

Diversity Foster Care Ltd

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26 Havelock Walk, Forest Hill, London SE23 3HG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Diversity is a small privately owned independent fostering agency. It has been operational for 18 months and this is its first inspection. Its focus is on providing placements for black and ethnic minority children, although the agency also places children from all backgrounds. It offers short-term, long-term, emergency and parent and child placements. It currently has four fostering households and three children in placement.

Inspection dates: 18 to 22 March 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: n/a

Overall judgement at last inspection: n/a

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children receive good individual care and flourish at this agency.
- Foster carers receive bespoke training to support them to care for children.
- The leaders and managers have a clear vision about how they want to develop the agency.
- The foster carers appreciate the high level of support offered from the agency, which includes a designated worker for children.
- Support groups offer an element of training which helps foster carers to develop and achieve their personal development plans.
- The agency has a focus on safeguarding and offers good support and guidance to help keep children safe.
- The agency's preparation and training of foster carers offers a secure base model, which helps foster carers to understand complex behaviours better.
- Commissioners value the agency, describing a fantastic and unique approach to caring.
- The agency has a diverse and independent panel that brings a wealth of experience to panel meetings.
- Children are encouraged to express their wishes and feelings and these views are used in the recruitment and development of the staff team.
- The agency has rigorous recruitment practices which is helping to prevent unsafe people from working with children.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The agency's review of the quality of care does not yet take full account of the feedback from children, parents and professionals.
- The agency has not always notified Ofsted of serious incidents in a timely way.
- The agency is in the process of developing the foster carer reviewing process to ensure that reports contain all the required information and that outside feedback from social workers informs the process.
- The children's guide is not yet accessible enough for younger children or those children who have learning difficulties.
- The safeguarding policy does not yet include the risk to children who self-harm or who are at risk of suicide. Furthermore, the policy is not yet shared with the local safeguarding children's board and the designated officer for the local authority.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Ensure there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 25.1)

Specifically, in relation to including the feedback from children, parents and professionals.

- Ensure 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 where a notifiable event arises at the weekend. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 29.1)

- Ensure the fostering service provider's child protection procedures are submitted for consideration and comment to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) and to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for Child Protection. They are consistent with the local policies and procedures agreed by the LSCB relevant to the geographical area where the foster carer lives. Any conflicts between locally agreed procedures and those of other placing authorities are discussed and resolved as far as possible. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 22.4)

Specifically, the provider must update the policy to include risk of self-harm and suicide and share the policy as above.

- Ensure that reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their carers' ongoing suitability to foster. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 13.8)

Specifically, in relation to ensuring that placing social workers' views are sought.

- Ensure that where a child requires it, the guide is available, where appropriate, through suitable alternative methods of communications, e.g. Makaton, pictures, tape recording, translation to another language. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 16.6)

Specifically, in relation to making the children's guide more accessible to younger children.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency provides good individualised care and support to the children it looks after. Children, foster carers and social workers spoken to all gave positive feedback. A placing social worker said, 'They have been fantastic, consistent, shared information and gone over and beyond to deliver and work together.'

Children experience positive relationships which are warm and caring. Wider relationships with professionals are open, honest and effective. The agency provides good advocacy on behalf of its foster carers and, ultimately, its children. These good working relationships allow the agency to challenge other professionals in a positive way.

The agency uses referral information about children's needs and experiences to match them to suitable foster carers. Children are given information about the agency and, where possible, are supported to have a visit prior to moving in with their foster carers. The agency is currently developing foster carer profiles which will be shared with children when potential placements are being considered. When children have needed to move placements, this has been done in a planned way where possible.

All children are on roll in school and are making progress. Where children have required additional support or help, this has been quickly arranged for them. Children are making good and, in some cases, exceptional progress from their starting points. They have good experiences on a day-to-day basis and are offered many opportunities, such as school trips, activities and extracurricular clubs and events.

The agency's children's worker has helped to ensure that children's views are heard and that children enjoy activities. The agency helps children to understand their entitlements by providing an informative guide. However, this guide is not yet easily accessible for younger children or children with learning difficulties. The agency has a newsletter for children, and children are asked to contribute any pictures, letters or ideas that they wish to be included. Some of the views of children, shared with the agency's 'child development and support worker', have been used in the recruitment of new staff for the agency.

Where children live outside their home authority, the agency has ensured that every support is available. This has included regular visits to the foster home and local support and training for foster carers.

Carers say that the agency is very welcoming and inclusive in its approach to them when they enquire about fostering. The preparation and assessment of foster parents are consistently thorough. The training has an emphasis on a 'secure based model', helping prospective foster carers to think about attachments and relationship-based approaches. Foster carers said that they felt well prepared for the task of fostering. This means that children benefit from being placed in foster homes that understand the impact of the children's previous experiences.

