

Fusion Fostering South East

Fusion Fostering Limited

Basepoint Innovation Centre, Harts Farm Way, Havant, Hampshire PO9 1HS

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fusion Fostering has been operating since 2011. The growth of the agency has led to the creation of five regional offices. The South East office of Fusion Fostering was separately registered in June 2016. The service offers permanent, long-term, short-term and emergency foster care.

At the time of this inspection the agency has 27 fostering households, who are caring for 31 children and young people.

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 and 19 June 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: Not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: This is the first inspection of this agency

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children and young people thrive and feel safe in their foster families. They develop positive relationships and a strong sense of belonging.
- Committed staff effectively support and train foster carers, who feel valued and part of a wider family caring for the children and young people living with them.
- Children and young people are safeguarded by foster carers and staff who know about and understand their vulnerabilities and strengths. They use this knowledge to enable children and young people to build resilience.
- Children learn how to regulate their feelings and manage their behaviour. This enables them to build friendships and join in the activities and groups of their choice.
- Children enjoy good health and make progress in education with the proactive and effective support of their foster carers.
- Agency staff have established strong multi-agency partnership working arrangements which successfully underpin foster carers' work with children and young people.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The panel sometimes lacks critical thinking in its analysis of assessments of potential foster carers. A very small number of assessments are not sufficiently analytical or evaluative.
- The manager's monitoring and reports are overall insufficiently evaluative and do not include an analysis of any behaviour management measures used by carers. This misses opportunities to drive the development of the service.
- Not all staff undertaking the direct supervision of foster carers are qualified social workers.
- Records of matching a child with a foster family do not always demonstrate the full range of matters considered.
- The statement of purpose is not fully tailored to the service, nor does it detail how the therapeutic aspect is implemented in practice.

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
The fostering panel must also— oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider, and give advice, and make recommendations, on such other matters or cases as the fostering service provider may refer to it. (Regulation 25 (4) (b)(c)) In particular, be more challenging and critical of assessments where necessary.	31 August 2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service (including behaviour management) to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Ensure that immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (NMS 25.2) In particular, improve analysis and evaluation in monitoring reports so as to further develop the service.
- The service should implement a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. (NMS 4.5) In particular, ensure that risk assessments identify all the known risks and actions to be taken by the foster carer should the specified risk reduction strategies fail.
- The fostering service provider's child protection procedures are submitted for consideration and comment to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) and to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for Child Protection (or other senior officer responsible for child protection matters in that department). They are consistent with the local policies and procedures agreed by the LSCB relevant to the geographical area where the foster carer lives. Any conflicts between locally agreed procedures and those of other placing authorities are discussed and resolved as far as possible. (NMS 22.4) In particular, ensure that

foster carers understand the role of the local authority in the wider context of safeguarding processes as they affect to children.

- Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. The frequency of meetings for short break foster carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided. (NMS 21.8)
- The fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to, and understood by, foster carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. It is available to the responsible authority and any parent or person with parental responsibility. (NMS 16.1) In particular, tailor the statement to reflect this service and clarify the use of the term 'therapeutic' to reflect what this means in practice.
- Children are carefully matched to a foster placement. Foster carers have full information about the child. (NMS 11.2) In particular, ensure that the records fully reflect the areas that managers consider when assessing the suitability of carers for children referred.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people enjoy positive relationships with the fostering families that they are part of. Even children only placed for a short time are developing secure attachments. One young person said of the carers, 'The best thing is that they consider me as their daughter.' Another commented, 'They treat me like their own.' Professionals are enthusiastic about the quality of care, the excellent communication and the child focus of the agency. A placing social worker said, 'I love going to visit; it's relaxed, fun and there's always something going on.'

The vast majority of children and young people benefit from good-quality individualised care. Children and young people's needs are identified, understood and met by foster carers who know them well. Staff effectively support foster carers in this task and enable them to access additional information and advice when necessary. Good team working has supported children and young people to make progress in all areas of their lives. One care partner observed, 'We are raising children as a community.' A placing social worker said, 'My children are doing amazingly with both sets of carers; –if I could clone them, I would.'

Children and young people are healthy. They get good support from carers to ensure that both routine and specialist healthcare needs are met. For example, young children are encouraged to understand about healthy eating; young people are given the information that they need about sexual health, the effects of smoking and drug and alcohol misuse. The application of this advice is seen in improving diets and a reduction in drug misuse.

Children and young people engage well in education. Foster carers work well with schools and advocate on behalf of the child, for example to address any bullying. A child proudly shared with his foster carers the maths game he had brought home from school and enjoyed playing it. One placing social worker reflected on the journey of a child from that of a school refuser to a high attender in full-time education. Another talked about how the high level of engagement of a foster carer with a college had enabled a young person to sustain his place and gain a qualification. Foster carers are proactive in securing work experience placements that build young people's confidence and develop skills. Staff are taking action on behalf of the very small minority of children not in education at the time of this inspection.

