

Ansacare Fostering Agency

Ansacare Fostering Agency Ltd

Weatherill House, New South Quarter, 23 Whitestone Way, Croydon, CR0 4WF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Ansacare is based in the London Borough of Croydon. The agency provides services for children and Children and Children and young people from birth to 18 years. At the time of the inspection, there were 20 approved fostering households with 19 children and Children and Children and young people in placements. The agency aims to provide, short-term, long-term, permanent and emergency placements.

Inspection dates: 14 to 18 May 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and Children and Children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and Children and 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: 26 September 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children and young people make good progress in their placements, with some remaining with their carers after their 18th birthday under 'staying put' arrangements.
- Children and young people progress well in education, supported by committed and driven foster carers, who liaise well with education providers.
- Foster carers enjoy good levels of training which help them provide high levels of care. A therapist helps to offer direct support and specialist training to support carers.
- The agency benefits from a strong and effective panel and reviewing process which offers strong scrutiny and advice.
- The agency benefits from a new registered manager who brings energy and drive to the agency. He has recruited a new team of committed and dedicated qualified social workers to support him.
- The registered manager has implemented a programme of improvements since the last inspection: this has led to improvements in the matching of foster placements, tracking of educational progress, risk assessment practice and the training of foster carers.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development :

- There are a number of minor shortfalls. The agency failed to notify Ofsted of a significant incident and there is an absence of welcome books from foster carers and weaknesses in the range of recruitment and training of foster carers. In addition there is a lack of access for children and young people to gain independent advocacy and a shortfall in the process of return to care interviews. These shortfalls do not adversely affect the level of care enjoyed by children and young people.

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>36: Notifiable events</p> <p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the person or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1)) This is with specific reference to informing HMCI as required.</p>	28/07/2018

Recommendations

- Ensure support and training remains available to foster carers to assist them to meet the specific needs of children they are caring for (National Minimum Standards 20.8). This is with specific reference to raising awareness of the key dangers posed by children and young people 'running county lines' or becoming involved in the selling of drugs.
- Ensure the wishes, feelings and views of children are taken into account in developing the fostering service. In particular, ensure that the views of children and young people remain considered for staff appraisals and risk assessments. (National Minimum Standards 1.3)
- Ensure that children and young people are offered independent return home interviews when they go missing. (National Minimum Standards 5.7)
- Ensure the fostering service implements an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service. (National Minimum Standards 13.1)
- Ensure children and young people have access to independent advice and support from adults who they can contact directly and in private about problems and concerns. (National Minimum Standards 1.5)

- Ensure that unless an emergency placement makes it impossible that children and young people are given information about the foster carer before arrival.
(National Minimum Standards 11.3)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and Children and Children and young people: good

Children and young people make good progress in their foster placements and quickly form close attachments to their carers. Foster carers encourage children and young people to develop a wide range of hobbies including karate and rugby. They are rightly proud of these achievements and the resulting progress that children and young people make. Positive feedback from placing social workers echoes this, one comments 'The placement is amazing and I can't believe what she has done for him (young person).'

Outcomes for children and young people are largely positive and placement disruption limited. Case records show a number of children and young people moving onto independence or remaining with their foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements. A placing authority who commission a majority of the agency's placements support this, one commissioning worker commented on the, 'High levels of support for carers throughout the organisation.'

Placement preparation and plans have been improved by a revised matching process, with the addition of a new referral form and an in depth knowledge of the strength and weaknesses of each foster carer. One foster carer completed research on the internet before receiving a placement of a young person with complex needs. He is now settled and forming a close relationship with his carer.

The agency now monitors educational progress effectively. When achievement is limited, the agency advocates effectively for extra tuition with placing authorities. Foster carers liaise closely with schools and offer support with homework. This stimulates children and young people's interest and encourages their attendance and engagement.

Behavioural management is effective. There is no use of restraint within the agency while police call outs are rare. Foster carers impose appropriate boundaries that are consistent and child centred. Children and young people understand these boundaries such as turning off the internet at night and respond well.

Children and young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their own behaviours to build resilience and self-esteem. Good training allows foster carers to understand a philosophy which focuses on positivity and the development of relationships. Feedback from placing social workers refers to the 'patience and empathy' shown by foster carers. Case records show foster carers making good use of their support networks when children and young people struggle to engage. Recently this involved a carer's son sensitively explaining the importance of regular washing to a young person.

Children and young people settle quickly into their placements and enjoying an introductory visit wherever possible. However, foster carers do not provide a formal welcome book. This limits support to children and young people at the point that they move to their foster carers.

Independence work is well structured and specific to the needs of children and young people. Foster carers teach children and young people how to cook and encourage a healthy diet by introducing fruits and vegetables by the making of smoothies and new recipes. Foster carers consistently seek the views of children and young people and assesses their knowledge of key support services and their understanding of their legal rights.

Children and young people enjoy safe and managed contact with friends and family. Foster carers strive to offer a 'normal' family style environment. Where appropriate siblings and friends are able to stay overnight. If contact is not positive foster carers act quickly to inform key professionals and ensure protective action is taken.

The achievements of children and young people and foster carers are warmly celebrated. Managers invite placing social workers to nominate the achievements of foster carers and children and young people. A recent awards ceremony marked these by offering certificates and vouchers. This acts as a source of motivation for carers and children and young people.

Children and young people benefit from good access to primary care services. When they fail to take prescribed medication, foster carers quickly alert professionals and request advice. Where there are delays in accessing specialist support such as therapists, foster carers liaise with supervising social workers to advocate for swift allocation.

