

Integrated Fostering Services Limited

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Unit 3, Pavilion Business Centre, 1st Floor, 6 Kinetic Crescent, Enfield, Middlesex EN3 7FJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Integrated Fostering Services Limited is a privately owned independent fostering agency based in Enfield. The service aims to provide the following types of foster care placements: short-term, bridging, respite, emergency and solo and sibling placements. Additionally, the service aims to provide foster care placements for mothers and babies and asylum-seeking children.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 79 approved foster carers with 108 children and young people in placement.

Inspection dates: 22 to 26 January 2018

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

Date of last inspection: 4 July 2013

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The fostering service provides good-quality placements and the outcomes for children are very positive.
- Children are safe and are well protected from harm, neglect and abuse.
- The recruitment and preparation of foster carers are robust and thorough. The fostering agency approves skilled, experienced foster carers who are able to offer quality, stable placements that meet the needs of children.
- The fostering service's matching process is effective.
- The fostering agency provides good support, training and supervision to foster carers and staff.
- Leaders and managers are skilled, experienced and passionate about promoting the best possible outcomes for children. Management monitoring systems are effective.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The newly appointed manager is yet to obtain the required management qualification.
- The vetting of some staff requires improvement to confirm that they are suitable to work with children.
- Training offered to foster carers requires review to ensure that this is sufficiently challenging. Foster carers who offer mother and baby placements do not receive training tailored to address placement specific issues.
- The service's children's guide for young children requires revision.
- Arrangements for foster carers' annual reviews requires revision.

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>4. The fostering service provider must—</p> <p>(a) keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide. (Regulation 4 (a))</p> <p>In particular, to ensure that information in the children's guide for young children is written in age-appropriate language.</p>	01/05/2018
<p>7. (1) A person must not manage a fostering agency unless they are fit to do so.</p> <p>(2) A person is not fit to manage a fostering agency unless that person—</p> <p>(b) having regard to the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it—</p> <p>(i) has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for managing the fostering agency. (Regulation 7 (1)(2)(b)(i))</p> <p>In particular, that the manager obtains the relevant management qualification.</p>	01/09/2018
<p>(3) For the purpose of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>(a) is of integrity and good character,</p> <p>(b) has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>(c) is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform</p> <p>and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (3)(a)(b)(c))</p>	01/05/2018
<p>17. (1) The fostering service must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the</p>	01/05/2018

interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))

In addition, that the service provides mother and baby placement training to relevant foster carers.

The provider must provide foster carers with effective training focused on the management of allegations. Foster carers are to complete the training and development standards within 12 months of being approved.

Recommendations

- The fostering service has and implements a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the fostering service's files, on the child's file and on case files relating to foster carers. (NMS 26.1). In particular, that safe care policies and foster carer written profiles are sufficiently detailed.
- Managers, staff, volunteers and foster carers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The level of delegation and responsibility of the manager, and the lines of accountability, are clearly defined. (NMS 24.4). In particular, that senior managers review the current management of foster carers' annual reviews and appoint personnel independent of the fostering panel to chair these reviews.
- The fostering service supports their foster carers to ensure they provide foster children with care that reasonably meets those children's needs, takes the children's wishes and feelings into account, actively promotes individual care and supports the children's safety, health, employment, education and preparation for the future. (NMS 21.1). In particular, that foster carers receive support and advice to fully explore the option about 'Staying Put' arrangements well in advance of children placed with them reaching the age of 18 years.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The fostering service provides good-quality placements and the outcomes for children are very positive. Most placements have continued successfully for a number of years, and many children are matched in long-term placements. Children develop secure attachments with their foster families and have a very strong sense of belonging. A child told the inspector, 'I love it here. I fit right in. They *are* my family.' Children make significant progress and thrive in their placements. Unplanned endings are rare.

Children feel listened to and are aware of how to complain. However, children very rarely make complaints. Managers ensure that children can influence the shape of the service through regular consultation exercises. There are plans in place to appoint a 'children's champion'. This lead staff member will be responsible for the targeted consultation exercises with children to help them to share their views and opinions about the service and how this can be improved upon.