Children and young people enjoy a wide range of activities. These include social events and holidays with their foster families as well as membership of community groups, for example Cubs, Rainbows and sports teams and faith groups. Children also benefit from the skills of foster carers in enabling them to build and sustain

friendships, for example through reciprocal tea visits.

The staff-run 'Children's Council' is effective in securing the views of children and young people. Children are given meaningful feedback as to how their opinions have been used. Examples of children's and young people's views in action include specific questions that are asked at panel and the contents of welcome packs. Children and young people said that their foster carers are good at asking their views and acting on them.

Staff actively support young people to remain in placement after 18 years of age, where this is in their best interests and in line with their expressed wishes.

Children and young people develop an increasing awareness of, and ability to manage and express, difficult feelings and emotions. This is achieved through positive relationships with foster carers and their consistent, caring maintenance of boundaries. A placing social worker said, 'He has learned to regulate his own emotions; he can now say sorry and is more open to a joke. This is a massive change. He's like a different child – much happier.' Another social worker described how a foster carer had enabled a young person to develop strategies to manage emotions safely, which had very significantly reduced the risky behaviour of that young person.

Children's frequency of contact is in accordance with their care plan. Foster carers are sensitive to the impact of contact arrangements and make every effort to ensure that it is a positive experience. A placing social worker complimented the foster carers for their good management of contact with family members. This is proving effective in the development of positive identity for the children. Where foster carers have concerns about the impact of contact on children, they share the information appropriately.

Staff are vigilant in sharing with carers all the information that they receive in the referral and, as noted by a placements officer, they 'actively chase additional information if necessary'. Children and professionals generally speak positively about the warmth and welcoming attitude of carers and the agency. This includes the use of age-appropriate welcome booklets and packs. Staff and foster carers work well together to achieve smooth transitions, and involve other professionals where necessary. A psychotherapist outlined her involvement in identifying with the agency the style of care that a young person would need in order for the move from residential care to be successful. The foster carers embraced this and, with continued direction and support from staff and the psychotherapist, the young person is now an established foster-family member. When a child or young person moves placements within the agency, they have opportunities to learn how to rebuild relationships in a supportive atmosphere.

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

Children and young people are safe and feel safe. Foster carers report that safeguarding is a key component in all their interactions with the agency, from the

initial home visit, through assessment, training and in their regular supervision.

Staff and foster carers understand how to identify and manage risk. Where necessary, they have suitable plans to reduce risks to children and young people. In the vast majority of cases, this is underpinned by effective written risk assessments. In a very small number of cases, the written plan has missed an element of risk or does not outline the action to be taken should the specified strategies not work. Foster carers also use risk assessment to provide children with opportunities to take suitable, age-appropriate risks so as to support their personal development, for example an unsupervised bike ride to the park or the use of social media.

The instances of young people going missing have reduced significantly since moving to foster carers with this agency. Where a young person has continued to go missing, the agency has raised concerns with the placing authority and highlighted the foster carer's perception of increased and escalating risks, for example about sexual exploitation. The agency's proactive approach has secured change and reduced risks to young people effectively. The manager has identified that return home interviews are not always taking place as required and is taking action to address this. Foster carers are aware of, and alert to, changes of behaviour that may indicate that a young person is putting themselves at risk, for example through drug and alcohol misuse or the potential radicalisation of young people.

Children and young people benefit from the support of foster carers who understand behaviour in the context of the lived experiences of children and adapt their responses accordingly. Foster carers have a positive approach to behaviour management. Children and young people thrive in homes with clear and consistent boundaries that they understand and feel are fair. Young children enjoy seeing their good behaviour choices recognised and celebrated, for example on star charts. Foster carers work at identifying and understanding triggers for behaviour so that they can help young people recognise this for themselves and so effect change. Carers are trained in an accredited behaviour management model. The model includes the use of physical intervention but emphasises the need to reward the desired behaviour and use distraction and diversion strategies to achieve positive changes in behaviour. There have been no instances of physical intervention. Foster carers say that there is always someone available, who knows both them and the children, to talk to and/or visit to provide support if necessary. Foster carers tailor sanctions for individual children, but use these infrequently. Foster carers record any sanctions in the children's daily logs. However, this does not enable necessary management oversight in this area.

The agency strives to ensure that only suitable people work for the agency, by the implementation of sound recruitment policies and procedures. Where the agency identifies concerns about a person's suitability, prompt action is taken to safeguard children. This includes liaison with the local authority designated safeguarding lead and an appropriate agency referral where necessary.

