

Ikon Fostering Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC486357
Inspection date	27 June 2016
Inspector	Rachel Britten
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	

Setting address	Ikon Fostering Limited, Pool Street, Walsall WS1 2EN
------------------------	--

Telephone number	01922 618790
Email	info@ikonfostering.org
Registered person	Shiv Pattni
Registered manager	Darren Jowett
Responsible individual	Madhuri Pattni
Date of last inspection	N/A

© Crown copyright 2016

Website: www.gov.uk/ofsted

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

The agency is privately owned. It is a single service and was first registered in June 2015. There are 10 approved carers in seven fostering households at the time of inspection. All carers have been recruited and approved over the previous year. There are seven children in placement at the time of this inspection. Short-term, long-term, emergency and respite placements are provided. There are sibling and solo placements and placements for children and young people with complex health needs.

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: **Good**

This is an agency that has enjoyed an effective first year of registration. Children and young people of varying ages experience good care. Brothers and sisters and children with complex needs are having their individual needs well met. Their welfare is safeguarded and promoted well. Trends in service performance are good overall, but it is too early to make comparisons with trends that are found nationally.

Overall, children and young people make good progress, although in some emergency and short-term placements there is little time for carers to make a significant impact. Most children and young people settle quickly. They thrive in safe, stable placements with families that they have quickly come to feel safe and secure.

Recruitment and preparation of foster carers is good. It results in a range of foster

carers who have skill, insight and ability to meet the diverse needs of children and young people. There is a steady flow of diverse carers being assessed, including carers who are likely to be able to provide parent and child placements.

The agency works to ensure that relationships with partner organisations are effective. It has established working partnerships with local authority commissioning teams. The agency has also sourced good-quality assessors and formed an effective, experienced fostering panel. This means that the steady growth of this new service is based on a foundation of good-quality carers.

Most prospective foster carer assessments are well focused, analytical and completed in a timely way. This means that potential foster carers are not lost through deficits in the process. The skills and strengths of carers are clearly drawn on and a diverse range of carers are approved and being approved. This means that children and young people are well matched with their carers and have genuine potential to make sustained good progress and lasting relationships with them. However, the individual development needs of new carers are not always clearly identified or met at an early stage.

Foster carers feel well supported by the agency and are part of the team working with the child or young person. Carers' knowledge and experience of individual children and young people is beginning to be used to inform planning and decision-making. However, care-planning documents do not work well. Documents do not make clear what help should be prioritised for children and young people in order to ensure their safety and maximise their progress. This shortfall has the potential to hold back carers' work and children and young people's motivation.

The views and experiences of children, young people and foster carers are obtained periodically by the agency. They show good levels of satisfaction with the service overall. However, the agency is not consulting with children, young people and stakeholders when placements have ended. This is a missed opportunity to learn and develop the service in a very child-centred way.

The registered manager, responsible individual and directors are a highly visible and effective leadership team. They work collaboratively and reflectively together to ensure that they maintain a sensitive, child-centred ethos in all they do. Carers are very confident in them. Their approach to growing and diversifying the service is cautious, thorough and effective. However, managers have not kept the agency's statement of purpose up to date. The statement therefore does not accurately reflect staffing or the range of fostering placements currently.

The leadership team is effective with its business planning and teamwork, but its monitoring of the service is underdeveloped. Care issues are dealt with on a case-by-case basis and do not lead to a clear evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the fostering service or action plans and targets for improvements.

All breaches of regulations and minimum standards are minor and do not have any adverse impact on the safeguarding or welfare of children and young people.

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 within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
Ensure that the statement of purpose is kept under review and revised where appropriate. (Regulation 4 (a))	5 August 2016
Ensure that a system is maintained for monitoring the matters set out in schedule 6 and improving the quality of foster care provided by the agency. Written reports of such reviews must be provided to the Chief Inspector and must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35)	5 August 2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Ensure that all carers have personal development plans (PDPs) that set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. In particular, ensure that PDPs are completed promptly and with due regard to development needs identified by the panel and agency decision maker at carers' approval stage. (NMS 20.5)
- Ensure that the views of the child, social worker, family and independent reviewing officer are sought regularly on the child's care. This is with particular respect to placements that have come to an end. (NMS 1.4)
- Extend and develop the support given to carers to manage their responses and feelings arising from caring for children. This is with particular respect to establishing early, regular support opportunities for new carers and supporting carers who have experienced difficult placement endings. (NMS 3.7)
- Ensure that carers are well supported to contribute effectively to each child's placement and care plans and their review. In particular, ensure that risk assessments, care plans and progress records are clear, specific and helpful to carers about what help children need and how carers should help them. (NMS 31.1)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people get helpful information about the carers that they are going to before they move. Some children and young people visit their carers and make positive choices to move in with them after well-planned introductions. The leadership team is persistent and creative about getting information to children and young people. For example, they use email, phone calls and mobile devices, even when emergencies limit the time available. Having information about where they are going reassures and empowers children and young people. It helps them to invest in the placement from the start and therefore achieve good outcomes.