Children benefit from the service's careful placement negotiations and placement starts. Introductions between children and their prospective foster carers are carefully and sensitively coordinated. Children have the opportunity to learn about the families that will care for them as each fostering household has a written profile, which is shared with children. This helps to settle children in from the outset and enhances placement success. However, some of these profiles require revision so that children can easily read important information about their prospective foster families. The fostering service's matching process is sound and children experience strong attachments. As a result, placements are sustained successfully.

The vast majority of children are engaged in learning activities as the service promotes educational attainment and success. Most children attend school or college very regularly, and are making good progress from their original starting points. Foster carers are strong advocates for their children's educational success and are very much involved in promoting this ethos. Fostering service staff acknowledge and celebrate children's academic and more general achievements. This acts as further motivation for children and young people to aim high in their ambitions.

Children engage in a wide range of physical, social and religious activities that are of their choosing. Typically, these include sport, attendance at local youth clubs and religious worship. Most enjoy family holidays with their foster families, sometimes abroad. In addition, children and their families very much enjoy social events and activities organised and funded by the fostering agency. Recently, families have enjoyed a summer barbecue and a day trip to a theme park, both facilitated by the fostering service.

Children live healthy lifestyles. They access primary care services to help them to maintain good health and have nutritious diets. Foster carers ensure that children attend annual health assessments and that immunisations are kept up to date. Some

foster carers are helping young people in their care to stop smoking.

Disabled children make good progress while living with their foster families. Foster carers are aware, for example, of the impact of learning disabilities on children's lives. They are able to offer appropriate care and support. Care provided takes into account the child's level of understanding and communication difficulties. Foster carers access specialist support where this is required. For example, one foster carer became a member of the National Autistic Society in order to access relevant advice and information for the autistic child who she cares for. Young people are encouraged to make use of specialised healthcare services such as mental health, contraceptive and sexual health services. This promotes positive, healthy outcomes.

The preparation of older young people for their transition to adulthood is good. They benefit from the input of their foster carers and the fostering staff who help to prepare them to manage their lives more independently. Young people have the opportunity to explore and develop skills focused on healthy eating, budgeting, household chores and their own self-care. Recording and assessments tools help young people and foster carers to chart young people's progress in completing practical tasks independently. This is particularly important for young people new to the United Kingdom.

A small number of young people remain living with their foster carers post-18 years in 'Staying Put' arrangements. This allows them to remain living and maintain existing relationships with their foster families as they prepare for adulthood. However, the fostering service must ensure that the preparation of both young people and foster carers is fully explored before negotiations with local authorities start. This is to ensure that there is a mutual understanding about all possible options available to all those involved but especially for young people preparing to leave care.

Mother and baby placements help young mothers to offer their babies a good standard of basic care, routine, warmth and stimulation. A young mother told the inspector, 'My carer is helping me with my son. She's giving me support and different ideas. What to do different, get him into a routine, eating and sleeping. I've learned quite a lot of things in the little time that I've been here. It's been good.'

Children's identity needs are well met by the service. Staff ensure that they obtain clear information about issues of identity, including age, gender, disability, religious and cultural considerations from placing authorities. The fostering service's matching process is effective and children benefit from this process. For example, they have the opportunity to attend their chosen places of worship, are placed with families that speak the same or similar language or dialects and live with families that promote their cultural heritage. Children eat culturally appropriate food, have private space for prayer and engage in community events. One young man, new to the United Kingdom and seeking asylum, celebrated being placed with a family originally from the region that he grew up in. He and the foster carer are able to hold meaningful discussions about his previous home life and travelling experiences.

Foster carers and staff help children to safely understand their backgrounds and events that have happened to them. This helps young people to build emotional resilience and to develop a positive sense of their own identity.

