

Hythe House Support

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Hythe House Support Limited is an independent fostering agency. In December this year the fostering service had 22 carer households providing care for 28 young people. The agency provides permanent long-term foster care, short-term foster care and emergency foster care.

The provider offers fostering services for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and mild learning difficulties, education in their own school and therapy and counselling, nursery services. The service was founded and registered with Ofsted in 2003.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

Young people are supported by care planning which is individual and diverse. Carers enable young people to gain confidence and feel secure and safe within their foster placements. As a result young people develop and sustain secure attachments with their foster carers; they are engaged and feel part of the fostering family.

Effective training is provided to most of the foster carers, providing them with insights and knowledge which inform and shape their practice. However, there is a

small, but significant, number of secondary carers that are not being effectively engaged in training and supervision. The agency has not effectively addressed these hard to reach carers.

Carers feel supported and motivated by regular and frequent supervision, however minutes of the sessions do not always reflect this effectively or evidence the growth and professional development of the carer.

The fostering panel carries out assessments for approval and annual reviews, however some annual reviews have been delayed and fostering panel minutes do not consistently reflect an analytical and evaluative approach to the assessment of carers. Carers and staff feel that panels perform more effectively than the resulting minutes suggest. Effective quality assurance practices have not yet become embedded in the panel's performance.

Young people feel that their views are valued by the agency. Their views influence the planning and support provided for them.

The agency has formed and sustained effective relationships with health services and education and this close working and liaison has provided effective support for the young people. This is particularly evident in education, where good progress has been made by young people.

Areas of shortfall identified are largely related to recording of practice rather than poor practice. This is particularly relevant to supervision, matching and some panel activities. Effective action was already being taken during the inspection to address and evidence these areas, with clear improvements emerging.

Areas for improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
16 (2011)	ensure that the fostering service provider implements a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents (16.2(a))	01/02/2014
21 (2011)	ensure that all persons employed receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21.4(a))	01/02/2014

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)
- ensure that the panel chair provides written minutes of panel meetings which are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation (NMS 14.7)
- ensure that each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, is reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives. The service's decision-maker should review the performance of the panel chair, and for this purpose may attend a proportion of panel meetings but only as an observer. Views about the chair's performance should be sought from other panel members and from those who attend panel meetings, such as prospective foster carers and social workers who present reports to the panel. For all other panel members, the panel chair should conduct the performance review (Children Act 1989 Statutory Guidance Volume 4 paragraph 5.15)
- ensure children are carefully matched to a foster placement, and that foster carers have full information about the child (NMS 11.2)
- ensure that foster carers take reasonable precautions in assessing the degree of risk, making informed judgements about when to allow a child or young person to take a particular risk or follow a particular course of action (Children Act 1989 Statutory Guidance Volume 4 paragraph 3.64)
- ensure that panels provide a quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented to panel (NMS 14.2)
- ensure that the panel pass its recommendations on by way of the written minutes of the panel meeting, setting out the main points of discussion and reasons for the recommendation (Children Act 1989 Statutory Guidance Volume 4 paragraph 5.23)
- ensure that there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence. This should include appropriate training and support to foster carers caring for young people who are approaching adulthood. Arrangements should be consistent with the young person's care plan, including their placement plan, pathway plan and transition plan for children with disabilities and special educational needs. (NMS 12.3)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

Young people know that they are valued and that their wishes and feelings are respected and listened to. Young people feel able and motivated within their placements to express themselves, and they are aware of their rights to be kept safe

and protected. Young people express their views and carers listen to them. However, the more formal process for consultation is not being consistently managed. Young people are completing the agencies surveys regularly, but these documents are providing very limited information and influence as they lack detail and comment.

Young people have formed effective and harmonious relationships with their foster carers and feel part of the family. They have been effectively supported in this by the carers, through negotiation and effective behaviour management.

