

ISP Rainham

Integrated Services Programme, The Old Church, High Street, Rainham, Gillingham
ME8 8AY

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

ISP is an independent fostering agency run by Partnerships in Childcare Services Ltd. ISP has centres in Kent, Buckinghamshire, Sussex and London. ISP Rainham was registered with Ofsted in September 2017. The agency provides family-based childcare services for children referred by local authorities. This includes parent and child foster placements.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 51 approved fostering households and 49 children placed with foster carers.

Inspection dates: 22 to 26 October 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
How well children and young people 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: this is the agency's 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:

- The registered manager is a strong and reflective leader who implements change in order to improve the quality of the service.
- The fostering panel and agency decision-maker provide effective challenge in order to drive up standards.
- Quality of care monitoring systems are becoming more effective and are enabling the registered manager to maintain oversight of standards of care and progress being made by children and young people.
- The majority of children and young people build positive, trusting relationships with their foster carers and make good progress across most aspects of their lives.
- Children and young people's educational needs are prioritised from the outset of their placement.
- There is a system in place for monitoring children's and young people's mental health and emotional well-being and they have prompt access to therapeutic support.
- The agency advocates strongly for children and young people when there are concerns that external agencies are not responding to their needs.
- The system for responding to complaints and allegations made against foster carers is robust.
- Effective systems for recruiting staff and foster carers minimise the potential for unsuitable adults gaining access to vulnerable children and young people.
- Foster carers feel valued and well supported by managers and staff.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Safeguarding and child protection practice is not strong, particularly in relation to the assessment and management of risk.
- Some foster carers need to be supported to develop greater skills and knowledge so that they can meet the complex needs of vulnerable children and young people.
- The model of care used is not consistently implemented across all foster placements.

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>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. (Regulation 11 (a))</p> <p>Specifically, ensure that individual risk assessments and safety plans are kept up to date and contain all relevant information and strategies for keeping children safe, and that prompt action is taken when information is received that indicates a child could be at risk of harm.</p>	07/12/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which—</p> <p>is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for—</p> <p>written records to be kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect, and of the action taken in response. (Regulation 12 (3)(d))</p>	07/12/2018
<p>The fostering service provider 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 provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that—</p> <p>no child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable.</p>	07/12/2018

<p>The fostering service must prepare and implement a policy, which is agreed with the local police, setting out—</p> <p>the procedure to be followed when a child is missing from a foster parent’s home without permission. (Regulation 13 (2)(b)(3)(b))</p> <p>Specifically, ensure that any sanctions imposed by foster carers are evaluated for effectiveness and that the missing child policy and risk assessment is followed when a child is reported missing to the police.</p>	
<p>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))</p> <p>Specifically, ensure that foster carers complete training in relation to the specific needs of any child they are caring for, in a timely way.</p>	07/12/2018

Recommendations

- Foster carers meet children’s individual needs as set out in the child’s placement plan as part of the wider family context. (‘Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2.3’)

Specifically, ensure that the agency’s plans for caring for children reflect the recommendations made in specialist assessments, include the rationale and arrangements for respite care and specify how known vulnerabilities, such as bullying, will be addressed.
- Children’s physical, emotional and social development needs are promoted. (‘Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 6.1’)

Specifically, ensure that there is a planned response to any concerns that a child may be misusing substances or alcohol.
- 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’)

Specifically, ensure that the matching process takes into account the needs of all children living at the foster home and the impact the new admission is likely to have.
- Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified

social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. The frequency of meetings for short break foster carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided. Foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 21.8')

Specifically, ensure that the regularity of supervision meetings is sufficient to meet the requirements of this standard.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The majority of children and young people placed with the agency's foster carers experience increased levels of security and stability. This is attributable to the commitment and skills of foster carers who provide an environment in which vulnerable children and young people can begin to build trusting relationships. The number of unplanned endings to foster placements is relatively low. The registered manager is able to account for these and reflect on factors contributing to the breakdown. Disruption meetings to consider the underlying causes of the breakdown do not always take place and the registered manager acknowledges this is a missed opportunity for learning and developing practice.

Children and young people are encouraged to express their views on how they are being cared for, by completing surveys and through conversations with staff. This includes their views on respite care arrangements, although these have not always been recorded. Many children and young people regularly visit the agency's office to engage in activities or attend therapy and this provides further opportunities for them to get to know members of staff and develop the confidence to report anything they may be concerned about.

There is a coordinated approach to ensuring that children and young people are provided with education in a setting that best meets their individual needs. A representative from the agency's education team attends the placement planning meeting when a child or young person is first placed with foster carers, to ensure that educational needs are prioritised from the outset. This approach has resulted in many children and young people making better than anticipated educational progress and some have gone on to higher education or vocational courses where they have excelled.