Children have good access to contact with their siblings, family members and others when it is safe for them to do so. The fostering agency manages arrangements for contact carefully. Staff ensure that there is a consistent focus on the impact of contact and that arrangements are always in the best interest of children. Foster carers understand the importance of children remaining in contact with their families. In one instance, the foster carer facilitates regular contact between a child and parent spanning a distance of several hundred miles. The foster carer commented, 'It's hard, but it's the right thing to do.'

Children benefit from the close partnership working between their foster carers, fostering service staff and other professionals. Communication is regular and effective. This is particularly true with local authority social workers and education and health professionals. This supports the effective coordination of children's care. A local authority social worker commented, 'The agency supports permanency plans if the children are fully settled and integrated into the foster family and committed to look after the child looked after long term and if the child is in agreement with this. The agency offers 24/7 support and in my view, foster carers are very well supported.'

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

The fostering service considers effective safeguarding as a priority for all placements and holds this ethos central to its entire function and operation. Foster carers are committed to developing positive relationships with children and the agency operates a culture of openness and trust. Staff ensure that they consistently review and monitor each child's safety and well-being throughout placements. Children benefit from the agency's clear and robust child protection policies and procedures. This helps to keep children safe.

Staff ensure that comprehensive placement plans address any changing needs and that strategies are in place to help reduce risk-taking behaviour. For example, staff complete comprehensive risk assessments soon after placements start. These are updated regularly and help to identify and address known and potential risks to children's safety. Foster carers devise safe care policies. However, these are not always sufficiently detailed and are not explicit about what safe care strategies are to be used with individual children.

The assessment, preparation and supervision of foster carers have a strong focus on child protection and this supports their safe care of vulnerable children. Unannounced home visits are another mechanism to monitor the safety of children. Staff routinely conduct two unannounced visits to each fostering household every year.

Foster carers and staff are active participants in multi-agency professionals meetings convened to address young people's suspected or actual involvement in child sexual

exploitation or where there are persistent episodes of young people going missing. Staff support foster carers to take prompt and appropriate action to help to reduce such incidents. Managers and leaders effectively monitor, have good oversight, reflect and report on any safeguarding incident. This is particularly the case for when children are at risk of sexual exploitation or go missing. Managers and staff review and update key documents regularly to reflect children's changing needs and circumstances. This helps to keep children safe from harm and abuse.

Children are matched with carers far from their homes where there are significant risks posed and it is in their best interests to do so. In one example, a child is placed several hundred miles from his home due to the threat of abduction from family members.

Foster carers receive regular and consistent child protection training. Staff ensure that they routinely explore safeguarding issues in supervision sessions and in all other foster carer forums. There has been one incident of a foster carer restraining a child. The foster carer and subsequently staff of the service managed the incident appropriately, producing clear records of the circumstances and reasons why physical intervention was necessary. Managers continue to offer foster carers training in de-escalation techniques to help them to manage children's sometimes challenging and dangerous behaviour.

Since the last inspection, there have been several allegations made by children against their foster carers. In each instance, staff managed the incident appropriately and in accordance with child protection procedures. This ensured that appropriate support was available to the child. External safeguarding professionals, such as designated officers, are involved and staff adhere to their advice and instructions. This helps to keep children safe in the event that they are unhappy about their placements or foster carers. The management team tracks and regularly discusses all allegations. This ensures that procedures are followed and that children are safe and well protected.

The fostering service has strong and effective working partnerships with other agencies. These include children's social workers, health and school personnel and the police. This successful collaboration promotes an effective, coordinated approach to safeguarding children.

The fostering service has good systems in place to ensure that the vetting, selection and recruitment of staff and panel members are thorough and promote the safety of children. However, managers must ensure that they ratify the recruitment of support staff where vetting has been completed by the service's sister company. This is to ensure that safe recruitment standards are consistently maintained and that all required information, for example confirmation of formal qualifications, is evidenced. This was found not to be the case in one instance.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The leadership and management of the fostering agency are strong. The management team demonstrates the continued ambition and commitment to

provide and maintain quality foster care placements that meet well the needs of children. The management of the fostering service is efficient and the service is well run.

