

ISP Sussex

9 Victoria Way, Burgess Hill, West Sussex RH15 9NF
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Integrated Services Programme (ISP) Sussex is a separately registered independent fostering agency, which is part of a larger childcare organisation based in England. The headquarters is situated in Sittingbourne, Kent. Carers provide long- and short-term, emergency, respite and parent-and-child care. ISP Sussex provides social work support and supervision to foster carers, educational support, and assistance with contact between children and their birth families. The organisation provides a network of intensive therapeutic support via trained therapists and psychology and psychiatric services. At the time of this inspection, ISP Sussex had 59 approved foster care households with 70 children placed.

Inspection dates: 19 to 23 November 2018

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: 14 March 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Most children and young people have strong, trusting relationships with their foster carers and can therefore make good progress across most aspects of their lives.
- The fostering agency staff are professional, passionate about children's well-being and very committed to their agency.
- The registered manager is a strong leader who can successfully implement necessary changes.
- Staff roles are well structured, and this means that all aspects of the service have an appropriate, dedicated focus.
- Foster carers feel valued and supported, both in and out of office hours.
- Children and young people benefit from the therapeutic approach and resources offered by this agency.
- Children and young people receive very good support and monitoring from the agency's education team.
- Foster carers appreciate the opportunities they have to learn from others and reflect on their own practice.
- The fostering panel and agency decision maker are highly effective, knowledgeable practitioners.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The internal procedure for staff to follow when children and young people are missing from care lacks a primary focus on children and young people and is unclear.
- There is insufficient scrutiny and review when some children and young people go missing from their foster home.
- Four recommendations are made to encourage further development in the following areas: involving children and young people in their outcomes tracker; ensuring that Prevent training covers right-wing extremism; obtaining feedback from local authority colleagues; and prioritising foster carer recruitment from ethnic minority groups.

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 prepare and implement a written procedure to be followed if a child is missing from a foster parent's home without permission. (Regulation 13 (3))</p> <p>Specifically, ensure that the written procedure is sufficiently child-focused and clear so that it can be implemented effectively.</p>	28/01/2019
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a))</p> <p>Specifically, ensure that appropriate scrutiny and review routinely occurs if children go missing from their foster home without permission.</p>	28/01/2019

Recommendations

- Children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. (National Minimum Standard 1.3)

Specifically, ensure that the outcomes tracker is clearly laid out so that, where appropriate, children can be fully involved in their own progress.

- Children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. Children are protected from abuse and other forms of significant harm (e.g. sexual or labour exploitation). (National Minimum Standard 4.1)

Specifically, ensure that Prevent training has sufficient input on right-wing extremism.

- 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. (National Minimum Standard 25.1)

Specifically, ensure that feedback is routinely sought from local authority social workers and local authority commissioners.

- The fostering service recruits, assesses and supports a range of foster carers to meet the needs of children they provide care for and is proactive in assessing current and future needs of children. (National Minimum Standard 13.0)

Specifically, ensure that there is a particular focus on recruiting foster carers to appropriately reflect the ethnic diversity of the children currently placed.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people benefit from the supportive and tight agency network around them. This network holds their foster care placement securely and enables foster carers to focus on rebuilding children and young people's fractured attachments. Most children and young people respond to these focused efforts and enjoy being listened to and spending lots of time with their carers. As one young person said, 'They are really nice, and I really like it here and guess what? They really like me a lot. It's fantastic.'

Children and young people engage in a wide variety of positive social experiences depending on their preferences and skills. Some children and young people engage in sports and achieve significant success in areas such as sports commentating and horse riding. These new-found skills boost their self-esteem and confidence in themselves.

All children and young people stay with a respite carer for a standard period. The foster carers in this agency are a tightly knit group, and most know each other's children and young people. As such, some of these arrangements have grown naturally, but all are carefully matched and considered and take serious account of children and young people's views.

Children's and young people's views are important to this agency and are sought in a variety of ways. For example, the agency completes an annual survey as well as seeking children and young people's views during the agency's review processes. Young people gave examples of the agency acting on their informal feedback, for example over respite provision, and most children and young people understand the complaints procedure. However, children and young people are insufficiently involved in noting and recording their own progress using the agency's outcome tracker.

A significant strength of this agency is the high level of support for education offered to children, young people and their carers. The small but effective education team puts strategies in place to ensure that children and young people's educational needs are met. These strategies include liaising with schools and virtual heads and working closely with foster carers. The success of these strategies is clearly demonstrated in the very high numbers of children and young people who are enrolled in, and regularly attend, school.

Although there are no 'Staying Put' arrangements in this agency, one young person is benefiting from a 'Staying Close' arrangement that was brokered with the local authority by agency staff. This means that she continues to live in a familiar area and maintains very regular contact with her former foster carer. Other young people who are no longer cared for directly by this agency's foster carers also continue to benefit from ongoing contact. These ongoing arrangements help young people to

successfully navigate transitions to adulthood.

This agency has a strong therapeutic ethos that places children and young people at the heart of its activities. This ethos is threaded throughout the agency by reflective practice groups for all staff, which are very well received by both administrative staff and foster carers. As one foster carer said, 'Reflective Practice is really good to reset and refresh. You can hear experiences from new carers and carers that have been with the agency longer.' In addition, foster carers have direct access to psychotherapeutic help for children and young people and for themselves. A foster carer commented, 'Therapy is our big benefit. We can see the progress our young person has made. Therapy has taken the pressure off us.'