Children and young people feel well cared for and feel part of the family. One child told the service on her feedback form, 'I like my foster home and I like everyone that is living in the house. I can talk to them about things about school and I like going out with them. A social worker described the carer for the young person as, 'Welcoming and warm, committed to my young person, proactive about involving him in caring for his room and things and inviting him to her family occasions. This means he is going missing less often, popping back more regularly and wanting to have a base with her.'

Children and young people know that they can stay with their carers and most of them express a desire to do so. One child said, 'They look after us in the week and we look after them at weekends. We are going to stay here until we are grown up and when they are old we will look after them.'

Children and young people are developing good attachments, both to their carers and to their carers' own children. The agency plays a positive role, advocating for children and young people to remain in placements long term, including through adoption and special guardianship orders. Birth children in one caring family say how much they like sharing their lives with more children because they can play with them and talk to them. A carer for a young person who is regularly missing has helped him to attach by making sure that he feels accepted. She tells him, 'You can bring your friends round – this is your home'

Children and young people have a wide range of opportunities, help and support. They are overcoming their emotional and behavioural difficulties because carers are sensitive to their needs and have high expectations of what they can achieve. Carers include children and young people fully and provide them with security, warmth, opportunities and good experiences. For example, children attend a production that the carer and his daughter are involved in. Children go to dance classes and enjoy family holidays. They are learning how to play games together and help one another with reading. Children and young people have good routines at school. They are also learning to choose and cook a variety of meals. They are confident to talk to adults maturely, behave politely both at home, and out in the community.

Children and young people are confident to express their wishes, feelings and views. Carers listen to them and make sure that the agency pursues matters on their behalf, if necessary. They have liaised with local authorities, previous carers and parents to

ensure that children's concerns are resolved. For example, issues about new schools, lost phones and laptops and wanting parents to come to see them in school plays have all been happily resolved. However, the agency has not sought the views of children, social workers, families and independent reviewing officers when placements have ended. This is a missed opportunity to learn from placements and continuously improve the quality of the fostering service.

Children and young people lead a healthy life and receive advice on healthy living. They are active and take part in the life of their foster home. For example, they help on the allotment, help with cooking, go to the gym and swimming pool and go to dance classes. When it is needed, children and young people are offered effective emotional, physical, psychological and therapeutic help.

Most children and young people attend educational provision that is suitable for them. Carers work well with the agency and placing authorities to help children have continuity with their schooling after moving into foster care here, even where distance is a significant issue. There are concerted efforts to help young people who are not attending school regularly. Carers are fully involved in this and play a key role in helping young people see education as a relevant gateway to a better future.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The fostering agency recruits a good range of carers who can meet the diverse cultural, behavioural and emotional needs of children and young people in the West Midlands. The agency gives clear initial information to potential carers about the complexity of the fostering task. Senior staff commit significant amounts of time to talking with potential carers about the skills needed for fostering. New carers are therefore convinced about the child-centred ethos of the leadership team. This is ensuring that good-quality carers are going through assessment and approved.

The fostering panel promotes safe, secure and stable placements through active engagement with the agency. It carries out a rigorous quality assurance function about the quality of assessments. For example, the panel has requested that assessors improve and extend the take up of appropriate references to cross-reference with potential carers' motivations and history. The panel also reminds assessors to evaluate potential carers' motivations to foster. The agency decision maker is the agency's registered individual. She has agreed all the recommendations of the panel to date, meaning that about two new fostering households are approved each month. However, new carers' specific development needs that the panel and the decision maker identify, are not being recorded or taken forward. New carers do not yet have written personal development plans either. This means that their development needs are not being captured or met early in their fostering careers.

The preparation, assessment, support and training of foster carers focuses well on the needs of children and young people. Initial training is comprehensive and is delivered by leaders and managers in the agency. New carers gain an in-depth understanding of children and young people living away from their families and are equipped to meet their needs. One new carer said, 'Training raised issues of safety

and also accountability, which had not occurred to me before and I have a better understanding of the high level of commitment necessary in fostering as compared to hosting students.' Another new carer said, 'I will have to manage my emotions and I have mentally drawn up a concept of how to do that.'

New carers have a real sense of what fostering is about and how it affects everyone in the family. Children of new foster carers, including grown up children still living at home, are encouraged to attend workshops that cover how fostering affects them. These children and young people fed back positively to the agency after these workshops, saying 'you were fun and easy to talk to', 'I enjoyed learning about fostering' and 'I would like to talk more about how fostered children might take my place.'

Carers understand and demonstrate that they can help children and young people to feel part of the family and enjoy themselves. They do not use respite unless it is in the child's best interests. They create households that are active, warm, well organised and fun. They plan for holidays and a future that includes fostered children and young people.