The fostering service's newly appointed manager is highly skilled, well qualified and experienced to manage the service with positive effect. The manager is in the process of registering with Ofsted. She is yet to obtain the required management qualification.

The fostering service has extensive, effective monitoring systems in place for most aspects of the service's operation. These include, for example, the auditing of case records, the review and evaluation of the outcomes for children and the regular review of safeguarding protocols. Managers are consistent in their completion of quarterly overview reports. As a result, leaders have very good insight into the quality of the fostering service, including areas for improvement.

Stakeholders both within and external to the fostering service overwhelmingly identify managers as being visible, approachable and highly skilled. This is the overwhelming view of foster carers. A foster carer said of the management team, 'The managers offer my family a sense of security. The agency has a real family feel. Staff and managers are available 24/7 for anything and they really do care for the children.'

Another foster carer described how she had an issue with her supervising social worker. Managers intervened, listened to her point of view and allocated a new member of staff. Yet another foster carer said of the service's current operations manager, '[Name] is my girl. She's always on call if I need her, morning, noon or night. I can call seven or eight times a night if I'm having difficulties. She's on the ball and will sort things out, instantaneously.'

Members of the staff team are equally complimentary about the management of the service. A social worker commented, 'I was recommended by a friend to apply for a job here. My experiences have lived up to the recommendation. Managers are open and supportive, they offer a lot of guidance and I'm able to share my ideas and opinions.'

There are clear lines of accountability and managers and staff are clear about staff roles and responsibilities. Social work staff are qualified and experienced, and the agency has a long-standing history of providing placements to social work students. Many of these students are subsequently employed by the service, once they qualify as social workers. The training, support and supervision of staff are good. Managers consistently conduct staff annual appraisals. The entire team is skilled, highly motivated and industrious; they share similar enthusiasm, drive and ambition for the development of the service as managers and leaders do.

The fostering service is well resourced and is financially viable. There is a comprehensive development plan in place, which outlines plans for the improvement and expansion of the fostering service.

The fostering service's preparation, support and training of foster carers are

effective. This ensures that prospective and approved foster carers have good insight into the needs of those they look after and are skilled in meeting identified needs.

Foster carers receive a good range of training that helps them to care safely for very vulnerable children. The fostering service's training programme shows improvement from the previous year. However, despite this, some very experienced foster carers indicate some training is repetitive. There is a need for the training to offer foster carers even more challenge. Foster carers who offer mother and baby placements require training specific to these placements. This is to ensure that foster carers' knowledge and skills are in line with current research and practice.

The support of foster carers is excellent. Foster carers highlight the support that they receive from the entire staff team as being exceptional. Staff complete frequent supervisory visits that comprehensively review and challenge placement issues, as they relate to all parties. Foster carers feel listened to and appreciate the open culture of the organisation. They overwhelmingly identify the level of support that they receive as a clear strength of the service. A foster carer told the inspector, 'I feel really comfortable at Integrated Fostering. Staff and managers are never out of reach. They're always available to speak with you. I feel cherished and valued.'

Stakeholders and interested parties have access to comprehensive information about the fostering service. The agency's statement of purpose is an informative document that outlines well the services and facilities it aims to provide. The service produces two children's guides for the use of children. The guide aimed at primary school aged children requires revision to ensure that the information is easy to read and is user-friendly.

Foster carers, staff and managers work in close partnership with other professionals. One local authority representative commented, 'There is good communication with the supervising social worker and up-to-date information is regularly communicated.'

The fostering agency is well organised. Leaders have ambitious, realistic plans and a clear vision for the service's future development. Leaders demonstrate a genuine commitment to improvement and to delivering very positive outcomes for children.

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

Inspection report for independent fostering agency: Integrated Fostering Services Limited

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: SC400955

Registered provider: Integrated Fostering Services Limited

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Inspector

Sandra Jacobs-Walls: social care inspector



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