The agency is in its early stages of operating and is beginning to complete foster carers' annual reviews. In one case, the review of foster carers was not as detailed as it should be. In this case, the quality assurance mechanism was effective in picking up the shortfalls. The review process is an area for ongoing development.

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

The agency works hard to assess risks and to put plans in place to reduce risks for children. Risk assessment and management of risk begin before children move into their foster homes and are continually revisited and revised. The agency requests relevant referral information and speaks directly to social workers or previous carers to ensure that the agency understands children's needs. This information is then used to complete an assessment which matches the child's needs with the ability/skills of the foster carers.

The agency also undertakes risk assessments for the activities and events it organises. The agency takes a healthy approach to managing risk and is not overly risk averse, for example supporting children to be as independent as possible while keeping risks to a minimum.

Foster carers are expected to attend the 'skills to foster' training, 'parent and child training' and the 'secure base model' training prior to becoming foster parents. Once foster carers are approved, there is an expectation that they will continue with ongoing training as they work through their training, support and developmental standards (TSDS) within their first year of approval. In addition to mandatory training, other more individualised training to support their care of children is also on offer.

The agency has a comprehensive safeguarding policy which all foster carers have access to via an electronic database system. Safeguarding of children is introduced early in the assessment process and foster carers are continuously revising their training through TSDS, in supervision and by attending training courses. The key areas of child protection are included, as are more thematic safeguarding issues.

The agency has a separate policy for responding to children who go missing or run away from care. Children who have a known history of going missing have an additional risk assessment completed prior to their placement beginning which highlights how foster carers should respond and minimise the risk. The agency's safeguarding policy does not yet have guidance or a policy about the risk of self-harm or the risk of suicide.

Foster carers are given good training, preparation and support to manage children's behaviours. There is a specific training for managing behaviours. Foster carers also receive effective supervision where they can talk through how to manage challenging behaviour.

New foster carers are offered additional support if needed and, when it has been necessary, the agency has advocated well to secure additional resources. The 'child development and support worker' also supports children and foster carers by providing respite for carers and someone additional for children to confide in when they are worried.

The agency is extremely careful in its recruitment of staff, foster carers and panel members. Essential and detailed checks are undertaken to ensure that inappropriate people do not gain access to working with vulnerable children.

The agency has brought in signed agreements with foster carers about internet safety to help reduce the risks to children of bullying, exploitation or grooming via social media.

Agency staff undertake at least one unannounced home visit to its carers, and staff write up all visits and supervisions with foster carers. This ensures that a careful record of all discussions is held, which adds an additional safeguard for vulnerable children.

Complaints and allegations have been dealt with appropriately and referred to the correct authority where required for investigation. Notifications have been made to Ofsted about serious incidents. However, on occasion the notification has not been submitted in a timely way.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers have worked hard to create their vision of a diverse fostering agency to look after and support children from all backgrounds, races and ethnicities. Their aim is to support and recruit more foster carers for children from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. Their ethos and vision for their service is to provide a high-quality service and help all children to achieve and realise their potential.

Leaders and managers give children the highest priority. They know the children that they are looking after well and are very involved in the work of the agency. This will change and become more of a challenge as the agency grows and develops and staffing numbers increase.

Leaders and managers have started to develop a tracking tool. These systems are in place to track children from their starting points throughout their placement and to understand progress for them, or to know when to advocate if children need further support.

There is good evidence of case file audits and collaborative working. This shows that early intervention is present to support foster carers and children to try and prevent placement disruptions. Generally, the children placed have complex needs and this has led to two placements being disrupted.

The agency is small and is growing slowly and steadily. This has allowed the agency to develop carefully, and by learning and developing from experience. The leaders and managers have been the key workers and have not had major supervisory responsibility for staff. They have been supervising foster carers, the child development and support worker, and overseeing the training and support of all at the agency.

Foster carers' personal development plans and panel members' appraisals have been completed in a timely manner. New staff who join the agency will have an induction and probationary period. The panel members have had relevant induction and

training.

Leaders and managers understand the agency's strengths and areas for development and are learning and developing things as they progress. They are willing to listen and to take on board feedback which is, in turn, helping their ongoing development and progress.

Leaders and managers are excellent advocates for children. They have sought out alternatives for children when they see a need and have been keen to empower and support children to get what they need and to have their voices heard.

Equality and diversity are instrumental in what this agency hopes to achieve. The agency gives close attention to ensuring that children have their diversity needs met and advocate strongly for their voices and views to be heard.

The fostering panel is diverse in terms of culture, gender, race and ethnicity. It also brings an excellent skills base and is providing an effective gatekeeping service and feedback role for the agency.

Leaders and managers complete a comprehensive quality of care review which is meeting regulations. However, it would be improved further by considering the views of interested others, including children, parents and other professionals. This will strengthen the agency, informed by other viewpoints as the agency progresses.

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

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Inspector

Christine Kennet, social care inspector



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