

Liberty Foster Care

Liberty Foster Care Limited

Passfield Business Centre, Lynchborough Road, Passfield, Liphook, Hampshire GU30 7SB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Liberty Foster Care Limited is a private company that is owner-managed by the responsible individual and the registered manager. This agency has 23 fostering households and currently has 27 children in placement. Liberty Foster Care provides foster care placements for children and young people aged between zero and 18 years, on a short, medium and long-term basis.

Inspection dates: 19 to 23 February 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: 1 August 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Safe and secure placements support the children to make good progress in all areas of their development.
- Warm, nurturing relationships with their foster carers ensure that children feel part of their foster families.
- Good safeguarding practice ensures that all child protection concerns are shared and investigated.
- The agency staff and the foster carers have strong relationships with other professionals, which means that they work together very effectively for the benefit of the children.
- The registered manager has a good oversight of the agency and ensures that any shortfalls in practice are identified and rectified quickly.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Risk assessments do not always reflect all the actions the foster carers should take to keep children safe, and strategies to minimise risks are often generic and are not explicit enough.
- Records in relation to safeguarding incidents and physical interventions do not sufficiently evidence all the actions that are taken or the rationale for the decisions made.
- The agency's policies in relation to safeguarding and behaviour management do not contain all the required information.
- Recruitment checks for agency staff are not completed.
- The registered manager and the responsible individual have not undertaken training to fulfil their roles.
- Training for staff and foster carers has lapsed, and carers have not undertaken training specific to children's needs.

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 service provider must— (a) keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide, (b) notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days, (Regulation 4 (a)(b))	02/04/2018
The registered provider must ensure that where the registered provider is an organisation, the responsible individual undertakes, from time to time, such training as is appropriate to ensure that they have the experience and skills necessary for carrying on the fostering agency. (Regulation 8 (2)(b))	02/04/2018
The registered manager must undertake, from time to time, such training as is appropriate to ensure that they have the experience and skills necessary for managing the fostering agency. (Regulation 8 (3))	02/04/2018
The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1)) In particular, ensure that all foster carers have completed the mandatory training and training specific to the needs of the children they care for.	02/04/2018
For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person (a) is of integrity and good character, (b) has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform, (c) is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform, 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))	02/04/2018

The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. (Regulation 35 (2))	02/04/2018
The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency, which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (3))	02/04/2018
If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))	02/04/2018

Recommendations

- All foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes. The fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes supporting positive behaviour, de-escalation of conflicts and discipline. The fostering service's policy is made clear to the responsible authority/placing authority, child and parent/s or carers before the placement begins or, in an emergency placement, at the time of the placement. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 3.8)

In particular, the agency's method of physical intervention is described within the agency's policy.

- Each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority where all such necessary information has not been provided by the authority. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 3.9)

In particular, ensure that a rigorous plan is in place for children who may have to be physically restrained that provides clear guidance on the behaviour the child may display and the most effective strategy to help the child to calm. The plan must also provide guidance on the preferred method of physical intervention.

- Children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. Children are protected from abuse and other forms of significant harm. (e.g. sexual or labour exploitation). (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 4.3)

In particular, ensure that risk assessments are up to date and provide sufficient guidance and advice on how to keep children safe.

- The panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 14.7)
- The fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 15.1)

In particular, take action to reduce the number of unplanned endings.

- Each fostering service has a designated person, who is a senior manager, responsible for managing allegations. The designated person has responsibility for liaising with the LADO and for keeping the subject of the allegation informed of progress during and after the investigation. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 22.5)

In particular, ensure that the agency's safeguarding policy specifies the designated person and the arrangements if the designated person is unavailable.

- There is a good quality learning and development programme, which includes induction, post-qualifying and in-service training, that staff and volunteers are supported to undertake. The programme equips them with the skills required to meet the needs of the children, keeps them up-to-date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the fostering service. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 23.1)
- Suitable arrangements exist for professional supervision of the agency's registered person or manager of a local authority fostering service. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 24.3)
- A written record is kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record is signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 24.5)
- Clear arrangements are in place to identify the person in charge when the registered manager, or local authority fostering service manager, is absent. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 25.5)

- Entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information and are signed and dated. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 26.5)

In particular, records for safeguarding and missing incidents detail all the actions taken, at what time they were taken and the rationale behind any decision made.

