

Ikon Fostering Limited

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Pool Street, Walsall WS1 2EN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Ikon Fostering is a private limited company based in Walsall. The agency was registered in December 2014. The agency provides a range of fostering placements, including long-term, short-term, emergency, parent/child and respite placements.

At the time of this inspection, there were 90 children living in 58 fostering households. The registered manager has been in post since October 2017 and is a qualified social worker and experienced manager.

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 June 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	requires improvement to be good

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 27 June 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

This agency provides good foster carer recruitment, preparation, training and consistent social work support. This results in confident, skilful foster carers and a positive fostering experience for children.

Foster carers, professionals and staff spoke positively of the agency's impact on children's progress. The agency has grown over the last two years, with 29% of carers transferring from other agencies. This has provided the agency with a pool of experienced carers.

The agency is in the process of introducing a therapeutic parenting model. While this is yet to be fully embedded, foster carers are benefiting from therapeutic support. Foster carers and children can directly access support from the agency's psychotherapist and support worker, who offer bespoke therapeutic work to help children to make sense of their earlier lives. Consequently, children's emotional health, well-being and behaviour all improve.

A strength of the agency is its support to foster carers to meet children's physical health needs. One staff member who is a trained pharmacist delivers the medication training and provides bespoke advice and support to carers caring for children with complex health needs. Carers value her role and consider that it has had a positive impact on children's well-being.

Most children are making good progress in their education. Children are aspirational about their futures and progress to apprenticeships and college placements. However, a small number of children are not in education and some children have out-of-area school placements that are not well coordinated to ensure that children regularly attend. Managers recognise the shortfalls in educational support and are currently making improvements to increase this.

Matching for some placements is weak. Initial matching processes fail to consider the current skills and experience of carers to meet children's individual needs or identify the impact on other children in the household. Consequently, placement moves in the agency for a few children have been high. Although the agency is responsive to providing extra training and support to carers, this has not prevented additional placement moves for some children. This has an effect on children's ability to maintain positive relationships.

Foster carers help children to achieve the skills that they will need in adulthood. The agency has successfully helped some children to 'stay put' with their foster carers after the age of 18.

Since the last inspection, the agency has taken steps to improve the involvement of foster carers and children within the agency. For example, children have devised questions for the agency foster panel to ask applicants. There has been an increase

in social events for foster carers and children.

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

Foster carers understand their roles in safeguarding children in their care and are quick to identify areas of concern. The agency provides a comprehensive programme of training to enhance carers' understanding of safeguarding. For example, carers have received training to increase their awareness of the risks to children of child sexual exploitation, and radicalisation.

Missing-from-home incidents are appropriately managed. Each child has an individual missing protocol in place and foster carers have a clear understanding about what they need to do. Children who have been missing from home are given the opportunity to speak to an independent person when they return.

When a foster carer has been subject to an allegation, the agency responds quickly, ensuring that timely notification is made to relevant statutory bodies. Foster carers have access to independent support when they are subject to an allegation, and post-allegation reviews are held to identify learning.

Foster carers provide children with safe home environments. These are monitored by supervising social workers, who complete annual health and safety inspections and two unannounced visits to the foster carer's home each year.

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

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 2017 and was the previous responsible individual. She is highly valued by foster carers and by staff across the agency.

During the inspection, the inspectors found several shortfalls in management oversight of the agency.

The agency has experienced several placements that have ended unexpectedly. Despite this developing pattern, managers have failed to undertake a review of this area to help them understand the trends or how they can improve placement stability. Managers have not always ensured that concerns about children's well-being are concluded and lessons learned. They do not ensure that all foster carers in a household have received the agency's core training expectation.

Managers have failed to clearly document complaints made to the agency. This means that it is not clear how the agency responds to the complaints that it receives, or how it learns from these to help to support service improvement.

The fostering panel fulfils its responsibilities. The decision-making process about foster carer suitability is rigorous and provides an effective gatekeeping function in relation to maintaining good-quality standards. However, the quality assurance feedback from the panel members is not routinely used to inform agency

development.

Recruitment processes for some staff are weak, as managers have failed to take enough references. This leaves children vulnerable to being cared for by people who may not be suitable to work with them.

Supervision arrangements for the manager are poor. The agency has appointed an independent consultant to provide supervision for the manager and address potential areas of conflict arising from the employment of family members in the agency. However, since registration, the manager has only received two supervisions. The agency has revised its statement of purpose to include the independent consultant, although this revision does not explain the purpose of her role.

More positively, the agency provides good challenge to partner organisations to ensure that improvements are made to children's quality of care. Supervising social workers are swift to challenge local authority social workers when they are not providing adequate support to the children who are placed with the agency.

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
The fostering service provider must notify the Chief Inspector of any revisions to the Statement of Purpose within 28 days. (Regulation 4 (b))	12/08/2019
<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>In particular, ensure that matching of children with foster carers clearly documents the child's needs, the carers skills and experience ability to meet these and, where there are gaps, how the agency will support the carers to meet these. Review and learn from placement successes and those that end early.</p>	12/08/2019
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. (Regulation 18 (4))	12/08/2019
<p>The fostering service provider must not employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p> <p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(3))</p>	12/08/2019
The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate training, supervision	12/08/2019

and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4)(a)) This is in specific reference to the supervision arrangements for the registered manager.	
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Recommendations

- Ensure that the fostering service has, and is fully implementing, a written procedure that promotes and values children's education and is understood by foster carers. ('Fostering services: National Minimum Standards', 8.5)
In particular, this refers to the support children need when they have out-of-area school placements.
- Ensure that the fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available and understood by, foster carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. ('Fostering services: National Minimum Standards', 16.1)
This specifically relates to ensuring that the role of the independent consultant is clear in addressing potential areas of conflict arising from family members employed by the agency.
- Ensure that a clear framework of training and development is in place and this is used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their training and development needs. ('Fostering services: National Minimum Standards', 20)
This relates to evaluating the effectiveness of the agency's framework for core training expectations and foster carers' take-up of this training.
- Ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. ('Fostering services: National Minimum Standards', 25.2)
- Each panel member's performance, including that of the Chair, should be reviewed annually, against agreed performance objectives. Views about the Chair's performance should be sought from other panel members and from those who attend panel meetings, such as prospective foster carers and social workers who present reports to panel. ('The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 2011', 5.15)

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: SC486357

Registered provider: Ikon Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: 1 Coton Lane, Birmingham B23 6TP

Responsible individual: Shiv Pattni

Registered manager: Madhuri Pattni

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Inspectors

Anne Daly, social care inspector

Sarah Junor-Fitzpatrick, social care inspector



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