

# Nurture Fostering Ltd

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The Old Fire Station, 340 Lewisham High Street, London SE13 6LE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency has been registered with Ofsted since December 2017. This is the agency's first Ofsted inspection. The fostering agency aims to provide a range of placements for children on a planned or emergency basis for a short and long-term duration, and for respite care. The agency also offers parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, nine fostering households provided care for seven children.

**Inspection dates:** 25 February to 1 March 2019

**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

requires improvement to be good

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:** n/a

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** n/a

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** n/a

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- Important documents, including the statement of purpose and the children's guide, are not up to date or used effectively.
- Leaders and managers have failed to ensure that all relevant information pertaining to the needs and safety of children is obtained prior to matching them with foster carers.
- Leaders and managers do not have systems or processes in place to monitor the progress and experiences of children.
- The assessment and management of risk is weak.
- Quality assurance is weak.
- Managers fail to notify Ofsted of all serious events or concerns as required.
- Some aspects of monitoring of the service are weak. This includes monitoring children's education.
- Inconsistencies in record-keeping do not support robust monitoring.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- The senior management team is realistic in its self-evaluation and is taking actions to address the weaknesses.
- Some children are making good progress and have positive experiences.
- The registered person demonstrates a commitment to developing more effective quality assurance systems.
- A positive working relationship is being developed with local authorities' commissioners.
- The fostering panel is robust and effective in its role.

## 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 fostering service provider must—</p> <p>keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide;</p> <p>notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days, and;</p> <p>if the children's guide is revised, supply a copy to each foster parent approved by the fostering service provider, and each child placed by them (subject to the child's age and understanding). (Regulation 4(a)(b)(c))</p>	20/05/2019
<p>The fostering service provider must promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>In particular, the fostering service provider must—</p> <p>Implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 16(1)(2)(a))</p>	20/05/2019
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and;</p> <p>improve the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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)(a)(b)(2)(3))</p>	20/05/2019

## Recommendations

- The fostering service must ensure that children can take up issues in the most appropriate way with support, without fear that this will result in any adverse consequences. (National Minimum Standards 1.6)

In particular, ensure that the complaints system is easily accessible to children and young people.

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

In particular, achieving good practice and consistency in relation to behaviour support plans which provide strategies to promote positive behaviour.

- Children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. (National Minimum Standards 4.1)

In particular, achieving consistency of good practice in relation to written risk management (individual children's safe care) plans.

- Ensure that foster carers are trained in appropriate safer care skills. (National Minimum Standards 4.6)

In particular, ensure that safer care plans are devised which meet the specific needs of each individual child, including care for children who have been abused.

- Ensure that telephone enquires are made to each referee to verify written references. (National Minimum Standards 19.1)

- The registered person has a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do when a notifiable event arises at the weekend. (National Minimum Standards 29.1)

In particular, this relates to implementing an effective system for sending appropriate and good-quality notifications to Ofsted consistently.

## Inspection judgements

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

The fostering service has had a variable start in meeting the placement needs of children. Some children in placement have transferred into the service with their existing foster carers.

The service provides an adequate quality of care and the outcomes for some children are very positive. Children have developed good attachments with their foster families and have a strong sense of belonging. Some children develop improved levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. However, for other children, ineffective monitoring systems make it difficult for the agency to evidence the progress made by children from their starting points.

In the cases reviewed by the inspector, it was evident that many children had developed positive relationships with their carers. Independent reviewing officers often commented within the agency's documents on the quality of attachments that children quickly build with their foster families. A social worker commented, 'X (child) in a short time is doing well. The foster carer has developed a routine which the child complies with. Because of this, he is happier in school and achieving.'

Children benefit from stable placements. Practice has been good in relation to matching children with foster carers who have the experience and knowledge to meet the children's cultural and day-to-day needs. However, foster carers are not always provided with written information of all the care needs of individual children. Some foster carers said that they were unaware of the long-term plans for the children. Furthermore, managers have not been effective in challenging placing authorities to ensure that such plans are in place.

Children appear happy, relaxed and at ease with their foster carers. Foster carers have the skills to enable children to feel part of their family. They engage children in day-to-day routines and help them with practical tasks. Foster carers provide a range of opportunities for children to practise their skills for independence.

Transitions are managed in a sensitive way, with foster carers playing a significant role in family finding to ensure that the assessed needs of the child are fully met. Foster carers demonstrated a strong sense of advocacy on behalf of children.

The progress that children make in areas such as education and health is largely positive, despite foster carers being unable to evidence the appropriate paperwork. For example, a child is currently undertaking A levels and has a plan in place for university study. Foster carers value healthy lifestyles and promote exercise and health diets.

Children are able to enjoy a range of appropriate activities that promote the development of their confidence, social skills and social relationships. These activities include youth clubs, football and dance.

