

Achieving for Children

Achieving for Children Community Interest Company
Achieving for Children, Guildhall 2, High Street, Kingston upon Thames KT1 1EU
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Achieving for Children is a community interest company created in 2014 by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, to provide their children's services. The agency delivers fostering services to children in these two boroughs as well as for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

The fostering service provides the following types of placement: short-term, long-term, specialist, respite, emergency and sibling placements. Additionally, the service provides foster care placements for parents and babies and asylum-seeking children.

This is the first inspection of the fostering service since it registered with Ofsted in August 2018. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 91 approved foster carers and 73 children and young people in placement.

Inspection dates: 9 to 13 September 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: This is the fostering service's first inspection following its registration with Ofsted in August 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: N/A

Enforcement action since last inspection: N/A

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

This service provides high-quality foster care placements. The outcomes for children and young people are very positive. They develop secure attachments with their foster families and have a very strong sense of belonging. The children and young people feel loved, respected and listened to. A young person said, 'My foster carers care for me the way a child should be.'

Children and young people receive personalised care that meets their needs. They have good experiences and make steady progress from their starting points. The agency pays good attention to issues of equality and diversity. Children and young people's identity needs are well met.

Children and young people feel listened to. They are aware of how to make complaints and, on occasion, do so. The fostering service continues to develop strategies to help children and young people influence the shape of the service. For example, the agency supports the Children in Care Council and also conducts consultation exercises to obtain the views, wishes and feelings of the children and young people.

The fostering service's revised matching process is not yet embedded into staff practice. The new matching tool is not consistently used, and the process fails to highlight fully the strengths and weaknesses of proposed placements. Where placements are planned, introductions between children and their prospective foster carers are sensitively arranged. This helps children to settle quickly. Placements are generally very stable, and unplanned endings are rare.

Most of the children and young people are engaged in educational activities, and their learning outcomes are good. The service promotes educational attainment and success. Staff and foster carers are strong advocates for their children and young people's educational success. Their communication with education professionals is good. This helps to encourage children and young people's educational and vocational achievements.

Children and young people live healthy lifestyles. Foster carers and staff ensure that there is good promotion of their physical, emotional and social well-being. Children and young people have excellent access to primary healthcare services, and they receive advice and support from specialist services when these are required.

The service's Family Link Project provides respite care for children and young people with disabilities. The scheme is particularly successful in meeting these children and young people's complex health and medical needs. A parent whose child is accessing this service said, 'We don't worry about him. We know it's an excellent placement. We get contacted if there's anything. The foster carers are even learning sign language. We get a text to say he's fallen asleep. He's safe. It's all hugely impressive.'

The preparation of older young people for their transition to adulthood is good. They benefit from the input of their foster carers and the fostering staff who help to prepare them to manage their lives more independently. A small number of young people remain living with their foster carers post 18 years in 'staying put' arrangements. This allows them to maintain existing relationships with their foster families as they prepare for adulthood.

Children and young people have good access to contact with their siblings, family members and others when it is safe for them to do so. The fostering agency manages arrangements for contact carefully. Staff ensure that there is a consistent focus on the impact of contact and that arrangements are always in the best interest of children and young people.

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

Children and young people are protected from harm and abuse. The fostering service staff and foster carers ensure that the safety and well-being of children and young people are paramount. Children and young people benefit from the agency's clear child protection policies. Managers and leaders effectively monitor, have good oversight, reflect and report on all safeguarding incidents. However, not all notifications of key events to Ofsted are forwarded in a timely fashion.

Staff ensure that comprehensive placement plans address any changing needs and that strategies are in place to help reduce risk-taking behaviour. For example, staff complete risk assessments soon after placements start. These are updated regularly and help to identify and address known and potential risks to children and young people's safety. Foster carers devise safe care policies. However, these are often very general and are not explicit about what safe care strategies are to be used with specific children and young people.

Staff and foster carers manage well any critical incidents. Episodes of children going missing from care and their involvement in sexual or criminal exploitation are infrequent. When these instances do occur, staff and foster carers devise effective strategies that help to curb the risk-taking behaviours. Multi-agency professional meetings are held to devise effective safety plans. These help to protect children and young people from harm.

