

Excel Fostering Limited

SC396525

Excel Fostering Limited

243–245 Clifton Drive South, Lytham, St Annes, Lancashire FY8 1HW

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is privately owned. It was registered in October 2009. The agency provides the following types of foster placements:

- emergency
- short term
- long term
- respite
- parent and child.

The manager is suitably qualified and has been registered to manage the agency since 2016.

Inspection dates: 13 to 17 May 2019

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **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: 25 April 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people make good progress through being offered stable and committed care. They have benefited from long-term placements and they spoke highly about the benefits of the care they received. One local authority social worker commented: 'He has relished the care. We did some work with him and he placed his foster carer at the centre of his world.'

Children and young people develop a strong sense of identity and positive achievement that builds their self-esteem. They participate in their communities and have a wide range of hobbies and interests that they pursue with their carers.

Young people are encouraged by carers and the agency to 'stay put' in their placements. Within caring homes, they develop aspirations for their futures and many go on to begin developing their careers at university.

Innovative use of the skills that some carers bring ensures that parents continue to receive ongoing support when they have left placements, for example with local authority agreed packages of ongoing support for parent and child placements.

Children are regularly listened to and involved in the running of the agency. They have been involved in developing questions at panel for new fostering applicants and devising a revised welcome booklet.

Improved systems in recruitment of new foster carers ensure that there is timely follow-up, induction, support and training. A newly introduced buddying system, alongside formal staff support, enhances new foster carers' experiences and enables them to fulfil the agency's expectations. In addition, birth children of prospective carers are also fully involved and welcomed into the fostering community.

In response to a recommendation made at the last inspection, a tracking tool has been introduced to better reflect children's progress. This, however, is yet to be fully embedded and some opportunities of evaluation and analysis have been missed.

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

Any behaviours that pose a risk to children and young people are understood well by the carers and staff. Carers have received newly introduced training that supports them to manage and respond to behaviours more effectively. The monitoring of discipline and measures of control has improved and as such a recommendation made at the previous inspection has been met.

Although the risks that some young people face are understood well by the staff and carers, the written plans and guidance to reduce or mitigate against those risks are not clear. Managers are aware of this shortfall and intend to introduce newly developed documents that offer clear guidance, are measurable and regularly

reviewed.

Managers evaluate the stability of placements and seek to learn from any unplanned endings. As a result, the percentage of placement breakdowns has significantly reduced. This has been further underpinned through fewer children being placed and the number of foster carers recruited being increased.

Further supporting the stability of placements for children and young people is the significant reduction in emergency placements being made. This ensures that the agency is more confident that it only offers placements that can meet the needs of children and young people.

A requirement made at the previous inspection has since been met. There is now a robust process for the recruitment and vetting of staff.

When there are concerns regarding the safety of young people, staff and managers liaise appropriately with other agencies. Allegations are dealt with promptly to ensure that children and young people remain safe in placement. However, the recording of those action plans and responses are not located in one accessible place. This reduces staff oversight of the processes followed and the discussions that have taken place.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is suitably qualified and has been registered to manage the agency since 2016. Over the last 12 months, there has been a strong impetus from the management team to drive improvements in the delivery of services to young people and foster carers. Managers have a clear understanding of both the agency's strengths and the areas yet to be improved.

There is a strong culture of learning and managers are ambitious about the plans for change. These plans are both realistic and achievable and the work that has been identified is at varying stages of implementation. Changes that have been achieved include the recruitment of additional staff, increased training opportunities, a reduction in staff workloads and an expanded management structure.

A reduction in case allocation for staff ensures that carers receive good levels of support. Management structures have been expanded and regular managerial meetings facilitate the dissemination of good practice and learning. Other improvements include newly created mechanisms for monitoring children who may present concerning behaviours, an improved peer mentoring system for newly approved carers and clearer matching processes for children placed with foster carers.

The fostering panel works effectively and there is suitable challenge and feedback to ensure that robust assessments are carried out on proposed carers.

Carers receive regular supervision and report being given timely support and advice.

However, the recording of supervision and support is variable in both format and quality. Managers are aware of this shortfall and have developed plans to ensure that consistent and good-quality recordings are made by agency staff.

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

Recommendations

- Staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, Standard 26, paragraph 26.2) In particular, that consistency is achieved through maintaining clear formats and providing regular auditing for carer's supervision records.
- There should be explicit policies in place to enable foster carers and staff to keep clear records about children in placement and the work of foster carers about children and the work of foster carers with those children. ('The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services', paragraph 5.7)
- In accordance with Working Together, it is important to keep on the foster carer's record a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made, action taken and decisions reached, and to make this available to the individual. ('The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services', paragraph 3.78)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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: SC396525

Registered provider: Excel Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: Wootton Chase, Wootton St Lawrence,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG23 8PE

Responsible individual: Catherine Lockett

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Inspectors

Pauline Yates, social care inspector

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