Foster carers benefit from training, which has provided them with insights into promoting young people's general health. As a result, young people understand the importance of maintaining their day-to-day general health. Carers help young people to make appropriate lifestyle choices and young people understand how these choices affect their lives.

Young people engage with the community and young people are encouraged to identify hobbies and clubs where they can meet their peers and make new friends. Young people use these opportunities effectively and this results in them gaining a sense of this wider community. Carers understand the importance of contact and young people are supported to ensure that contact is harmonious and uneventful. Carers provide young people with effective emotional support during and following contact.

Young people are supported in their education and in many cases young people's attendance and achievements have benefited as a result. Foster carers take an active role in promoting education and liaise frequently and successfully with education providers. A school associated with this fostering agency, provides many young people with their education. One social worker commented that two young people placed who had histories of school refusal, had exceeded expectations and now attended school over 95% of the time.

The school staff are proactive and tenacious in ensuring young people attend education and work hard while there are there. Indeed the school provides transport and frequent liaison with carers to support the young people's learning. Where young people attend mainstream schools, monitoring of their progress, achievement and attendance is less evident. This leaves the fostering agency less able to assess young people's progress. It is acknowledged that the carers do take an active role in promoting education; however, the agency is less able to influence the carer's role in promoting education consistently.

Young people that are approaching adulthood are supported by foster carers to learn skills that will help them to make a smooth transition into adulthood. Carers seek to assist young people to develop their current skills and learn new ones. However, the current process of supporting young people to learn these skills is largely informal and arrangements lack formal assessment, planning and review. This leaves young people less able to develop their current skills and learn new skills to support themselves for the future. It is acknowledged that during this inspection formal and comprehensive planning is emerging and being finalised and this will be rolled out to

young people soon.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

The fostering service recruits and retains a varied selection of carers from the local community. The community surrounding the location of the fostering service is less ethnically diverse than the national picture. However the agency has been successful in trying to recruit a more diverse group of foster carers. Carers are able to offer homes for young people with complex and challenging behaviours and carers feel supported in providing these services. Carers are supported by a variety of training and this provides carers with insights and understanding of young people's needs and their more complex behaviours. Carers feel that the training is challenging and rewarding and gives them confidence and knowledge to fulfil their roles successfully. Matching is viewed as successful by placing social workers, and carers however, the agency do not always record this process consistently and this leaves some weakness in the matching and assessment process.

In a small number of cases, the non-primary carer has been more difficult to engage in training and the supervisory process and this reduces the opportunities for these carers to gain knowledge and understanding of the needs of young people. It is acknowledged that the agency is already developing more creative and innovative training opportunities to try and engage these hard-to-reach carers.

All foster carers are able to access regular supervision with their supervising social worker. Supervision is valued by the foster carers and foster carers feel motivated and supported by this process. Carers feel that their confidence and ability to understand more complex behaviours is enhanced by their supervision and this support.

Although, foster carers feel supported by the supervision and able to discuss and evaluate their practice and professional development, supervision minutes do not always reflect this. Minutes of these meetings are in some cases lacking evaluation, analysis and evidence of the development of the professional role.

Carers feel engaged in the planning process for young people and they feel valued by the agency and their fellow professionals. Carers are encouraged to express their opinions and views and fully take part in the planning and assessment of the young people. This has resulted in carers being proactive and motivated in their support of young people.

The panel meets regularly to conduct its business; however some carers have had their annual reviews delayed and these reviews have not been undertaken in accordance with the timescales of the fostering regulations.

The fostering panel has not yet adopted formal quality assurance practices and panel members receive limited supervision and performance evaluation. Some minutes of panel meetings lack evaluation, analysis of the carers and provide limited focus on

the reasons for recommendation.

In addition, suitable arrangements are not in place to ensure the objectivity of the agency decision maker and this detracts from the transparency of the decision-making process.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

Young people feel safe in their placements and they feel supported and valued by their foster carers. Young people understand their rights to express themselves and they understand that their opinions are valued. Young people speak to their foster carers and share with them any concerns or worries they have and they are confident their carers will act to support them.

