

# Fusion Fostering West Midlands

Fusion Fostering Limited

Watling Court Orbital Plaza, Watling Street, Cannock, Staffordshire WS11 0EL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This fostering agency was registered in August 2017. It is part of a larger, privately run organisation that operates nationwide. Prior to this service being registered, it formed part of another registration within the company. This registration supports foster carers across the West Midlands.

The placements provided include emergency, short-term, long-term, respite, bridging to permanent and parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, the agency had 28 fostering households and cared for 27 children.

The registered manager left the post in June 2018. A new manager has been appointed. She holds the qualifications required for the role. She has yet to make an application for registration to Ofsted.

**Inspection dates:** 6 to 10 August 2018

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>Good</b>
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good

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

**Date of last inspection:** first inspection

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** none

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children receive good-quality care that supports them to make progress in all areas of their lives.
- Foster carers are well supported by the agency. They receive regular supervision and have access to additional peer and professional support when required.
- Children live with foster carers who have the necessary skills to meet their needs.
- Children feel part of their foster family.
- Children are encouraged to do well at school.
- Foster carers are responsive to the individual needs of children.
- Incidents of children going missing from home are low.
- Children and foster carers have opportunities to socialise together.
- Foster carers support children to maintain links with people who are important to them.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- There are gaps in the management oversight of the agency, which have resulted in some things being missed. These include shortfalls in training, supervision, recruitment and record management.

## 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
A person must not manage a fostering agency unless they are fit to do so. A person is not fit to manage a fostering agency unless that person is physically and mentally fit to manage a fostering agency, and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 7(1)(2)(b)(ii))	21/09/2018
The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to the size of the fostering agency, its	02/11/2018

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 and manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8(1)(a)(b))	
The fostering service must ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21(4)(a))	02/11/2018

## Recommendations

- Ensure that the fostering service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 14, paragraph 4.5)

This relates to managers implementing risk assessments that provide foster carers with clear strategies to manage and reduce risks for children.

- Ensure that written records kept by the fostering service where a child goes missing detail action taken by foster carers, the circumstances of the child's return, any reasons given by the child for running away from the foster home and any action taken in light of those reasons. This information is shared with the responsible authority and, where appropriate, the child's parents. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 16, paragraph 5.10)
- Ensure that the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. The reports are accurate, up to date and include evidence based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third party information. The reports are prepared, signed and dated by the social worker who assessed the prospective foster carer, and countersigned and dated by the fostering team manager or a team manager of another of the provider's fostering teams. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 29, paragraph 13.7)
- Ensure that reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about its carers' ongoing suitability to foster. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 29, paragraph 13.8)
- Ensure that the fostering panel makes its recommendation on the suitability of a prospective foster carer within eight months of receipt of the prospective foster carer's application to be assessed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 30, paragraph 14.4)
- Ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers). For foster carers who were approved as such before April 2008, the Standards are attained by April 2011 (or by April 2012 for family and friends foster carers). Fostering households may use the same evidence workbook. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards',

page 40, paragraph 20.3)

- Ensure that all staff, volunteers and the registered manager are properly managed and supported and understand to whom they are accountable. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 49, paragraph 24.2)

This relates to implementing a policy which details the management of supervision when there is a potential conflict of interest. For example, when individuals have close family relationships.

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children make good progress in all areas of their lives because of the care that they receive. Foster carers demonstrate commitment and dedication to the children that they care for. One foster carer told the inspector, 'We are really proud of what he has achieved. He is the child I get up for every morning, he is my purpose.'

Supervising social workers make sure that children live with foster carers who can meet their needs. For example, one child who had experienced 13 moves previously is now established with long-term foster carers. His social worker said, 'He seems to have found a place where he is safe and secure.'

Children are encouraged to do well at school. Foster carers are aspirational for children to make progress in their learning. Foster carers attend parents' evenings and ensure that they keep close communication with schools. One child's school report stated, 'She has had an excellent year, celebrating achievements both academically and in terms of her attitude and behaviour.'

Children feel part of the foster carer's family. They enjoy a range of individual and family activities and are included in significant family events such as holidays and weddings. One social worker told the inspector, 'He gets a lot of fantastic opportunities, he is an integral part of the family.' Foster carers produce creative memory boxes and photo albums that record these experiences for children. This inclusive care promotes security and enables children to build positive childhood memories.

Foster carers provide good-quality individualised care. For example, one foster carer has created a sensory garden at their home for one child who has complex needs. Foster carers are also creative in their approach to meeting the cultural needs of children. This positive approach to diversity ensures that children feel valued.

Foster carers support children to maintain links with people who are important to them. Foster carers are sensitive to children's separation and loss. This is supported by the agency, which has introduced 'Foster Carer Day' to reduce the conflict that children experience on Mother's Day or Father's Day when it comes to celebrating and sending cards to foster carers. This empathic approach helps to reduce anxiety for children.