Prospective foster carers feel valued and welcome when approaching the agency. Assessments are consistently thorough, and appropriately analytical. Foster carers see their preparation for caring as giving them a sound foundation on which to build their skills. They feel very well-supported by the agency both in office time, and outside this through the very effective out of hours service. This high level of support enables carers to offer a very good quality of care to children and young people who have significant levels of need.

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

Children and young people say that they enjoy living with their foster carers and feel safe. The direct therapeutic work that the agency does, or facilitates, helps to reduce the impact of past abuse. Risk assessments are thoroughly and regularly completed and reflect the positive impact of high-quality care on children and young people's well-being. For example, for some children and young people their risks of being involved in child sexual exploitation and/or substance misuse are much reduced.

Foster carers understand that they must follow the appropriate local authority guidance when their child or young person goes missing. However, the overarching agency protocol on children and young people missing from their placement is unclear and insufficiently child-focused. This has not adversely affected the immediate safeguarding response to children and young people who have gone missing. However, on occasion, it has been incorrectly interpreted, resulting in children and young people receiving insufficient scrutiny and review following a missing episode.

Safeguarding knowledge and understanding within the agency is usually strong and has been further strengthened by both targeted recruitment and ongoing specialist training. In particular, there is some excellent knowledge in the agency about how to counter web-based and social media risks to children and young people's safety. This has been successfully shared with foster carers, children and young people directly. This strategy has both grown foster carer's knowledge and helped children and young people to keep themselves safer from possible harm.

Foster carers are adept and flexible at managing a range of behaviours. As one local authority social worker commented, 'As carers they have insight into very difficult behaviours associated with attachment issues. They have ably managed extremely volatile behaviour – often damage to property and on occasions physical injury. And yet they persist.' Foster carers are appropriately trained in de-escalation and physical restraint, if necessary. This is sparingly used, but when used it is well recorded and those involved are soundly debriefed.

The agency staff are well informed about the range of possible safeguarding risks, and there are some very good examples of direct work with children and young people over such risks as radicalisation. Foster carers can routinely access the Home Office Prevent training but there are currently additional risks relating to right-wing extremism that this approved training does not fully explore.

External safeguarding colleagues are very positive about this agency's response to safeguarding, describing their practice as 'transparent' and their approach to safeguarding issues as being 'proactive'. Child protection concerns are promptly shared with local authorities, and if necessary the agency will escalate its concern appropriately. The agency is keen to share borderline standards of care issues with appropriate people such as the designated officer, and is robust in its decision-making about safeguarding children and young people.

The agency has a meticulous approach to preparing foster carers, with a clear focus on safeguarding. This continues once carers are approved, and unannounced visits, independent reviews, and appropriate risk assessments are routinely completed. This results in safe and comfortable homes for children and young people.

There is safe recruitment practice in place with extensive checks and verification of carers, staff and panel members. This helps prevent unsuitable people gaining access to vulnerable children and young people.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager has only been in post for the last year but has already achieved a huge amount. She has further plans for next year and these, together with her initial achievements, amply demonstrate her ambitious vision and strong leadership qualities.

Systems for approval and review of foster carers are strong and robust. The panel is led by an experienced and knowledgeable chair and is well supported by the fostering adviser and agency decision maker. Ensuring a suitably diverse panel is an ongoing challenge, and this will be helped considerably by a care-experienced young person joining the panel in the new year.

The registered manager uses a range of effective monitoring processes to ensure that a high quality of care is achieved. For example, there is a system in place of

routine audits and spot checks to ensure compliance with individual children and young people's care plan requirements. In addition, particular children and young people are discussed on a weekly basis with key team members, and those particularly vulnerable ones are RAG (red, amber, green) rated and subject to further scrutiny.

The registered manager is a strong advocate for her children and young people. Staff and foster carers have complete confidence in her ability to actively drive through the achievement of important goals, and she is very willing to challenge other agencies as necessary. This powerful advocacy has resulted in some important achievements, for example obtaining appropriate accommodation for young people leaving care.

Staff receive effective supervision and appraisal with a good balance of support and monitoring. Training is intelligently led and covers key areas appropriately. The registered manager is very keen to support and grow her staff and is sponsoring two of them to complete a level 5 qualification in leadership and management. She is also encouraging specialisms among her staff group, including life story work as well as safeguarding areas such as working with sexually harmful behaviour. Her staff strongly value her support and scrutiny, and as one said, 'She can be scary, but mainly she's brilliant.' Foster carers too appreciate her input, finding her 'very accessible'.

Generally, the agency has developed effective working relationships with placing authorities, and commissioners in particular speak very positively about the agency. One said, 'The complexity of need of children referred seems to continue to increase and this agency still presents as one of the most robust "can do" organisations available to us.' However, the agency does not routinely canvass feedback from its external partners, and this limits the learning that is available to it.

Foster carers benefit from the support and challenge that comes from their supervision and review. Foster care retention is a strength of this agency and balances the comparatively slow progress in new foster carer recruitment. Current foster carers are a suitably diverse group in many ways, but the ethnic diversity of carers does not match the ethnicity of the children and young people who are placed. However, this does not adversely affect children and young people's cultural needs being met.

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. 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: SC383539

Registered provider: ISP

Registered provider address: Partnerships In Childcare Services Ltd, Wavendon Tower, Ortensia Drive, Wavendon, Milton Keynes MK17 8LX

Responsible individual: Tracy Livesey

Registered manager: Emma Hannett

Telephone number: 01444 871100

Email address: sussex@ispchildcare.org.uk

Inspector

Bridget Goddard, social care inspector



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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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