

ALL4U Fostering Ltd

ALL4U Fostering Ltd
Wood Farm, Burlings Lane, Knockholt, Sevenoaks TN14 7PF
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

ALL4U Fostering is a private limited company, closely associated with the Layberry Foundation, a registered charity. The agency has been registered with Ofsted since 11 June 2017.

The agency provides a range of placements for children and young people aged 0 to 18 years, including: respite, short-term, long-term, sibling, parent and child, asylum-seeking and disabled children.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 30 June 2017.

Inspection dates: 12 to 15 November 2018

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: this is the agency's first inspection

Overall judgement at last inspection: N/A

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- The process for matching children is weak. Children have been placed with foster carers who do not have the identified experience or training needed to meet children's specific needs.
- Risk assessments do not identify or evaluate risk to support carers to safeguard children effectively.
- Children's files do not contain the statutory documentation from the local authority to inform care plans and decision making.
- Children's plans do not provide clear guidance or strategies for managing behaviour.
- Monitoring arrangements are not effective. Data is incorrect or misleading. They do not identify areas of weakness to help managers drive improvements.
- The agency has adopted a standard approach to terms of approval in relation to age ranges. This is not good practice and does not reflect the stated child-focused ethos of the agency.
- The fostering panel does not always provide sufficient oversight, scrutiny and challenge.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- Children's day-to-day experiences are good. They have strong attachments with their foster carers and said that they feel safe.
- Children have made progress from their starting points.
- Foster carers spoke highly of the agency and feel supported and valued.
- Foster carers benefit from regular support groups that support good relationships.
- Managers have created a family-orientated service.
- The agency is very responsive to requests for more specific training to help foster carers to meet children's complex needs.

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—</p> <p>(a) the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster carers is safeguarded and promoted at all times.</p> <p>(11(a) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011)</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, that effective action is taken when children are known to be at risk of harm and that foster carers have the skills and knowledge to protect children from harm.</p>	31/01/2019
<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>(13(1) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011)</p> <p>Specifically, ensure that the agency's behaviour management policy is fully implemented in practice and that children's plans contain effective guidance and strategies for de-escalating challenging behaviour and minimising the potential for children to engage in unsafe behaviour.</p>	31/01/2019
<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.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster parents are familiar with, and act in accordance with the policies established in accordance with regulations (12(1) and 13(1) and (3).</p> <p>The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided</p>	31/01/2019

<p>with a copy of the most recent version of the child’s care plan provided to the fostering service under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (17(1)(2)(3) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011)</p>	
<p>The registered person must ensure that a written record is made of any complaint or representation, the action taken in response to it, and the outcome of the investigation.</p> <p>The registered person must ensure that— (a) children are enabled to make a complaint or representation. (18(4)(5)(a) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011)</p>	31/01/2019
<p>For the purpose of this regulation and regulation 24— (a) a person is not independent of the fostering service provider if— (iii) in the case of a fostering agency the person is employed by, or is a trustee of, that fostering agency. (23(10)(iii) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011)</p>	31/01/2019
<p>In considering what recommendation to make under paragraph (1), the fostering panel— (b) may request the fostering service provider to obtain any other relevant information or to provide such other assistance as the fostering panel considers necessary.</p> <p>The fostering panel must also— (b) oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider, and (c) give advice, and make recommendations, on such other matters or cases as the fostering service provider may refer to it. (25 (2)(b), (4)(b)(c) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011)</p>	31/01/2019
<p>The fostering service provider— may where X was approved as a foster carer by another fostering service provider and that approval has been terminated, and where X consents to the inspection, request inspection of the relevant records compiled by that other fostering service provider in relation to X under regulations 30 and 31. (26(2)(d) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011)</p>	31/01/2019

Recommendations

- Ensure that foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 4.2)
- Ensure that foster carers keep a written record of all medication, treatment and first aid given to children during their placement. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 6.11)
- Ensure that checks are carried out in line with regulation 26 and prospective foster carers understand why identity checks, relationship status and health checks, personal references and enquiries undertaken about them and why enhanced CRB checks are made on them and adult members of their household.

Prospective foster carers are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets the child's developmental needs.

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 provider's fostering team. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 13.5, 13.6 and 13.7)

- Ensure that 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.