Foster carers know the action to be taken in the event of an allegation or disclosure by a child or young person. Generally, foster carers follow the procedures effectively, and in one case this led to a criminal conviction. On the rare occasion where there

has been a delay in reporting, this has not had an impact on the immediate safety of a child, and action has been taken in time. Although foster carers have a good understanding of safeguarding procedures and reporting within the agency, there is some uncertainty about the wider context of safeguarding processes. The agency has effective links with the host authority designated safeguarding lead who has been involved in the provision of some training for the agency. The underpinning safeguarding policy contains the relevant information but is not sufficiently specific to the local area, which has the potential to cause confusion.

Staff implement good systems for ensuring that foster carers provide safe and comfortable houses for children and young people to live in. Staff make health and safety checks during the unannounced visits that they do at least twice each year and ensure that action is taken to address any matters arising from these.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

This is the first inspection of the service since its registration as a standalone agency. The agency has a suitably qualified and experienced manager in post. The support structure for the manager has recently been extended to include a newly appointed regional manager in addition to the responsible individual and the operations manager. All share a strong child focus and know the strengths and areas for development both for this agency and the organisation as a whole.

Care partners apply the clear processes that underpin their effective recruitment and assessment of foster carers. Most recruitment is achieved by word of mouth, with existing foster carers recommending the agency to others. Assessments are timely, and the quality of these and annual reviews is good. However, a very small number of assessments do not draw conclusions from the detailed descriptions provided. Panel minutes show that members are confident to challenge and request additional information where they identify this as a need. Some panel evaluation of assessments of foster carers is insufficiently challenging or critical. The assessor and panel have missed opportunities to explore the potential impact of life events on an applicant and how these could enhance or impinge on their ability to respond in particular circumstances. This was a factor in the effectiveness of recent matching. The established panel is seeking new members to improve the diversity of background and experience. The quality assurance function of panel is not well evidenced.

Matching has been a strength of the agency, reflected in the number of long-term arrangements achieved. Unusually for the agency, there have been two recent unplanned endings at the request of foster carers. The team is reflecting and learning from these. The matching documents are not sufficiently explicit about how the skills of the foster carers will equip them to care for the particular needs of children, as outlined in the referral.

The statement of purpose covers the whole organisation. The use of the term 'therapeutic' is too broad brush and does not define what this means in the practice

of the agency staff and foster carers.

The agency has an innovative 'care partner' model, established by the responsible individual. Care partners hold their own budgets and usually have a maximum of 10 fostering households to support. They are responsible for foster carers throughout their fostering career, from recruitment and assessment to the provision of ongoing support. Care partners, who are all qualified social workers, may have some variation in the provision of support to carers. All run foster carer forums, some employ additional supervising social workers and/or support staff and some have direct access to therapeutic advice. All carers are highly complementary about the level of support that they receive. Carers said, 'We're like a big family,' and 'There's always someone who knows us and the children at the end of the phone any time, day or night.' Foster carers cite numerous examples of how this support enables them to sustain placements. Not all staff undertaking the direct supervision of carers are qualified social workers, although this is recommended in the national minimum standards for fostering.

The manager undertakes monthly monitoring and has a sound understanding of what is happening in the lives of the children and young people placed with agency carers. The written account of this monitoring is primarily descriptive and lacks incisive analysis to drive improvement. The team reflect on their learning from placement stability and breakdowns but the manager has not formalised this into actions for the service development plan.

Staff have good systems for gaining the views and opinions of fostering families, children and young people, both formally and informally. The organisation is looking to further improve this through the use of information technology. For example, an app is being trialled.

Placing officers and commissioners are positive about the agency and their effective partnership working. One said, 'I am confident in the quality of their foster carers and the work of the agency. They are very clear about what they can offer and realistic about the capacity of their foster carers.' Managers challenge local authorities appropriately where they consider it necessary to promote the well-being of children and young people. Examples of this include raising issues about potential restriction of liberty or where location is a factor in safeguarding.

Staff are, and feel, well supported. A staff member said that the registered manager 'has a good handle on our work.' Managers provide regular formal supervision and annual appraisals. They effectively share information and learning through monthly team meetings and organisational senior management meetings.

Carers describe training as a strength of the agency. They enjoy a varied training programme which also provides them with valuable opportunities for meeting carers linked to other care partners. Foster carers and staff also benefit from specialist training in response to identified need, for example mental health.

Foster carers keep thorough records and so maintain a detailed, accessible account of children's lives. Carers also complete monthly progress reports. Some of these

provide good examples of progress made by children and young people. Others are repetitive, particularly where a child or young person is not achieving a target. This misses an opportunity to review work in this area and/or the targets themselves.

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: 1212899

Registered provider: Fusion Fostering Limited

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Yeovil, Staff, BA20 1SH

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Inspector(s)

Maire Atherton, social care inspector



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