All young people are supported by placement plans and placement agreements and these documents articulate effectively how young people's welfare is safeguarded. Plans demonstrate how young people's needs are to be met and consider any overriding safety concerns. This provides young people with plans that meet their more diverse and individual needs and contribute to keeping them safe.

Risk assessments are conducted for young people, but some more generic risk assessments are unclear as to what action is to be taken to minimise or remove risk. This leaves an inconsistent approach to risk assessment and risk reduction less well managed. It is acknowledged that specific, targeted risk assessments are effective and the more generic risk assessments are being reviewed at the time of this inspection.

Young people rarely go missing from this fostering agency and it is clear from documentation and from speaking to foster carers that effective strategies have resulted in minimising and preventing them from going missing. One social worker commented that a young person's previous behaviour of running away has stopped altogether. Carers are aware of the risks that young people face when they go missing and as such they are proactive in managing these episodes effectively. An out of hours and on-call system is in place and this has effectively resulted in the prompt return of young people. Carers have gained insight through their training of specific risks posed to young people while they are missing. Young people are safer and less likely to be exploited because carers understand and manage these risks.

Carers have received training that has made them more aware and sensitive to the impact of abuse of young people. Carers understand the importance of promoting safety and minimising the likelihood of the exploitation of young people. Carers promote an open and active dialogue with young people where they can share their concerns or worries.

Carers feel confident in recognising signs and symptoms of abuse and have a rigorous approach to raising any concerns with the agency.

Young people are kept safe by effective recruitment and vetting procedures. Foster carers are rigorously vetted and references are followed up to ensure they are appropriate people to care for young people. Staff members in the agency and panel members are recruited in a similar way.

Training for staff and foster carers in safeguarding, provides them with an understanding of whistleblowing and reporting their concerns.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

There is no Registered Manager in post and the previous Registered Manager left the agency in July 2013. The acting manager has been in this post since October 2013.

The acting manager has already begun to address areas of shortfall effectively and systems and processes are emerging as a result. Staff and the foster carers feel supported by the acting manager and have confidence in her abilities and experience. The acting manager is motivated and enthusiastic to address the shortfalls and improved systems were emerging at the time of the inspection.

The agency publishes a Statement of Purpose which accurately reflects the services that are provided and the aims and objectives of the agency. The Statement of Purpose is regularly reviewed to ensure that the emerging needs of young people continue to be met. Foster carers and staff are aware of the importance of the Statement of Purpose and they are included and consulted in reviews of this document. This results in the staff and carers being engaged, and able to influence the services provided.

Carers and the young people are supported by the agency and both young people and the foster carers feel they are valued by the agencies staff. The agencies staff receive training that enables them to provide carers with appropriate guidance and support through their supervisory role. Staff members are competent and professionally qualified with experience of working with young people and carers.

Carers are motivated and proactive in raising any matters with the agency staff and carers commented that the agency staff are always on hand and available when they need them.

Young people's records and personal files kept by the agency are very well maintained, they are clear and provide an accurate picture of the young person, which young people may use to gain an understanding of their lives. The fostering premises are well maintained, well-equipped and suitable to enable the service to meet the objectives of the Statement of Purpose and provide their fostering services.

The agency's development plan details areas of the service which are being reviewed and improved and this plan provides all staff within the service, consultation and an

opportunity to influence its future development.

Foster carers are paid in a timely and consistent manner and all carers are aware of the fees they receive for the services they provide. Carers feel empowered to discuss financial matters along with any other matters related to their support.

The registered person notifies all significant events to the appropriate authorities relating to the health and protection of children fostered by the service.

All young people are cared for in line with the placement plan and care plan and the agencies staff take action to chase up any outstanding reviews or visits from the placing authority.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.