recruitment do not demonstrate that safer recruitment processes are always adhered to. One member of staff was recruited and commenced work before a clear Disclosure and Barring Service check was obtained, although other checks were completed. The agency followed the appropriate process; however, records do not clearly demonstrate that this person was supervised whilst working directly with carers and children whilst waiting for the check.

Staff and managers have a good understanding of the therapeutic model of care, which supports the ethos outlined in the agency's statement of purpose. There are well-planned processes regarding upskilling and embedding of the model to all foster carers. This enables foster carers to support a more trauma-informed approach when helping children with high care needs.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Senior leaders and managers have a clear vision for the agency. The staff team is cohesive and well established. This offers continuity to foster carers who describe supervising social workers as committed and supportive.

The registered manager is dedicated to improving outcomes for children. However, the agency has several managerial roles. Monitoring systems are not fully embedded, due to the cumbersome weight of oversight and reporting systems. As a result, the quality assurance of practice is inconsistent.

These differences are reflected in the experiences of foster carers in different areas covered by the agency. Foster carers told inspectors of the differences in expectations of their roles and responsibilities. For example, some areas have thorough and proactive management oversight that ensures they are maintaining high standards, whereas others do not.

The registered manager does not currently have fully effective monitoring systems in place that will ensure compliance with the agency's policies and identify patterns or trends. However, the governance arrangements provide an additional layer of scrutiny for the service.

Staff told inspectors that they enjoy working for the agency and supporting foster carers. Staff said they are respected and able to approach any senior leader or manager for advice and guidance. All staff receive regular case-based monthly supervision. This is well recorded and promotes reflective practice. However, there are inconsistencies in the standard of oversight and challenge, for example, when a foster carer has not completed necessary training. This creates a disparity in guidance given to supervising social workers and the expectations of some foster carers.

Supervising social workers provide informed supervision to foster carers which remains focused and up to date. Managers and staff have completed all necessary training. The agency has a comprehensive induction and all staff have received an annual appraisal. This supports staff to progress and identify areas for improvement or development.

The fostering panel is organised and effective, offering a good-quality resource to new and experienced foster carers. It is chaired by a knowledgeable and independent person. Panel members actively seek input from education and health services, on a case-by-case basis. Well-informed decisions and outcomes are recorded and thorough.

The agency decision-maker offers clarity and scrutiny to decision-making. Information and reports from supervising social workers and managers are received promptly. This enables decision-making to be informed. Any recommendations are unquestionably in line with the agency's overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

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 that all foster carers undertake the relevant training to support them in their role.</p>	30 September 2023

Recommendations

- Each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority where all such necessary information has not been provided by the authority. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.9)
- The fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment. This includes DBS checks. All personnel responsible for recruitment and selection of staff are trained in, understand and operate these good practices. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 19.2)
- There are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This includes the financial viability of the service, any serious incidents, allegations or complaints about the service and ensuring the quality of the service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.1)
- The manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2)

- Information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.6)

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: SC035026

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Inspectors

Jill Sephton-Wright, Social Care Inspector (lead)
Alphie Khumalo, Social Care Inspector

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