- Ensure that in reaching a decision or making a qualifying determination, the decision maker should consider *Hofstetter v LB Barnet* and *IRM* (2009) and approach a case accordingly. (The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4: Fostering Services 5.40)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are at the centre of this agency's practice. The managers, the staff and the foster carers alike are determined to provide good quality care to enable children to reach their potential. One child commented during their feedback to their foster carer's annual review that the care they received has, 'allowed me to have the same opportunities as my friends and everyone else'.

Managers recognise that if the foster carers feel well supported and guided then this will improve the quality of care provided to the children. The managers' commitment to providing a 'family feel' and personable approach ensures that the foster carers feel part of a team and are able to seek guidance and advice to ensure that the children receive the right care to meet their needs.

Warm, nurturing relationships between the children and their foster carers ensure that the children feel secure and safe, providing them with stability in order that they can move on in their lives. Children have a sense of belonging within their foster families, and are included in family activities and celebrations. One child commented in feedback to the agency, 'I don't feel like I'm in care, I feel like they are my family.'

Sensitive care and guidance from the foster carers help the children to reflect on their experiences and feelings. As a result, the children gain a more positive self-view and develop stronger emotional resilience, resulting in significant improvements in their confidence, behaviour and social interactions.

Education is highly valued. All of the children are in education, and the agency and its foster carers go to exceptional lengths to ensure that the children receive the required support and resources to achieve their potential. This has included arranging additional tutoring. One child who failed their mock exams went on to achieve nine GCSEs. The child commented in their feedback to the agency that their foster carers had, 'supported me the whole way through my GCSEs'.

The foster carers champion fun activities to widen children's social experiences. Foster carers are thoughtful about what activities are best suited to the children's needs and interests while providing the children with opportunities to try new things. Consequently, the children increase their self-confidence and extend their social networks.

Transitions to independence and adult life are well managed. The foster carers work collaboratively with the children's social workers to ensure that there is a pathway plan in place so that children are being prepared for the responsibilities of adult life.

Through careful and sensitive guidance from the foster carers, the children are supported to maintain and improve their relationships with their families. As a result, the children are able to maintain a sense of belonging within their families and

benefit from their ongoing support.

Foster carers and the agency staff have a good understanding of the children's needs and know how these are best met to ensure that the children achieve positive outcomes. As a result, the children progress in line with their plans, often returning home or moving on to adoption.

The agency's staff try to obtain as much information as possible to inform placement planning. However, in some cases the agency's drive to provide safe family homes to children who urgently need them has resulted in a high number of placements breaking down. In the majority of cases, this has not been the fault of the agency but is due to the limited information known by the child's placing authority prior to placement. Consequently, children have been placed with foster carers who do not have the skills or abilities to meet their long-term needs.

Children, and others involved in their care, do not have the opportunity to shape the development of the agency. Children are asked for their feedback during foster carers' reviews on the care they received from their foster carers; however, opportunities for further consultation have not been developed.

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

The children's safety is paramount. Their foster carers focus on providing consistent and stable environments for children where they feel safe and secure. Consequently, most children settle, feel able to open up and reflect on their experiences and are supported by their foster carers to move on. One child stated, 'I am happy with my carers. I'm no longer scared. I feel safe.'

Close working relationships between the foster carers and supervising social workers ensure that the agency staff are kept up to date on the child's placement. Children benefit from regular contact with their foster carers' supervising social workers, who visit them at least monthly and spend time developing a good rapport with each child. These visits ensure that children have regular opportunities to speak to known professionals and share any worries or concerns.

Good management of risk keeps the children safe, and helps them to understand harm and learn to avoid risk-taking behaviour. The foster carers are adept at balancing risk management with their responsibility to encourage children to become more independent and learn how to keep themselves safe. However, the children's risk assessments and safer care strategies do not always reflect all the actions the foster carers should take to keep children safe, and strategies to minimise risks are often generic and not tailored to the child.

Rigorous safeguarding practice, underpinned by well-trained knowledgeable staff, ensures that children feel safe and are safe. Safeguarding concerns, complaints and allegations against the foster carers are shared appropriately and are fully investigated. However, the designated lead for safeguarding for the agency is not specified in the safeguarding policy, nor is the person whom the staff or the foster carers should contact in their absence. In some cases, records regarding

safeguarding incidents do not sufficiently evidence all the actions that were taken or the rationale for the decisions made. This hinders the manager's monitoring and subsequent learning.

Children occasionally go missing from their foster carers' homes. In these instances, the foster carers implement the agency's missing persons policy and alert the necessary agencies. The agency staff advocate on the children's behalf to obtain a return home interview from their placing authority. However, in some instances records of missing incidents do not reflect the actions the foster carers have taken or the time when the police were alerted.