Children and young people are able to access a range of activities, offering new experiences and providing them with opportunities to develop their individual interests and skills. One young person spoke enthusiastically about becoming a scout and reflected on how this was helping him to prepare for his chosen career. Group activities for children and young people are also arranged and supervised by agency staff. Efforts are currently being made to increase the number of children attending the 'kids club' provided by the agency.

The health and well-being of children and young people are prioritised. Staff and children work together to complete a health and well-being questionnaire. This stimulates conversation regarding the child or young person's sense of well-being and helps identify any emerging concerns the child or young person may have regarding their physical health and social and emotional development. All children and young people have access to individual therapeutic provision. The therapeutic team is also able to provide advice and guidance to foster carers on how the child or young person's mental health and emotional well-being can be promoted. Many foster carers spoken with during this inspection spoke of the benefits of being able

to consult a therapist when difficulties emerge.

Despite this overall positive approach to promoting good physical and mental health, there has not always been a structured, well-planned approach to supporting young people who may be experimenting with illegal substances.

The agency is in the process of implementing a recognised model of care which maximises the potential for children and young people to develop secure attachments with their foster carers. Training on the model is being delivered to foster carers but the approach is not yet fully embedded in practice.

Children and young people's contact with their birth families is well planned and sensitively supervised when appropriate to do so. Placing authority social workers are consulted regarding contact arrangements and are kept fully informed of any issues arising from contact visits. The agency provides a well-equipped, child-friendly venue for contact meetings to take place.

The foster carers spoken with during this inspection feel valued and well supported by staff. They have a positive approach to fostering and clearly have the children's and young people's best interests at heart. Those who are relatively new to fostering said that the assessment process had been demanding, but they had felt supported throughout. Foster carers said they were provided with all the information they needed as the assessment and approval process moved forward.

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

The response to child protection concerns is not consistently strong, proactive or completed in a timely manner. Although examples of good practice were identified, shortfalls in the standard of practice mean that risks are not always identified promptly, and this sometimes leaves children and young people at risk of harm for longer than necessary.

Leaders and managers are aware that the quality of individual risk assessments has sometimes been poor, and they are taking action to address this. However, until improvements in the assessment and management of risk become embedded in practice, the potential for children and young people to come to harm will not be minimised. Examples were found where no risk assessment had been completed regarding vulnerable children being unsupervised at an event or activity. In one case, no written risk assessment was completed before a child with known unsafe behaviours was placed for overnight respite care where other children were resident.

The strategies for managing risks are underdeveloped in many cases. A child sexual exploitation risk assessment, reviewed at this inspection, contained only two management strategies and these failed to address many aspects of the young person's behaviour which were known to put her at risk. There is an over-reliance on supervising children and young people's access to the internet as a strategy for ensuring that they do not become exploited online. There is insufficient

consideration in the risk assessments in regard to educating children and young people about the risks they may face when accessing the internet.

There is a clear behaviour management policy which complements the therapeutic model of care favoured by the agency. However, the implementation of the policy by foster carers is not always monitored effectively. One example was found where the sanctions being imposed by the foster carers for unacceptable behaviour had not been evaluated. Continued use of the sanctions became a significant factor in the deteriorating relationship between the young person and the foster carers.

There is also a detailed policy for responding to children and young people who go missing from care. The inspectors identified one occasion when the policy was not fully implemented and a significant amount of time had passed before the vulnerable young person was reported missing to the police. The situation was aggravated by the fact that no risk assessment had been completed regarding the potential for the young person to go missing, and so the foster carers had no guidelines to follow which were specific to the young person.

There has been a significant improvement in recent weeks as to how child protection matters are recorded. Prior to this, many records did not provide a clear audit trail of the child protection incident, the reporting and decision-making process or a record of the actions taken. Consequently, it is not always possible to judge how effectively the child or young person was protected from harm after the child protection matter had come to light. It is imperative that the new recording process becomes embedded in practice.

Insufficient priority has been given to ensuring that foster carers have completed training specific to the safeguarding needs of the children and young people they are caring for. This has resulted in some foster carers looking after children who have complex needs, such as sexually harmful behaviour or vulnerability to sexual exploitation, without having completed the training that would enable them to support these children and young people more effectively.

The majority of children and young people develop secure, trusting relationships with their foster carers and this is a strong protective factor. Most children and young people develop the confidence to share their worries and concerns with their foster carers, who respond appropriately and share relevant information with safeguarding professionals.

The registered manager ensures there is a coordinated and effective response to complaints. This includes allegations made against foster carers. Consultation with the designated officer in the local authority is initiated early when an allegation is made and placing authority social workers are kept fully informed of any concerns. The fostering panel provides effective scrutiny of the allegation investigation process and it is proactive in making recommendations where opportunities for improving practice are identified.

