

Fusion Fostering East 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 privately owned fostering agency was registered in August 2017. Before this date, the service was incorporated in another registration within the same organisation. The agency supports foster carers across a wide geographical area which includes East Yorkshire and the East Midlands.

The placements provided include short-term, long-term, emergency and parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, the agency cared for 29 children living in 23 fostering households.

The manager is registered with Ofsted and holds a suitable management qualification.

Inspection dates: 23 to 27 July 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children, taking into account **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers 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: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children receive consistent and stable care from motivated foster carers.
- Children feel part of their foster carer's family.
- Foster carers work hard to support children's health and education.
- Foster carers feel well supported by the agency.
- The agency works well with placing authorities.
- Children are actively involved in developing the service.
- Supervising social workers recognise and reward children's achievements.
- Children are supported to maintain relationships with their wider family.
- Strong recruitment processes help to ensure that the staff and foster carers are suitable to work with children.
- The registered manager is passionate about the service and is committed to improving children's lives.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Insufficient attention by the agency to the matching of a few children has meant that some foster carers have not been adequately skilled to respond to risk.
- A few foster carers do not have the skills to meet the needs of children with more complex needs.
- When children live alongside other children, the assessments completed by the agency do not provide sufficient detail on children's history and risk to help to inform decisions.
- Managers do not ensure that risk assessments and safer caring policies are kept updated.
- Following an investigation into an allegation, the manager has not completed a review of a foster carer's suitability to continue to be approved, in line with the national minimum standards.
- Weak oversight of staff training by managers means that they do not have a good understanding about the training completed by supervising social workers.

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 person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed is safeguarded at all times. (Regulation 11(a)) | 31/08/2018 |
| <p>The fostering service must prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>The fostering service must take all reasonable steps to ensure that no child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable. (Regulation 13(1), (2)(b))</p> | 28/09/2018 |
| The fostering service 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)) | 26/10/2018 |
| The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21(4)(a)) | 26/10/2018 |

Recommendations

- 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 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 as soon as possible after an investigation into a foster carer is concluded, their approval as suitable to foster is reviewed. There is a clear policy framework which outlines the circumstances in which a foster carer should be removed as one of the foster service provider's approved foster carers, in the interests of the safety or welfare of children. This is available to foster carers. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 45, paragraph 22.8)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children: good

Children benefit from consistent and stable care from highly motivated foster carers who work hard to help children to achieve good outcomes. One social worker told the inspector that: 'Since being placed with her new foster carer the child's emotional stability has improved, her ability to make and sustain relationships has also improved, she now displays less challenging behaviour and she is happier.'

Foster carers understand and are responsive to the health needs of children. For example, within days of one child's placement starting their foster carer had identified that the child had undiagnosed health needs. As a result of the foster carer's vigilance, the child was able to receive the required medical attention that they needed.

Children are well supported in their education. For example, the agency and foster carers work closely with schools. Because of this partnership, children increase their school attendance and begin to do better in school. For instance, because of one foster carer's help one child has made considerable improvement in their reading and writing. The child's confidence has improved so much that they now love reading their favourite books.

Children are supported to experience a range of social opportunities with their foster carers. Consequently, children attend various after-school clubs, learn to play musical instruments, can participate in holidays with their foster carers, and are supported to make and sustain friendships. As a result of these various opportunities, children feel part of their foster family and grow in confidence.

Supervising social workers recognise and reward children's achievements. This includes each child receiving a card and gift to show how much their supervising social worker is proud of their achievements. This child-centred approach helps children to understand the progress that they are making and to know that their success matters.

Children are supported to maintain relationships with their wider family. One placing social worker told the inspector: 'The foster carer has empathy for the parent as well as for the child, and understands the parent's difficulties in seeing their child happy in another household.' This sensitive approach gives children confidence that they can explore these relationships and gives them a greater understanding of their history.