Positive relationships between the children and their foster carers underpin the sound behaviour management approach used. Foster carers have a good understanding of the children's behaviours, and what strategies to use to support the children to calm down. Through consistent boundaries and support, the children are learning to regulate their emotions.

There is a lack of clarity in the children's risk assessments and the agency's policies concerning the nature of the physical intervention to be used. There are no clear plans in place advising the foster carers of how to respond to the children's varying levels of challenging behaviours. Records of physical interventions lack detail, and in some cases the foster carers have not reported physical interventions in line with the agency's procedures. The lack of robust guidance may cause confusion and lead to the foster carers not implementing physical interventions confidently, as well as hindering the manager's monitoring of such incidents.

The manager and senior leaders have not undertaken sufficient safeguarding training relevant to their role and responsibilities. There have been occasions when the manager has not notified Ofsted of significant events as required by the regulations. This hampers the regulator's ability to monitor the service.

Recruitment and preparation of the foster carers focus on providing safe, nurturing placements for the children. Rigorous assessments and panel processes ensure that foster carers are only approved if they have the necessary skills and experience to provide safe, caring placements to children.

Recruitment procedures for the agency's staff are not always completed in line with regulation, resulting in some staff and panel members being employed without the correct checks in place.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager demonstrates an extensive knowledge of her foster carers and the children the agency supports. She and her staff have a sound understanding of each individual carer's approach, their strengths and how these can be used for the benefit of the child.

A culture where the child is paramount has been encouraged and embedded by the manager, resulting in a supportive family approach. Agency staff and the foster

carers feel part of a team working towards the best interests of the child. As a result, the foster carers were extremely positive about their relationships with the manager and the agency staff.

Proactive relationships with other organisations ensure that the agency staff and the foster carers work together with other professionals to ensure that the needs of each child are met to a good standard. When necessary, the agency staff and the foster carers will offer professional challenge and advocate on the children's behalf to ensure that they receive effective support to help them to progress.

Skilful, nurturing care by the foster carers has ensured that the children make good progress in all aspects of their development. The agency has systems for monitoring the children's progress to ensure that it targets resources effectively to help the children achieve positive outcomes.

Foster carers and the children spoke highly of their supervising social workers and the range of support offered by the agency. Supervising social workers ensure that they maintain consistent contact with their foster carers. As a result, they remain up to date with the children's placements and provide effective guidance and support when needed.

Some of the foster carers' mandatory training has lapsed, while others have not completed training specific to the needs of the children they support. This can affect the foster carers' ability to provide safe care. The manager is aware of these concerns and is reviewing the agency's strategies to ensure that foster carers engage in the training provided by the agency.

Regular audits ensure that the registered manager has a good oversight of the service. She analyses and evaluates practice so that she can identify areas for improvement. The agency's development plan demonstrates the managers' awareness of the agency's shortfalls. However, it lacks timeframes for the review and completion of targets, which may result in actions for development being left to drift or not being achieved. Systems for monitoring the agency do not include consultation with all those involved with the service. This represents a missed opportunity to gain further insight into areas for development. Managers have not submitted quality monitoring reports to Ofsted in line with regulation. This hinders the regulator's ability to monitor the agency.

Competent staff are extremely committed to ensuring that children receive good quality care through well-supported placements. Regular supervision ensures that staff feel supported in their roles. However, staff have not always completed relevant training specific to the children's needs so that they can oversee children's placements effectively.

Rigorous challenge and helpful feedback to the agency demonstrate that the panel is fulfilling its quality assurance function. Consequently, the panel only recommends people who are suitable to foster and is supporting the agency to improve its practice. However, the panel minutes do not sufficiently evidence the discussions had between panel members.

Poor recording by the agency's decision maker does not demonstrate a rigorous approach, as records fail to evidence their consideration of the information submitted to panel or their reasons for approval.

The responsible individual and the registered manager have not undertaken sufficient training. Although this is yet to have any impact on the quality of care provided to children, it could hinder their ability to fulfil their roles. The registered manager does not receive any formal supervision to enable her to reflect on her practice or the quality of care offered by the agency to aid her own and the agency's development.

There are currently no clear arrangements in place to identify the person in charge when the registered manager is absent. As a result, staff and foster carers are unclear about who to go to with concerns or for advice when the registered manager is unavailable.

Children, their parents and placing authorities are not provided with accurate information about all aspects of the agency. The statement of purpose and children's guide do not contain all the information required by regulations and standards.

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: SC397846

Registered provider: Liberty Foster Care Limited

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Responsible individual: John Harper

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Inspector

Melissa McMillan, social care inspector



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