Placements benefit from specialist support. An allocated systemic therapist works with foster carers to reflect on developing the relationship with children and young people and understanding behaviours. Foster carers respond well and use the sessions as a time to reflect and understand the triggers for poor behaviours. This encourages improved awareness for carers and placement stability.

Despite managers offering regular windows for obtaining feedback from children and young people, evidence of their wishes and feelings are limited in care plans, risk assessments and staff appraisals. In addition children and young people do not routinely access information regarding the support offered by independent advocates.

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

Children and young people consulted with by the agency feel safe in their placements and reduce risk taking behaviour such as self-harm. Foster carers are

alive to key areas of risk such as the risk of child sexual exploitation and understand the safe care policies for each child. One young person points to 'finding respect' as the reason why their behaviour improves.

Safeguarding is strong. Staff realise the importance of regular communication with key professionals. Multi-agency meetings explore new means of supporting children and young people quickly. When difficulties arise in placement, supervising social workers increase their visits. Placing social workers commented on the 'persistence and alertness of the agency' in raising concerns and proposals for agencies to work together to safeguard children and young people.

The agency acts quickly to offer extra support to placements. Foster carers receive daily support from family support workers and assistance with school transport if required. This promotes placement stability and in one case allows siblings to remain together.

Risk assessments are effective and lead to good care planning. Assessments identify key areas of risk such as the risk of self-harm and highlight key strategies such as the removal of sharp objects. Risk assessments encourage children and young people to take age appropriate risks with close supervision from foster carers. The agency consults key professionals such as therapists and ensures that decisions on important issues such as a reduction in supervision are appropriate.

Foster carers spoke to feel supported and report good levels of respite. This allows them to sustain placements and engage with children and young people. Foster carers confirm that their supervision sessions are engaging and offer them creative means of support and insight into extra resources for children and young people within the community.

Procedures are up to date and reviewed regularly. Comprehensive guide books offer clear and simple explanations of some of the more complicated aspects of the fostering task, such as the legal status of children and young people. This allows foster carers to advocate effectively for children and young people.

Foster carers state that training is engaging with good use of case examples. They value the importance of training and its positive influence on their ability to care. Training teaches foster carers new techniques such as how to de-escalate situations where children and young people are displaying challenging behaviours or how to handle complicated conditions such as panic attacks. However, in discussions with the inspector foster carers said they were unaware of the current risk posed to children and young people by 'running county lines' or leaving London to involve themselves in drug dealing.

When foster carers are unable to attend training, they receive supervision that enables them to follow up learning objectives. Training is specific to the needs of the placement. Recent training allowed for a carer to understand the specific needs of transgender children and young people. This supports the foster carer to understand and support the young person effectively.

Foster carers are proactive when children and young people go missing, this includes searching the local area and contacting family and friends. However, independent return to care interviews do not occur regularly, therefore limiting an important source of support to children and young people at a vulnerable time.

Foster carers understand the complaints procedure. When complaints occur, managers respond promptly and feedback offered.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Management of the agency is improved. The agency benefits from a registered manager who has been in post since January 2017. He is a qualified social worker, with the required management qualification and over fourteen years of experience. He is also the designated safeguarding lead for the agency. A deputy manager who joined the agency in August 2017 supports him.

The registered manager has achieved good progress. Since his appointment the registered manager has recruited a new and experienced staff team, broadened out the panel membership and begun to extend the range of services offered to placements.

Staff morale is good and one staff member commented that the team 'gels well together.' Managers engineer a good team dynamic in the agency and among foster carers. Placing social workers are encouraged to nominate foster carers who have excelled in their role.

The registered manager understands the shortfalls outlined during this inspection and is committed towards addressing them. Of six previous requirements, five are now met with one repeated during this inspection. The agency has succeeded in addressing all of the previous recommendations. A placing authority commissioner commented on the improvements and 'obvious integrity and dedication of the new registered manager.'

Case files show good evidence of management oversight and regular audit. Files reflect the strong, child-centred ethos of the agency. Where documents and information from the placing local authority are missing managers chase these consistently.

The registered manager acts quickly to address any placement concerns and will advocate strongly for both foster carers and children and young people. The registered manager knows each foster carer well, this helps to support good decision making in relation to the allocation of placements. Placement disruptions are limited and when these occur managers seek to address any concerns and learn lessons quickly.

Foster carers appreciate the progress achieved by managers, particularly in the area of improved matching. They report receiving more in-depth information before placement. Foster carers feel heard and valued by the agency and are an integral part of the young person's support network.

Foster carers do not reflect the diverse nature of the local community. Managers are aware of this and are publicising the agency more widely. Despite this, one placing professionals refers to the agency as 'growing with a lot of potential.'

Managers are eager to improve the service and have commissioned a new computer data base system to allow staff to assess and analyse the needs of placements more effectively. Management monitoring systems are now much tighter and include all aspect of care including health and education. This helps managers to allocate resources to foster carers and support placements accordingly.

The fostering panel is improved. Managers have taken steps towards broadening out the scope and diversity of the panel. A former looked after child has joined the panel and will offer increased challenge and child centred views. The fostering panel and review process offers high levels of scrutiny and oversight. The fostering panel is an effective source of advice and guidance for foster carers. Panel members attend training and the recent awards ceremony for foster carers. If appropriate, the fostering panel delays the approvals of carers to allow for the completion of further assessment work. This ensures foster carers are ready and fully assessed.

The matching process is improved. Managers are clear on what presenting behaviours children and young people can display, such as extreme mental health conditions that foster carers are not able to accept and refuses these referrals accordingly.

Recruitment practice for foster cares and staff is safe. The fostering agency has sound systems in place for the vetting and recruitment of staff and others working on behalf of the agency.

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 children young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever 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: SC406245

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Inspector

Barnaby Dowell, social care inspector



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