

The Fostering Foundation

The Fostering Foundation Limited
46-47 Brook Street, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0HE
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The Fostering Foundation is an independent fostering agency based in the South West region of England. The main branch office is based in Tavistock, with one smaller office operating in Bristol.

This service provides a range of fostering services, such as short-term, long-term and emergency care, for children and young people who may have complex care needs. There are currently 51 foster carers looking after 61 children.

Inspection dates: 30 September to 3 October 2019

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: not applicable. This is the agency's first inspection.

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

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

Most foster carers positively change the lives of children and young people they care for. Many children and young people have lived with their foster carers for a long time, and have a sense of permanence and feel loved. However, the positive outcomes for many children are overshadowed by the shortfalls in the agency's safeguarding and leadership and management arrangements.

The matching of children and young people with foster carers is not always carefully and sensitively considered, leading to poor outcomes and unplanned endings for children and young people. Professional curiosity and caution during the matching process are not always evident. A complex and vulnerable child was recently placed with a foster carer despite agency concerns about the foster carer's standards of care, leaving a child potentially at risk.

Most children and young people achieve positive educational outcomes. All children and young people regularly attend school. Foster carers challenge educational authorities effectively, as a good parent would, if they feel their foster child is not receiving the education they deserve. Educational achievements are recognised and rewarded by the agency and children and young people receive certificates to celebrate their achievements.

The views of children and young people are gathered through regular meetings and forums. Children and young people are invited and trained to become part of the agency's foster carer and staff recruitment panel. This role helps to raise the self-esteem and confidence of the children and young people.

Children and young people, including the birth children of foster carers, enjoy a variety of events run throughout the year by the agency, where they have fun and make friends.

The agency employs a qualified therapist who offers foster carers support and advice. Foster carers report that they value this support and that it is always easy to obtain support when needed from the agency, any time of the night or day.

Foster carers remain in contact with children and young people when they leave their care, often visiting them at their new homes. Young people can remain with their foster carer when they reach 18 years old under a 'staying put' arrangement. This arrangement offers young people a sense of permanence and security.

The assessment of prospective foster carers is undertaken by independent social workers and the agency's social workers. The assessment process is timely and comprehensive. It gives the panel all the information they need to recommend to approve, or decide not to recommend to approve, a prospective foster carer.

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

Foster carers are trained by the agency in how to safely restrain a child or young person physically, as a last resort to keep the child or young person and others safe.

Permitted holds for each child and young person are detailed in their safer caring plans. However, children and young people are being restrained by some foster carers using unaccredited methods of restraint, such as ground holds.

Leaders and managers recently introduced a system for examining incidents of restraint for trends or patterns, or an indication that the foster carers are struggling to manage the behaviour of a child or young person. One child was restrained by his foster carer 11 times in 12 months. Managers failed to promptly examine the reasons for the regular incidents of restraint and the impact of the restraints on the child.

Records of restraint do not detail whether accredited holds are used and what action is taken by the foster carers to try to de-escalate incidents effectively and prevent the need for a restraint. It is not clear in the record of restraints if children and young people are consulted to gain their views and feelings following an incident of restraint.

An assessment of risk and guidance for foster carers detailing how they should manage identified risks are not always provided to foster carers prior to a placement. Risk assessments are formulaic and not regularly updated. One young person's assessment of risk was not updated for over three months after they were first placed, despite issues being raised by the placing authority social worker.

The agency places parents undertaking a parenting assessment with their child alongside children and young people placed in a fostering household. Police checks of the parent are not always being undertaken by the agency prior to placement, to determine if the parent is a safe and suitable adult to live alongside a fostered child or young person. There is a lack of consideration by managers of the impact and potential risks of a parent who is deemed by their placing authority of being at risk of harming or neglecting their child, being placed alongside a fostered child or young person.

Standards of care issues are not always rigorously and promptly addressed with foster carers by supervising social workers and managers, in part due to a lack of professional curiosity and a failure to employ due caution. There is a need for foster carers to receive more robust and clear supervision from the agency's social workers, so that foster carers are promptly challenged, if necessary, to regularly provide comprehensive and informative daily logs.

Staff recruitment procedures are not always adhered to. One member of staff had recorded whole years and not months on their application form, giving numerous potential gaps in their employment history.

Children and young people report that they feel safe living with their foster carers and could name an adult they could speak to if they felt unsafe or worried. Children and young people know how to make a complaint and their views are sought during the supervising social worker's visits to their foster home.

Safeguarding incidents are well managed and promptly reported to safeguarding professionals. Foster carers receive comprehensive support when they are being investigated following an allegation from a child or young person.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be

good

The agency restructured in 2016 and re-registered with Ofsted in June 2018. Two offices merged into one office. A new manager was appointed in February 2019 and was registered in June 2019. A computer system is being introduced by managers with the aim of improving the quality of recording and management oversight. Staff and foster carers comment positively on the improved management arrangements and that, despite all the recent changes, the agency continues to retain a small and personal 'family feel' which helps them to feel valued.