The assessment, preparation and supervision of foster carers have a strong focus on child protection, and this supports their safe care of vulnerable children and young people. Foster carers receive regular and consistent child protection training. Unannounced home visits are another mechanism used to monitor the safety of children. Staff routinely conduct two unannounced visits to each fostering household every year.

Gaps in the safe vetting and recruitment of some members of the fostering panel mean that recruitment procedures are not always robust. Managers are unable to verify panel members' professional qualifications, and some personnel files do not

contain full vetting information as required.

Investigations into allegations and foster carers' standards of care are comprehensive and thorough. However, some investigations take a significant length of time before they are concluded. In one case, there was noted delay in action taken to address placement concerns.

The fostering service has strong and effective working partnerships with other professionals. These include children's social workers, designated officers, health and school personnel and the police. This successful collaboration promotes an effective, coordinated approach to safeguarding children and young people.

Foster carers' homes are safe and secure. Staff routinely conduct checks that ensure that homes are well maintained and comfortable and that there are no health and safety concerns. Where safety issues arise, staff and managers take effective action to resolve them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the fostering service's registration with Ofsted, managers have continued to implement strategies to improve the quality of the service. Some of these strategies are yet to be embedded in staff practices and are not yet effective. An example of this is staff's inconsistent use of a newly devised placement matching tool. Staff do not always devise child-specific safe care policies or complete foster care agreements.

The fostering service is yet to implement an effective recruitment strategy to attract and secure a larger pool of foster carers. This is important if the service is to provide foster care placements that meet the diverse needs of the children and young people.

Most foster carers feel that the support they receive is very effective. However, a minority of carers identified support as an area for improvement. Some foster carers said that they do not receive records of their supervisory visits. The fostering service will benefit from continued regular dialogue between managers and foster carers. This is particularly important due to recent changes in the foster carers' tier grouping structure.

The support of staff is good. However, gaps are noted in the frequency of some staff supervision and appraisals. This is also the case for some members of the fostering panel. Staff said that they receive good support and guidance from their line managers and others. Staff benefit from the availability of managers, and there are other forums that enhance staff's learning and practice. One staff member said, 'Managers know our children, even at [head of service] level. Managers keep children at the centre of all we do. They're proactive in organising the Foster Carers' Forum. All our foster carers know them.' Staff training opportunities are excellent.

The registered manager and responsible individual are skilled, well qualified and

experienced to manage the fostering service efficiently and with positive effect. This is particularly significant given service changes due to the agency acquiring responsibility for the two local authority fostering services.

The fostering service's preparation of foster carers is effective. This ensures that prospective foster carers have good insight into the needs of children and young people and that they are equipped to meet identified needs. This includes the preparation of the agency's cohort of Family and Friends (Connected) foster carers.

The training of foster carers is excellent. Most foster carers have completed identified core training and have personal development plans. Foster carers largely complete the training, support and development standards within the 12-month timeframe following their initial approval. The foster carers' annual reviewing process is thorough. This ensures that foster carers remain suitable to care for vulnerable children and young people.

The service's fostering panel operates effectively. Its membership is drawn from a range of professional backgrounds. Recruitment to increase the diversity of panel membership is ongoing. The panel undertakes clear and appropriate analysis of the work that is presented at panel meetings. The quality of foster carers' assessments presented at the panel is of a high standard.

Stakeholders and interested parties have access to clear information that outlines well the aims and objectives of the fostering service. Staff communication with other professionals is consistent and effective. Information available to the children and young people about the service is appropriate.

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 ensure that all persons employed by them— (a) receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21(4)(a))	01/01/2020
For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person— has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform, and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20(3)(b)) This relates to the recruitment information of members of the fostering panel.	01/01/2020
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)) In particular, ensure that investigations into allegations and concerns about foster carers' standards of care are managed and concluded in a timely fashion.	01/12/2019
If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36(1))	01/11/2019

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', 26.2). This relates, in particular, to the

matching matrix, child-specific safe care policies, risk assessments, foster care agreements and foster carers' supervisory visit reports.

- The fostering service implements an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service. Planning for future demands covers the need for short breaks for disabled children. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 13.1)
- Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. The frequency of meetings for short break foster carer should be proportionate to the amount of care provided. Foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 21.8)
- The registered person takes action to address any issues of concern that they identify or which are raised with them ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 25.8). In particular, the managers should continue to consult with foster carers about changes to the foster carers' tier grouping structure.

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: 1280297

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Inspectors

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