The agency provides opportunities for children and foster carers to meet socially. Supervising social workers consult with children through foster carer reviews and regular visits to foster carers' homes. Children's participation has been identified by managers as an area for further development to ensure that children's views support service improvement. Despite this shortfall, children do have other forums to share their views and experiences. For example, one child is part of a local authority's children in care council and has spoken at a workshop about her experiences as a looked after child.

Foster carers feel well prepared for their role as a foster carer. They value the support that they receive from the agency. Foster carers receive regular supervision

from qualified social workers. This is supplemented by support visits and peer support when required. One foster carer said, 'The support is immense. They were there in the early days to talk us through. It helps us to understand the child.'

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

Children are cared for in safe foster homes. Supervising social workers complete regular health and safety checks and undertake unannounced visits to the foster carer's home to maintain this.

Foster carers receive training that reflects the needs of the children that they care for. For example, foster carers are trained to help children to stay safe online. Recently, the agency provided joint training for foster carers and the children to help increase awareness around the risks that children can face regarding child sexual exploitation. Because of this training, one child's understanding of her situation has improved so much that her risk levels have now reduced.

Supervising social workers support foster carers to implement safe care plans and risk assessments when children are placed. These clearly identify known risks for the child. However, supervising social workers do not always include guidance on how to minimise risk. This means that foster carers can be without clear strategies that enable them to respond to a child's risks.

Children rarely go missing from home. When they do, foster carers respond quickly and work with social workers and the police to ensure that the child is safely returned home. Records of these incidents are not always sufficiently detailed to provide a clear understanding of the event. This limits opportunities to learn why children go missing from home.

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

The company operates a care partnership model through which supervising social workers are contracted as independent limited companies rather than being directly employed by the company. This element of the service is currently under review by Ofsted and, therefore, does not form part of the reporting or judgement from this inspection, other than to note its operation.

The acting manager has been in post for three weeks at the time of the inspection. She has quickly identified the strengths of the service, along with the areas for development and actions needed to address these. However, due to the limited time that she has been in post, it is not possible to evaluate the impact of any changes.

There have been ongoing gaps in management oversight of the service which have impacted standards within the agency. Leaders and managers have acknowledged these shortfalls and, prior to inspection, had begun to identify what needs to change. For example, the agency plans to bring in a new electronic recording and reporting system that will be key to ensuring that there is a consistent management oversight of the service going forward.

Managers do not ensure that defined timescales are adhered to. For example, 80% of assessments of an applicant's suitability to foster were not presented to panel

within eight months of application. Also, not all foster carers have been supported to achieve their Training, Support and Development Standards portfolio within one year of approval. This failure to adhere to the national minimum standards results in unnecessary drift within the service.

Managers have not always ensured that agency records are up to date. This omission means that the agency is without clear records of all the work that has been undertaken with foster carers and children. This leaves staff, foster carers and children without relevant information in the case of a complaint or allegation. Managers have implemented detailed action plans in recent weeks that have started to improve this shortfall.

The quality of information presented to the panel is not always sufficient to enable the panel to make clear and informed recommendations. On two occasions, this has had an impact on the agency's decision-maker disagreeing with the panel recommendation. The agency decision-maker has shown due diligence in the recording of these decisions and the panel has learned from these situations. However, work to improve the quality of the information presented has yet to be completed. The acting manager has quickly identified this issue and is in the process of implementing additional training for supervising social workers in response.

New staff to the agency receive a clear induction that is specific to their role. Staff report that they are well supported by managers, with regular reflective supervision and appraisals. The senior management team is available to all staff, and the operations director has stepped in to supervise staff in the absence of a registered manager. This consistency has ensured minimal disruption during the recent management change.

None of the supervising social workers have received training to support good practice in supervising foster carers. This means that staff are without some of the skills required for their role. The acting manager has identified training to address this gap.

During the inspection, a situation was identified that a member of staff was being line managed by a member of their immediate family. This raised concerns regarding transparency and management of whistleblowing. This situation was reviewed and changed during the inspection. However, the agency's policy does not clearly define what arrangements are to be made in the event of such a conflict of interest.

Recruitment of staff, foster carers and panel members is, overall, good. However, managers have chosen to allow the acting manager to start work pending all recruitment checks coming back. There is no record of this decision or the reason for delay.

## **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:** 1233309

**Registered provider:** Fusion Fostering Limited

**Registered provider address:** Old Mill, Maltravers House, Petters Way, Yeovil  
BA20 1SH

**Responsible individual:** Gary Dawkins

**Registered manager:** Post Vacant

**Telephone number:** 01543 404760

**Email address:** westmidlands@fusion fostering.co.uk

## **Inspector**

Tracey Coglan Greig, social care inspector



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