Management oversight of the service is an evolving process. Work to improve systems, critical analysis of incidents and the implementation of the agency action plan is yet to be fully embedded. A tracker for monitoring the outcomes of children and young people is in place, but it is not clear how this information is currently being used to further improve the quality of foster care provided by the agency.

Leaders and managers are undertaking audits of the agency's records, policies and procedures. A service manager was recently appointed to work alongside the registered manager to complete the audits. There is still much work to be completed. Many records and documents are incomplete, are not comprehensive or are filed in the wrong place and are hard to find. Children and young people may wish to read a record of their time in foster care and will not be able to do so if records and documents are missing or have not been completed.

The agency operates a panel that provides an effective quality monitoring function. The chair and vice-chair divide responsibility for chairing meetings between them. They hold panel meetings in different areas to cater for the diverse locations of the applicants. The panel members are not currently representative of the ethnic backgrounds of the agency's foster carers. The agency recognises this shortfall and is trying to actively recruit a panel member from a British minority ethnic background.

Over the last 18 months, recruitment of foster carers has not been a priority for the agency. The range of placements available for children and young people has decreased. This shortfall is now being addressed by the agency. Managers have identified the areas of the region where new foster carers are needed. A member of staff responsible for the recruitment of foster carers has very recently been appointed. She has a clear plan of how she intends to attract foster carers, through attendance at a variety of events and internet advertising.

Staff report that they are well supported and supervised. They are positive about the quality of supervision from managers and how it has improved since the new leadership team arrived. However, one new member of staff, while receiving regular informal supervision, has only received one recorded formal supervision session in their first 10 weeks in post. This is not in line with the agency's supervision policy.

The agency's statement of purpose and children's guide are published on the agency's website. These documents are not always kept up to date. For example, the children's guide states that there are three offices operated by the agency, when there are only two offices now operating.

Foster carers are trained in a wide range of topics that support them to care for children and young people effectively, including safeguarding, first aid and

therapeutic parenting. All foster carers have completed the training, support and development standards in foster carer within one year of their approval to foster or will complete this training within the specified time limits.

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 fostering service must take all reasonable steps to ensure that no child is placed with a foster carer is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable, and restraint is used on a child only where it is necessary to prevent injury to the child or other persons, or serious damage to property. (Regulation 13(1)(2)(b)(c))</p> <p>In particular:</p> <p>Ensure that foster carers only use the safe holding techniques they are trained to undertake.</p> <p>Records of restraint must contain a description of the duration of the restraint, events leading up to the restraint and what de-escalation of the situation was attempted by the foster carer prior to the restraint.</p> <p>Review policies and procedures in relation to restraint and ensure that children and young people's views are heard and recorded.</p>	04/11/2019
<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. (Regulation 17(3))</p> <p>In particular:</p> <p>Ensure that risk assessments are fit for purpose and control measures are put in place prior to a child or parent and child being placed with a foster carer, particularly when there is already a child placed.</p>	04/11/2019
<p>The fostering service provider must not—</p> <p>(a) Employ a person to work for the purposes of the</p>	04/11/2019

<p>fostering service unless that person is fit to do so, or (b) Allow a person to whom paragraph (2) applies, to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p> <p>(3) For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>(a) is of integrity and good character, (b) has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform, (c) is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>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(1)(a)(b)(3)(a)(b)(c))</p> <p>In particular:</p> <p>Ensure that all gaps in the employment history of a prospective member of staff are fully explored and can be explained and documented.</p>	
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which—</p> <p>(a) is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and (b) sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for—</p> <p>(e) consideration to be given to the measures which may be necessary to protect children placed with foster parents following an allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12(1)(a)(b)(3)(e))</p> <p>In particular:</p> <p>Ensure that the leaders and manager employ professional caution and vigilance when placing a child with foster carers where there has previously been a proven allegation, and that foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of children placed with them.</p>	<p>04/11/2019</p>

<p>Ensure that police checks are obtained prior to admission for any adult that is going to live in a fostering household to ensure that they are a safe and suitable person to be living alongside a fostered child.</p>	
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Recommendations

- Ensure that a written record is kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person. Ensure that the record is signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision. (NMS 24.5)
- Ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Ensure that children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. (NMS 26.6)
- Ensure that the fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to, and understood by, foster carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures or guidance. Ensure that it is available to the responsible authority and any parent or person with parental responsibility. (NMS 16.1)
- Ensure that the number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking in to account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for. (NMS 14.8)

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: 1378486

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