Foster carers receive good-quality training and support. They find leaders and managers in the agency easily approachable. They gain good skills and insights into fostered children's and young people's needs through the training that they have received around attachment, child sexual exploitation and behaviour management. One carer said, 'Our supervising social worker supported us in meetings, spoke on our behalf and advised about how to email social workers professionally rather than just emotionally. We are pleased that there are support groups for all the children and we recently completed training in attachment and [around] child sexual exploitation. We have experienced six months of greatness – thank you!' However, carer support groups and opportunities to debrief after first placement endings are not established. Carers, who are very satisfied overall, said, 'We did not receive much debrief after the placement ended. Maybe in future they could offer some sessions for difficult endings for us and the children.' Managers have not provided these timely enough for new carers to share their experiences and learn from them.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people receive good help and support to understand how to protect themselves from harm. They can talk to their social workers, carers and their carers' supervising social workers. They are confident that their concerns are listened to and addressed. Children and young people know how to complain about their care and how to get help if they are being harmed, but they have not needed to do so. Children and young people who are currently in placement have been asked for their feedback about their care, but children and young people whose placements have ended have not had this opportunity.

Placement plans and risk assessments identify children and young people's risks adequately. Carers are well briefed on the impact of children and young people's

previous experience of abuse or neglect on their risky behaviour. However, some placements have ended because unforeseen psychological and emotional crises meant that young people's needs could not be safely met in a foster placement. In addition, risk assessment documents and protection plans do not make clear enough the action that is required to protect and support children and young people. Despite this, carers work well with the agency and local authorities to ensure that children and young people are well supported and protected.

The incidents of young people going missing and/or being at risk of child sexual exploitation are monitored rigorously. Carers communicate promptly with the agency and take advice about every incident. The whole professional team around young people works well together. One carer whose young person is frequently missing said, 'I have tremendous support from the agency. They are always on hand to support and advise as my placement regularly goes missing.' The placing authority report that this carer always implements the agreed safeguarding plan and works well with their emergency duty team and police.

Foster carers are fully aware of, and sensitive to, potential and actual abuse in children and young people's lives. They have an open attitude to disclosures and know how they would deal with safeguarding and the need to protect foster children. Their preparation training, attachment and behaviour management training has equipped them with good skills in this area. The agency plans to extend these skills by providing specific safeguarding training.

The agency operates a safe fostering service with safe families. There is robust vetting and checking of potential carers at assessment stage as well as safe recruitment and vetting of all staff and panel members. Vetting of carers is tailored to the specific circumstances of each carer household. For example, single carers' regular visitors and potential back-up carers are vetted. Wherever concerns arise about individuals through this vetting, the agency makes child-centred and safe decisions about suitability. This means that safe care is promoted relevantly to the wide-ranging circumstances of carers. Staff and managers ensure that safer care agreements, health and safety checks, seeing children without their carers and unannounced visits, all help to ensure children's and young people's safety.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency has only been placing children and young people with carers for a few months. Nevertheless, the agency has established good working relationships with placing local authorities in the West Midlands. Placing authority complimented the agency for being proactive to get full information in order to make good matches. These priorities ensure that children and young people are placed with carers who meet their needs and help them to achieve better outcomes.

The agency is new, but the management team bring a wealth of fostering experience and good local knowledge. The manager, responsible individual and other directors are focused on ensuring that children and young people get opportunities to have fun and engage in their community as well as influencing their day-to-day care. The

majority of managers' time in the first six months was devoted to personalised advertising and recruitment. The registered manager said, 'We grew well because of going out and having conversations and being available'

The agency is based upon a firm business foundation. Its first year business plan demonstrates a strong, well-planned base, which is financially viable and can withstand the market strains that exist for new providers. The agency's website has been well received, but the statement of purpose shown on the site no longer accurately reflects the service in respect of staffing and the kind of fostering services that are currently available.

The manager says, 'We believe our greatest strength is in staff that can support carers to engage in reflective practice.' With this in mind, the manager has some good ideas for developing carers and the service that children and young people receive from them. For example, he plans to change the document template for foster carers' annual review, so that the document prompts for more written reflection about the carer's fostering experience during their first year. He is working on an independent living workbook for young people to use with their carers and then take with them into independence. He has published a 'health passport' where children and young people and carers can capture all the information that they need about their health and can take this with them if they move again. The manager has also produced information for prospective carers about the fostering panel. These are all pertinent improvements.

The manager has commissioned a system to track the progress of children and young people, but this is based on a lengthy and generic checklist of outcomes. The agency has only just started to use it, but so far, it does not help carers and staff to prioritise or target areas where individual children most need to make progress. Nevertheless, the manager carefully and regularly monitors risky behaviour and each placement on a case-by-case basis. For example, he looks for patterns and trends in young people's going missing episodes. He reflects on the details of each incident and thinks about strategies that might make a difference. The manager has not devised a system for monitoring and collating matters such as complaints and concerns, child protection issues, accidents, incidents, assessment records, use of restraint and medication administration. He is not consulting with children, young people, carers and staff about these matters or collating his findings in order to plan improvements to the service that are based on identified weaknesses. This oversight is likely to affect the quality of care if it is not quickly addressed.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 and 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.