

ISP Sussex

3, Albourne Court, Henfield Road, Albourne, West Sussex BN6 9FF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a privately owned independent fostering agency. The fostering service registered with Ofsted in September 2008 to become a separately registered branch of the Integrated Services Programme company.

The company is a part of a much larger organisation, Polaris Community, which comprises several independent fostering agencies.

There are three offices connected to the registered office in Sussex, located in Battle, and Hampshire.

Foster carers provide long-term, short-term, respite and permanent care placements. The fostering service also provides placements to disabled children as well as parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, there were 62 approved fostering households caring for 74 children.

The manager registered with Ofsted in May 2023.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 22 to 26 May 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	outstanding

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 19 November 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 make good progress from their starting points. This is because of the excellent care that they receive from their foster carers and the agency support network around them. Many of the children who live with their foster families have done so for many years. As a result, the children experience high levels of belonging and support that promote their welfare and emotional well-being.

Agency staff and managers ensure that 'staying put' arrangements are considered and planned as early as possible. This provides the children with important support throughout their further education, alongside helping them develop essential life skills in readiness for independence.

The majority of the children enjoy stability in their education provision and improve their academic attainment. Agency staff and the in-house education advisers are proactive in addressing barriers that prevent children from accessing suitable school or college provisions; for example, ensuring that assessments take place when a child may require an education, health and care plan or specialist services. The deputy manager is particularly tenacious in challenging and escalating concerns with the placing authority and other partners. This helps prevent drift and children becoming unseen.

Agency staff and the foster carers understand the important supporting role that they play in encouraging the children to reflect on and understand their life stories. Supervising social workers are proactive in encouraging foster carers to send photos of the children to the agency so that they are available to children in adult life in the event of their childhood photos being lost. Agency staff collate these photos into beautiful cushions with personalised messages for the children for when they leave their foster families. This helps the children feel valued and cared for.

Children experience care that is sensitive and responsive to their identity and family history. This helps the children to develop a positive self-view and build emotional resilience, and a sense of their own identity. Individual therapy is available for children to help them to overcome any previous experiences of neglect and trauma.

Children's healthcare needs are understood well by their foster carers, including those children with complex health needs. Foster carers and agency staff develop good relationships with health professionals to promote good health. One child, who has a complex lifelong health condition, has made immeasurable progress which has improved the quality and longevity of his life.

Children enjoy a range of clubs and hobbies. The agency hosts a range of seasonal and regular events for the foster carer households that all the children, including birth children, can join. These are facilitated by the agency fostering

advisers supported by the whole fostering team. The events are well attended and enjoyed by all and help promote a strong sense of community between the adults and children.

A small number of children have moved from their foster homes in an unplanned way. Managers ensure that the children's well-being and safety are held at the centre of decision-making and whenever possible are matched with foster carers within the agency.

Managers and the agency staff ensure that the matching of the children with foster carers is based on considered decision-making and information-sharing with everyone involved. However, matching plans do not always contain the children's views and wishes or reflect on the needs and feelings of other children living in the fostering household. This is a missed opportunity to gather the views of children about what is important to them.

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

The agency's whole-team approach means that any new or emerging risks for children are flagged up early through weekly child-focused meetings. The joined-up planning between the agency staff, in-house therapists and education advisers ensures that the children's safety and well-being are prioritised and responded to.

Risk assessments and safer caring plans give foster carers information about children's strengths and vulnerabilities. Plans are updated quickly to reflect the changing needs of the children. Children's individualised plans guide the foster carers in what they need to do to care for the children safely.

Agency staff ensure that prospective foster carers are provided with timely and relevant information following their initial inquiry. Those who go on to apply said that they felt well prepared by the application process and value the training that is provided. Panel members provide good scrutiny to ensure that prospective foster carers are considered in terms of their capacity to provide safe and caring homes for the children.

The manager and supervising social workers demonstrate a good understanding of child protection. Managers are confident to challenge the practice of external agencies and advocate on behalf of the children and the foster carers to ensure safe outcomes.

There is close partnership working with external agencies. However, a shortfall was found in delays from the agency notifying Ofsted about child protection concerns and a serious concern about a foster carer. Children were not put at risk. However, this hindered the regulator's ability to monitor the service.

A broad range of training is available for foster carers, alongside regular supervision visits to support them in meeting the needs of the children. However,

several foster carers are outside the agency's own mandatory refresher time frames concerning first aid and safer caring. This means that these foster carers may not have the most up-to-date information in providing safe care.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency is managed by a suitably experienced, qualified and newly appointed registered manager. She has sensitively and confidently taken over the reins of this high-performing agency through a period of change. The legacy left by the previous registered manager to improve and change the lives of the children continues to run through the veins of this agency.

Leaders and managers are inspirational in their dedication to ensuring the best possible care, experiences and future life chances for the children. The agency is well staffed. Supervising social workers hold manageable caseloads. Consequently, high-quality support is provided to the children and the foster carers. One foster carer commented: 'It's pretty tough being a foster carer at times. To be supported, listened to, valued, helped and guided is crucial, which I feel I have always been.'

The registered manager and deputy manager are passionate and highly committed to creating the right environment for the agency staff to work confidently and competently. As a result, there is effective support and challenge through supervision and the foster carer annual review process. This helps ensure that the children have a positive experience of being well cared for in loving homes.

The learning and relationship-based ethos of the organisation supports the agency staff's ongoing professional development and reflective practice. This supports them to provide the best possible care to the children. The availability of the agency's therapists and advisory teachers offers an additional protective layer around the children to help them heal and achieve in their lives.

The agency network meetings are an integral part of the way that the agency works, bringing foster carers, agency staff, in-house education advisers, therapists and external professionals together. This helps to improve partnership working and ensures that the foster carers receive the specialist support and help that they need. The inclusion of foster carers in meetings about the children is embedded in practice, and their input is genuinely valued and considered.

The panel members are recruited from a range of diverse backgrounds and are rigorous in their independent scrutiny of the decision-making by the agency. This includes strong quality assurance of assessments. Clear reasons are given by the panel chair for the recommendations made.

The registered manager makes effective use of the agency's internal and external monitoring activities to secure continuous improvement. The previous requirement and recommendations have been met. The learning ethos of this

agency means that when things do go wrong, the staff are open to taking forward new learning to inform and improve future practice. Plans to develop the organisation are ambitious and support the agency's sustained and ongoing development.

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>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 persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that any serious complaint about a foster carer is reported to Ofsted without delay.</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with a foster carer is reported to Ofsted without delay.</p>	7 July 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that all approved foster carers receive sufficient first-aid training. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 6.7)
- The registered person should ensure that all approved foster carers are trained in appropriate safer-care practice. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.6)
- The registered person should ensure that prior to the placement of each child, the matching information contains the child's wishes and feelings, alongside the wishes and feelings of the other children living in the fostering household. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 15.2)

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: SC383539

Registered provider: ISP Sussex

Registered provider address: Malvern View, Saxon Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove B60 4AD

Responsible individual: Joanne Savage

Registered manager: Penelope Capp

Telephone number: 01444 871100

Email address: sussex@ispchildcare.org.uk

Inspector

Anne-Marie Davies, Social Care Inspector

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