Effective systems are in place to minimise the potential for unsuitable adults to become employed by the agency. The registered manager has conducted thorough

assessments in response to any questions regarding an applicant's suitability. The process for recruiting foster carers is equally thorough. There is an ongoing commitment to continuously improve the standard of foster carer assessments, with a particular emphasis on ensuring critical analysis of the information being gathered.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is a qualified social worker and she holds the level 5 diploma in leadership and management. She has gained significant experience working in foster care agencies. The registered manager is an effective leader who is committed to providing a high-quality service for vulnerable children and young people. In recent weeks, she has reflected on the inadequate inspection judgement given at another of the organisation's foster care agencies and has used this learning to initiate significant changes to practice and procedures at this registration. These changes are having a positive impact on the quality of care being provided.

The agency was registered in September 2017. Since this time, the registered manager has effectively managed a series of complex staffing and personnel issues. She has taken a balanced approach and intervened effectively to address staff performance issues and staff shortages, adhering to the organisational policies and procedures. The agency is now fully staffed, and the team is working collaboratively. The team members feel well supported by the registered manager and benefit from receiving regular, good-quality supervision. The needs of children and young people and support for foster carers feature prominently in staff supervision records, and there is a clear audit trail of management decision-making.

The supervision provided to foster carers has not always been regular, and on occasions there have been gaps of between two and three months between formal supervisions. In one case, this resulted in significant disruption in a fostering household not being identified at an early stage. The registered manager has recognised that the current arrangement for providing formal supervision to foster carers every eight weeks is not effective, and she is making arrangements to increase the frequency of supervision.

The registered manager was able to give a clear account of the monitoring activities she undertakes, and how the information obtained is used to evaluate children's and young people's progress and the quality of care being provided. Through this process, and her learning from Ofsted inspections at other fostering agencies within the organisation, she had identified many of the shortfalls referred to in the help and protection section of this report. There is a clear plan for improving this area of practice and the registered manager has demonstrated that she has the skills and knowledge to drive this forward.

The registered manager and the supervising social workers spoken with during this inspection demonstrated a thorough understanding of the needs of children and young people placed with the agency. This knowledge and understanding is not always reflected in the plans pertaining to the children's and young people's care. For example, some plans do not demonstrate how recommendations made in

specialist assessments are being implemented. Some children's and young people's plans do not provide details on how specific behaviours, such as bullying, will be addressed. Although there are arrangements for all children and young people to receive respite care, their plans do not reflect the rationale or benefits underpinning the arrangement.

There is recognition from managers at all levels that foster carer training has not been sufficiently prioritised. This relates to mandatory training being completed on time and providing bespoke training to foster carers to ensure that they can meet the needs of individual children and young people. Action is being taken to address this situation. Child protection training is now being delivered prior to prospective foster carers being approved. The fostering panel is taking a proactive approach to ensuring that foster carers complete or renew their training in a timely way.

Collectively, members of the fostering panel have a diverse range of knowledge, skills and experience. The panel is efficiently led and provides a high level of scrutiny and professional curiosity during the approval and review process. The agency decision-maker demonstrates clear insight into the culture of the agency and identifies barriers that could inhibit the professional development of foster carers and staff. There is a shared understanding between the registered manager and agency decision maker on how to ensure continuous improvement across the services provided by the agency.

This commitment to ensuring continuous improvement is also demonstrated in work being undertaken by the agency's fostering services manager. A review of foster carer resignations occurring within two years of approval and complaints against foster carers is being undertaken. Further analysis will seek to establish whether any of the emerging issues could have been anticipated during the foster carer assessment process.

Improvements have been made to the process for matching children and young people with foster carers, particularly in relation to respite care arrangements. Despite this, the process does not yet ensure that sufficient consideration is given to the needs of the children already living at the foster home, and the likely impact the child or young person moving in will have on their progress and development.

Staff maintain positive working relationships with placing authority social workers and other professionals. There has been renewed emphasis on ensuring that professionals representing each discipline within the agency are involved at the initial planning stage when a child or young person is placed with foster carers. Strong representation has been made by members of the therapy team when placing authorities are perceived not to have met their responsibilities and prioritised the needs of children and young people.

The registered manager has a clear understanding of the demand for specific types of foster placements and is committed to growing the service in order to meet the requirements of placing authorities. Foster carers are recruited from a range of different backgrounds and reflect the diversity of the local community.

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: 1263501

Registered provider: ISP

Registered provider address: Partnerships In Childcare Services Ltd, Wavendon Tower, Ortensia Drive, Wavendon, Milton Keynes MK17 8LX

Responsible individual: Tracy Livesey

Registered manager: Naomi Fox

Telephone number: 01634 376 900

Inspectors

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