Children are supported to maintain family ties, and this helps them to feel pride in their identity. Foster carers and the agency support children to develop appropriate

relationships and have contact with significant people in their lives.

Not all of the children were aware of how to make a complaint if they are unhappy about their care. The complaints system is not easily accessible. The children's guide advises them to telephone or email the office if they wish to complain. The registered manager confirmed that the children's guide is currently being updated. Despite this shortfall, the staff are committed to helping children to access services that will advocate for them.

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

The fostering service considers safeguarding as a priority for all placements and holds this as central to its functioning and operation. The agency operates a culture of transparency and trust. However, procedures and systems are not in place to assist in keeping children safe.

Risk assessments and safe caring plans are not fully in place. Risk assessments showed a lack of information on known and potential risks and did not consistently include clear actions or strategies for foster carers to take. In addition, staff do not routinely evidence how they assess and manage risk. As a result, the fostering service fails to provide carers with robust risk assessments to help them care for children.

Similarly, the 'safe care policy', developed between the supervising social worker and foster carers, is not individualised to meet the specific needs of each child and does not contain effective measures to prevent children from harming others.

Some foster carers have the skills to help children maintain appropriate boundaries, and over time this assists children to reduce their levels of challenging behaviour. There have been no concerns regarding the use of physical restraint.

Agency staff have not consistently ensured that they are provided with the information necessary to keep children safe. For example, the inspector identified six cases where copies of children's childcare and protection plans had not been obtained.

Assessments of foster carers are good and have a clear focus on safeguarding. Foster carers spoken to during the inspection were unanimous in their praise for the assessment and preparation phase of their fostering career. They said that they felt well supported during their induction and benefited from relevant training. This includes training focused on keeping children safe, including recognition of signs and symptoms of the exploitation of children.

The agency's fostering panel is growing in strength and is playing an effective role in ensuring that unsuitable applicants are not approved as foster carers. The panel holds a quality assurance mechanism for the fostering service. The fostering panel has access to relevant policies, procedures and protocols to assist its function.

Foster carers understand and follow the procedures in the event of children going missing. Children are given advice and guidance on how to stay safe, and this includes internet safety.

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

The registered manager is new in post and was registered with Ofsted in February 2019. She is a qualified social worker and is in the process of completing a level 5 diploma in leadership and management.

Leaders and managers are yet to devise or maintain effective systems and processes that provide enough overview of the service's function and operation. Managers have also failed to implement a robust internal quality assurance review process. Additionally, shortfalls exist in some aspects of record-keeping and the quality of notifications that are sent to Ofsted.

Systems are being developed to monitor the progress that children make, although currently the strongest evidence of progress available to the inspector was the minutes from children looked after review meetings. These minutes indicate that some children make progress across many aspects of their lives.

The agency has a realistic business development plan, including an effective strategy to attract and secure a larger pool of foster carers. This is important if the service is to meet its aims to provide foster care placements that meet the diverse needs of children looked after.

Leaders and managers have not consistently ensured that the care plans for children meet their identified needs. In one case, no evidence could be found that the agency's plan for the child contained specific measures to ensure that the child received appropriate interventions to address their harmful behaviours. Although staff build positive working relationships with placing authority social workers, the effectiveness of these relationships has not always been monitored or identified when the partnership is failing to ensure the well-being of children.

Staff are suitably qualified and experienced to undertake their specific roles. Staff receive regular supervision which enables them to reflect on their practice and professional development needs. The agency provides an appropriate training programme for staff, carers and panel members relevant to the needs of children. This is generally well received.

The registered manager feels well supported and said that the clinical supervision she receives from an independent professional is helping her settle into her new role. A collaborative working relationship has developed between the registered manager and the supervising social workers. However, their close working relationship has meant that formalised team meetings have not always been prioritised.

The foster carers spoken to during this inspection expressed the view that the support that they received is of good quality and they emphasised that their supervision is regular and helpful.

To date, there have been no allegations made against any foster carer. Foster carers receive clear and detailed guidance about the management of allegations. This information includes both the role and responsibilities of staff in the event of an

allegation being made, and the level and nature of support that foster carers can expect.

Children are kept safe because of the fostering agency's good recruitment and vetting practices. The agency has procedures in place that ensure the careful selection and vetting of staff, foster carers and those on the agency's central list. The fostering service's personnel files for these individuals evidence that full vetting checks are carried out as required by the regulations. However, the agency does not consistently contact referees to verify written references received as required.

## **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:** 1265010

**Registered provider:** Nurture Fostering Ltd

**Registered provider address:** Meriden Hall, Main Road, Meriden, Coventry, Warks  
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**Responsible individual:** Jillian Valenti

**Registered manager:** Jennifer Walker

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## **Inspector**

Juanita Mayers, social care inspector



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