Prior to the placement of each child, the foster carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information is provided in a clear, comprehensive written form and includes the support that will be available to the foster carer. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority any gaps in the information provided to them on the child or the child's family, which may hinder the foster carers in providing a safe caring environment that meets the child's needs and enables them to keep the child, other children in the fostering household and the foster carer him/herself safe. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 15.1 and 15.2)

Inspection judgements

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

The responsible individual has created a family-orientated service with a real sense of belonging. Foster carers feel supported by their supervising social workers and the agency. They benefit from continuous advice and guidance from managers and this enables foster carers to provide stable homes for children. Foster carers are creative in identifying and accessing training themselves using online resources. The agency supports carers to further their own learning. One foster carer described their supervising social worker as 'always being available even when off duty'. This results in carers feeling valued.

The agency does not always ensure that at, or close to the start of, the placement foster carers have essential written information, including an up-to-date local authority care plan, placement plan, delegated authority documents or risk assessments. In one case, a child moved to a new foster placement after intimidating and making threats of violence to her previous carers. The agency did not ensure that the new carer was provided with all relevant information, resulting in an incident that was upsetting and difficult for the carer and for the child.

A small number of foster carers do not have the experience or training to meet children's identified needs such as autism spectrum disorder, challenging behaviour or sexualised behaviour. Despite this, and largely due to the skill and experience of foster carers, children's day-to-day care and experiences are positive. Most children benefit from strong attachments with their foster carers who are skilled at meeting children's individual needs. Children spoken with during the inspection praised their carers and the agency, describing them as 'one big family'. Carers were also able to outline clearly the progress the children have made since being placed with them.

The agency and its foster carers support and encourage children to attend mainstream or alternative educational provisions. All children have personal education plans and education, health and care plans, if required.

The agency prioritises children's health needs. All the relevant health checks are closely monitored and up to date. Overall, the arrangements for managing medication are good. Although practice is good, the written policy is not comprehensive. For example, it is not linked to the safeguarding policy, it does not include a policy for controlled drugs and does not include a clear audit mechanism.

The agency is in the process of developing a strategy to promote greater participation by children and young people in the development of the service. At this stage, children and young people's participation is mainly achieved through activity days. These activity days are arranged regularly and cater for children with a range of ages and needs, promoting inclusion.

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

Assessments of foster carers do not demonstrate sufficiently how they can provide the care that is required to meet children's diverse needs. Most foster carers are recommended and/or approved to care for children aged between 0 and 18 years. The registered manager explained that the reason for this was to attract local authorities for long-term placements. This practice is not sufficiently child focused and it does not promote the best possible matching of children with those carers who are most likely to be able to meet their needs.

The fostering panel is not robust in every area. For example, it has not provided sufficient advice and guidance to the agency in relation to the standard age range approvals. It has also not identified potential gaps in the skills and capacity of prospective foster carers to meet the standard of approval. There is insufficient analysis of foster carers' training at their annual review.

Leaders and managers cannot demonstrate that the process for matching children with foster carers is strong and effective in every case, because there is no clear audit trail of these decisions. Similarly, no record is kept of the matching process and decision-making for the placement of children with respite carers. Formal matching documents do not sufficiently detail the foster family's matching preferences and the importance of the child's previous foster family. Inspectors identified a small number of instances where children had been placed with foster carers who had not received sufficient training. For example, one child with highly complex needs was placed with inexperienced carers; this negatively affected the well-being of the child and the foster carers.

The documentation that is used for matching does not represent the agency's stated child focus. The agency approves and reviews bed space capacity rather than parenting capacity as set out in the criteria.

Children benefit from planned introductions to their foster carers. The agency has developed a range of resources to help children to settle in. This includes a book and a video presentation which have been made accessible to disabled children in symbol format.

In a small number of cases, children's safety has not been sufficiently promoted. On one occasion, foster carers did not act in a child's best interests when the child was at risk of going missing from care. Although the agency took appropriate action in response to the foster carer's actions, the managers have not subsequently carried out an organisational review to learn lessons.

Although the day-to-day care of children appropriately meets children's needs and addresses the risks that they face, the quality of written plans relating to risk and safe care is inconsistent and they do not always consider information that has been provided to the agency. The strategies within risk assessments do not give foster

carers clear enough guidance on how to minimise risk, and staff do not always update risk assessments following a significant event or incident. One safe care plan reviewed by inspectors was too generic and was not specific enough to the needs of the child. Consequently, although the foster carers were taking the right action to safeguard the child, the plan did not include sufficient guidance or strategies for minimising or responding to the child's unsafe behaviours.