Children are actively involved in helping the foster agency to improve. For example, children have been involved in preparing questions for panel members to ask foster carers when considering their reviews. Another example is the children's involvement in developing the agency's new children's guides. As a result of their engagement there are now two formats of the guide, one of which is animated.

The agency has recently introduced a new information technology system which includes tools to support managers and supervising social workers to track children's progress. This is still in the early stages of implementation, therefore the impact of this new system is not yet clear.

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

Sometimes social workers do not give sufficient attention to the matching of children to their new foster carers. Matching does not always consider how foster carers will meet the individual needs of each child. Furthermore, the training for foster carers is not always sufficiently matched to children's complex needs. These weaknesses leave foster carers ill prepared to manage the risks posed to children through self-harm or from social media.

When children live alongside other children, the assessment by the agency is not always sufficiently detailed to reflect the needs of all the children concerned. In one case, this weakness resulted in the disruption of four children's placements.

Managers do not ensure that risk assessments and safer caring policies are accurate and kept up to date to reflect the incidents that have taken place. For example, the risk assessment for one child was not updated to reflect an incident of self-harm. This leaves foster carers without the up-to-date information to manage children's additional vulnerabilities.

Only a few foster carers have undertaken training to help them to develop their understanding of child sexual exploitation, being missing from care, online safety and self-harm. This leaves foster carers and children vulnerable to harm.

In one situation, a foster carer implemented in their home a method of behaviour management (CCTV) which was outside of the agency's policy and without consultation with the placing authority or the agency. Despite this being later identified by the registered manager, no immediate action was taken. This resulted in children being subjected to excessive monitoring within a family home.

There has been one allegation in the past year. This was appropriately managed and safeguarding procedures were followed. However, the foster carer's approval as suitable to foster was not reviewed following the completion of the investigation. This failure to follow the national minimum standards has resulted in a missed opportunity for both the foster carers and the agency to learn from the incident.

Managers' strong oversight of safer recruitment processes for staff, foster carers and panel members means that people working with children are subjected to a high level of scrutiny.

Supervising social workers routinely conduct safety checks of foster carers' homes. This helps to keep children safe.

Incidents of children going missing from home are rare. Foster carers quickly report

children who have gone missing and search the community to help to find them. This proactive approach means that when children do go missing from home it is for a short period of time.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: 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 registered manager is passionate about the service and is committed to supporting the supervising social workers, foster carers and all children.

Staff told the inspector that they are supported by the registered manager and that she is readily available to them. This is reinforced through regular supervision and appraisal of the staff team. One supervising social worker told the inspector that the registered manager 'keeps me safe but allows me to be creative.' This allows staff to be innovative in their approach to supporting children. However, the registered manager has not had sufficient oversight of the training undertaken by staff. This has resulted in some staff not gaining all the training essential to support them in their role. For example, one social worker had not yet received training in completing a Form F assessment or managing allegations, despite having undertaken these areas of work.

Foster carers receive regular supervision from suitably qualified staff. One foster carer told the inspector, 'We feel our views and the views of the children are always taken into account.'

The fostering panel considers matters from two regions within the organisation. The makeup of the panel is suitably diverse and includes members who have previously been children looked after. The panel operates a quality assurance function, reporting to the registered manager after each meeting on the standard of information received. This supports the registered manager to improve standards.

On two occasions, the information presented to panel regarding a fostering household has been incorrect. In particular, increases in carer's approval over the usual fostering limit were incorrectly reported to be for respite care only. This prevented the panel from making a recommendation based on clear and accurate information.

The registered manager has not ensured that there is appropriate oversight of the assessment process that is presented to the panel within eight months of a foster carer's application. The registered manager is aware of this and has identified it as an area of learning.

The statement of purpose is organisation-wide and as a result, does not accurately reflect the specific services that are available in the region. The registered manager

took immediate action to address this during the inspection, ensuring that stakeholders receive accurate information about the service operated.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children. They watched how professional staff work with children and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children 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 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: 1255753

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Inspector

Tracey Cogan Greig, social care inspector



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