

Freedom Fostering

Freedom Fostering Limited
27 Waterloo Road, Wolverhampton WV1 4DJ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Freedom Fostering is an independent fostering agency registered in 2003. The director of the company is the responsible individual. The agency undertakes recruitment, assessment, approval and support of foster carers. The range of placement types provided include emergency, long-term, medium-term, short-term and parent and child placements. The service does not have any foster carers who provide short breaks. The agency currently has 14 fostering families and 34 children placed.

Inspection dates: 16 to 20 April 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **requires improvement to be good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 8 May 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- Leadership and management are poor.
- Processes for matching children with foster carers are weak.
- Monitoring systems do not demonstrate the progress of children or identify additional support when this is required.
- The experiences of children are variable.
- Risk assessments and safer caring plans require improvement and are not individualised.
- The training of foster carers is ineffective and some training is out of date.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- All children are in education.
- Sibling groups are supported to remain together.
- Some children are doing exceptionally well.

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 registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b))	02/07/2018
The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times, and before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given to the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. (Regulation 11 (a)(b)(ii))	02/07/2018
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))	02/07/2018
The fostering service provider must not allow a person to whom paragraph (2) applies, to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so. For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person is of integrity and good character, has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform, 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 (1)(b)(3)(a)(b)(c))	02/07/2018
The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4)(a))	02/07/2018
A fostering panel must make a written record of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations. (Regulation 24 (2))	02/07/2018

The registered person must maintain a system for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. 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. 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 (1)(b)(2)(3))

02/07/2018

Recommendations

- Ensure that foster carers understand what is in the child's placement plan and have clarity about decisions they can make about the day to day arrangements for the child, including such matters as education, leisure activities, overnight stays, holidays, and personal issues such as haircuts. (National Minimum Standards 7.3)
- Ensure that prospective foster carers are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets the child's development needs. (National Minimum Standards 13.6)
- The registered person must ensure no one may foster more than three children unless: the foster children are all siblings in relation to each other, or the local authority within whose area the foster carer lives exempts the foster carer from the usual fostering limit in relation to specific placements (in which case they must set out the terms as detailed below), and the foster carer's terms of approval allow it (any terms of approval must be compatible with the number of children the foster carer is caring for even if an exemption to the usual fostering limit has been granted, unless the placement is in an emergency and for less than six days). (Statutory guidance - Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, page 16)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

The agency is providing foster families for 34 children. The agency provides a range of different types of placement, which include short-term, long-term and parent and child. The majority of children are placed out of hours as an emergency. Furthermore, one child has remained on a 'staying put' arrangement, beyond 18 years of age.

Foster carers and children value the support that the agency provides. This support is helping some children to make exceptional progress, develop new skills, improve their confidence and keep themselves safe. Some children benefit from individual sessions undertaken with a support worker. For example, one child has covered important issues such as completion of a curriculum vitae and preparation for independent living. One child stated that he could not think of anything that they can improve on, and that staff should 'be proud of the agency'.

However, the experiences and progress of children are variable. The matching of children with their carers is not robust. Appropriate sleeping arrangements are not provided by some foster carers, and this has not been addressed by the agency. As a result, a two-year-old has been sleeping in a travel cot and another child has been sleeping on a day bed for eight months. Due to poor monitoring, it is unclear whether all children's health needs are being met. Staff rely on working for a small agency and knowing all of their children, rather than on efficient, formalised monitoring systems.

Some children are placed with foster carers who are of a different race or religion to them. Matching documents do not always make clear the rationale behind the decision-making in such instances, or how foster carers will meet children's individualised needs. This may not fully promote children's identity.

A strength of the agency is that all of the children are attending school or another educational provision. The education officer has ambitions for the children and works closely with schools, colleges and other providers to ensure that the children meet their full potential. Children also have ambitions. One child proudly told the inspector that he plans to work with animals. Children spend time enjoying themselves. For example, children attend 'Stagecoach', go swimming and enjoy going on holidays with their foster carers.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Children do not go missing from their foster homes nor are they known to be at any risk of child sexual exploitation or radicalisation.

However, children's safety is not consistently promoted in this agency. Some

children's risk assessments are weak as they do not contain enough information about children's risk-taking behaviours. One parent and child risk assessment does not provide adequate detail or set out at what point the foster carer intervenes to safeguard the child. Safer caring plans are generic and are not personalised to the individual child. This does not promote the safeguarding of children.

There has been one allegation since the last inspection that was not referred to the appropriate safeguarding professionals. This shortfall had the potential to place children at risk of harm. However, this was in June 2017. Recent feedback from the designated officer in the local authority is positive, particularly in relation to the registered manager.

There has been an improvement in the robustness of foster home annual reviews. The registered manager now chairs the review and fully addresses when there have been issues regarding standards of care or foster carers' practice. This helps to keep children safe and improve their life experiences.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Since the last inspection, a new manager has been appointed and was registered with Ofsted in September 2017. The registered manager has spent much of his time, building up staff morale. This has reduced his ability to focus on other aspects of the service, including ensuring compliance with regulation and addressing some of the recommendations from the last inspection.

A lack of effective quality assurance and monitoring processes means that the registered manager is unable to see what progress children make. The registered manager has started to monitor some aspects of the agency, for example by making sure that all paperwork is on file. However, he has failed to complete any quality assurance or management monitoring since the last inspection. He has not monitored children's outcomes in respect of health, cultural needs or emotional well-being.

The registered manager has not ensured that paperwork is completed thoroughly to promote the safety and well-being of children in placement. The majority of placements are emergency placements which are all approved and matched by the responsible individual. When matching, the responsible individual has not taken into account a lack of beds for children, and as a result, on one occasion, children have shared a bed. Furthermore, a sibling group of five children was placed with a foster carer, despite their paperwork stating that they were approved for a sibling group of three children. This demonstrates poor matching and placement decisions, which have potentially placed children at risk.

Staff report that they feel supported by the registered manager. One member of staff stated, 'Since the registered manager has been in post I now enjoy coming to work.' However, formal supervisions of staff and the registered manager do not meet the required standard. There is a lack of recording of discussions, decision-making or any actions that need to be taken. The registered manager does not have regular supervisions and his appraisal was undertaken by the previous registered

manager, who has no role in the agency. This limits learning and progress, and does not ensure that the governance of the agency is robust.

Training is variable and does not always provide foster carers with the skills and knowledge that they need. There is a lack of monitoring of foster carers' attendance on training courses. Some approved foster carers do not attend training or supervisions with the agency. When foster carers do not attend training, records do not show what actions the supervising social workers took to address their non-attendance. Some training that is undertaken with foster carers is out of date or of poor quality. This leaves carers vulnerable, and not necessarily equipped with the skills that they need.

Panel minutes do not evidence a rigorous overview of the agency's foster carers or practice. The reasoning for recommendations is not recorded.

The interim medical adviser has not been safely recruited.

Managers have not ensured that some of the recommendations from the last inspection have been met. For example, some foster carers do not know what responsibilities or decisions have been delegated to them so that they can make decisions for children to attend an education trip. An application for an exemption from the host authority has not been sought. Rigorous initial assessments of prospective foster carers have not been fully considered to ensure that they can meet the needs of children.

Despite these shortfalls, other professionals (including a social worker, and a commissioning officer) gave positive feedback about the service and reported good communication.

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: SC037304

Registered provider: Freedom Fostering Limited

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Responsible individual: Maureen Johnson

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Inspectors

Sandra King, social care inspector

Lisa O'Donovan, social care inspector



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