Foster carers very rarely use physical intervention. On the two occasions holds were used, the agency did not identify or record these correctly. This has made it impossible for the agency to scrutinise whether the interventions used were necessary, proportionate and undertaken safely.

Although children have local authority care plans and safer care plans, they do not benefit from explicit, written behaviour management plans. Discussions with foster carers and the registered manager suggest that this information is discussed and shared, and inspectors saw good examples of foster carers being proactive in managing children's behaviour. Carers develop social stories for children, to help children to reduce their anxiety. Foster carers were able to explain how they are supporting children to improve their behaviour, but this is not formally recorded. This overall approach is not robust enough to ensure that foster carers are guided in the event of, for instance, a child's emergency move. The registered manager has identified this shortfall and has taken steps to bring in additional expertise to strengthen this area of practice.

Foster carers are actively involved in day-to-day planning for children and they challenge professionals when decisions are made that are not in the best interests of children. The therapeutic support provided by the agency is a helpful resource. Children benefit emotionally from prompt referrals and weekly therapy sessions with a therapist who is attached to the agency.

The agency facilitates regular group meetings for foster carers, who benefit from the opportunity to discuss practice issues and receive peer support. Foster carers also have opportunities to make representations to senior managers from the agency. However, the agency does not always formally recognise or record expressions of dissatisfaction from foster carers or children as complaints. As a result, children and foster carers may not feel as though they are being listened to. This is also a missed opportunity to learn from situations that have gone wrong and act to prevent a reoccurrence.

Children participate in activities that are aligned with their individual interests. Foster carers support children to pursue skills that help them to develop their independence. Foster carers also encourage children to develop positive relationships with others in the community.

Children maintain friendships and relationships with important family members. These relationships are crucial to children's identity and culture. The agency is proactive in supporting children to spend time with their birth families.

Procedures for the recruitment of staff and foster carers are thorough and focused

on preventing unsuitable adults from gaining access to vulnerable children. The children and young people who were spoken with during the inspection confirmed that they feel safe in their foster homes and have the confidence to speak to their foster carers about any concerns or worries that they may have.

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

The responsible individual and registered manager are experienced and suitably qualified for their roles. However, their vision and plans for the organisation have not included some important operational and regulatory matters, leading to shortfalls in how consistently children are safeguarded.

Although many children find stability and security with their foster carers, in a small number of instances the agency did not take sufficient steps to safeguard children or to ensure that the risk of harm to children or carers is minimised. There are examples of child-centred work. However, these are not always underpinned by robust enough processes and systems.

The registered manager has worked hard to develop the agency in its infancy and has undertaken various roles and tasks. This decision led to some lines of accountability being blurred and to a conflict of interest in some areas, for example in the assessment of prospective foster carers and ensuring that reports are signed off by a social worker in the team. Recognising the conflict of interest, senior managers recruited independent social workers to undertake assessments of prospective foster carers. However, no action was taken to quality assure past approvals.

The systems for monitoring the quality of care are underdeveloped and do not ensure that any weaknesses in the service are quickly identified and rectified. The scope of the registered manager's monitoring activity is limited and there is no evidence that a detailed analysis of the data being collected takes place. Some information provided during the inspection was not correct. For example, an audit undertaken by the agency of local authority care plans showed that they were all in place, but inspectors' analysis identified a small number of gaps or omissions.

The agency promotes a learning culture. This includes offering a wide range of training, providing student placements and funding and supporting foster carers to undertake more specialist learning. Supervision, appraisal, induction and training for staff is good.

Foster carers receive regular supervision from their supervising social workers, who foster carers speak highly of. However, records of visits do not capture the quality of discussions that take place between them. Unannounced visits to foster carers take place in line with the standards, but these visits are not routinely used to audit or oversee the practice of foster carers, for example in the administration of medication. This is a missed opportunity.

The feedback that was obtained from a range of professionals, foster carers, staff

and children is extremely positive and very complimentary of the managers. Foster carers and children feel very well engaged, respected and involved in the life of the agency. Staff spoke highly of their managers and are enthusiastic and thoughtful about their work with foster families. Staff said that leaders and managers are available to them and that they are well supported.

Over the course of the inspection, leaders and managers were very keen to respond to the concerns raised and began to develop an action plan to address the identified shortfalls.

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: 1255143

Registered provider: ALL4U Fostering Ltd

Registered provider address: Wood Farm, Burlings Lane, Knockholt, Sevenoaks
TN14 7PF

Responsible individual: Marion Layberry

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Inspectors

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