

Qalb Fostering Agency Limited

Qalb Fostering Agency Limited
31– 33, Spelman Street, Spitalfields, London E1 5LQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The fostering service provides short-term, long-term, respite, emergency and sibling placements. Additionally, the service provides placements for asylum-seeking children and a short-breaks service for disabled children.

This is the first inspection of the fostering service since it registered with Ofsted in August 2017. At the time of the inspection, the agency had seven approved foster caring households and six children and young people in placement.

Inspection dates: 9 to 13 December 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious and widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded, and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor, and they are not adequately safeguarded.

Date of last inspection: n/a

Overall judgement at last inspection: This is the first inspection of this fostering service.

Enforcement action since last inspection: n/a

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Although children and young people receive a level of care that meets their individual needs, there are significant shortfalls in safeguarding, leadership and management that lead to an overall judgement of inadequate.

Children and young people generally have positive experiences and make some progress. However, it is not possible to determine the degree to which they make such progress due to the poor record-keeping by staff and foster carers.

Children and young people's case files are not explicit about how matching decisions are made. It is not clear that in every case a manager has been involved to provide appropriate oversight. Key matching processes such as placement planning meetings do not consistently take place.

Children and young people have secure attachments with their foster families and develop a very strong sense of belonging. They feel loved, respected and listened to. However, the assessments of prospective foster carers are not of a sufficiently high standard. Senior management oversight requires significant strengthening to ensure that the quality of these is of an acceptable standard.

Children and young people attend school regularly and generally make good progress. They are encouraged to develop healthy lifestyles, and their health needs are promoted well. This is particularly the case for disabled children. Children and young people's identity needs are well met by the service. For example, some attend a local mosque, and others are supported by interpreters to help them to express their views and opinions.

Children and young people develop practical living skills with the support and supervision of their foster carers. They receive support with managing road safety, making snacks and taking care of their personal hygiene. This helps to prepare them for adulthood.

Children and young people have good contact with their brothers and sisters, family members and others, when it is safe for them to do so. The fostering agency manages arrangements for contact carefully, ensuring that this is always in children and young people's best interests.

Children and young people are not well supported to complain about the service. The children's guide and information about making complaints are not available in symbols or pictorial form to ensure easy access to information for those children and young people who do not read or communicate verbally.

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

Current practice within this fostering service does not ensure the protection of children and young people. In particular, the recruitment practice, including the vetting of staff, foster carers and panel members, is poor and inconsistent.

Significant vetting documents required for the approval of foster carers are missing from personnel files. For example, managers have failed to obtain a number of foster carers' written references, employer references or references from their children's schools. Personnel files do not contain two written references for previous managers of the service. Panel members are not required to attend interviews, and the agency does not obtain references for them. These practices do not demonstrate that leaders recruit staff and others safely. This is not in the best interest of children and young people and may present risk to them.

Risk assessments are generally adequate. However, they do not always highlight known risks or strategies to curb risk-taking behaviour. For example, the risk assessment for one young person did not include information that would help to address his misuse of the internet.

Records do not consistently confirm that foster carers take appropriate action when young people are absent without permission. For example, one foster carer writes her daily records in Bengali. It is therefore difficult to determine whether in such instances effective action is taken to safeguard the young person.

The quality of foster carer assessments is poor. They do not explore fully key safeguarding issues, for example one family's experience of domestic violence and the implications of key family members living abroad. The fostering agency does not consistently obtain Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for foster carers' nominated support persons. Such practice fails to confirm that foster carers are suitable to care for vulnerable children and young people.

Fostering agency staff do not consistently conduct an unannounced home visit of foster carers annually as required. They also fail to follow up on identified health issues or safety concerns in the homes of foster carers. This means that the fostering agency is unable to confirm that foster carers are medically supported/fit to care for vulnerable children or young people or that their homes are safe.

Children and young people live with trusted adults whom they can talk to about their concerns. Children and young people are generally well behaved, and few critical incidents occur. There have been no recorded allegations made against any foster carers.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The leadership and management of the service are inadequate. Managers are neither effective nor efficient and are responsible for the serious failings identified during this inspection. The progress of service development has been too slow, and the inspection finds a number of key breaches of regulations. Management oversight is weak, and key functions of the fostering service are poor.

The fostering service has had no registered manager for over a year. Since registration with Ofsted, the provider has appointed four managers. This means that the management of the fostering service has not been stable or effective. This has a negative impact on the service's ability to comply fully with the regulations or to fulfil its stated ambitions.

The recruitment of foster carers has been too slow. For this reason, the fostering agency is unable to offer a diverse range of foster care placements as stated in the statement of purpose.

The training and support of foster carers are inconsistent. There has been no training provided to foster carers in over a year, and no foster carer has completed the training, support and development standards. There are gaps in the frequency of supervisory home visits to some foster carers. To date, no foster carer annual review meetings have been held.

Case records are poor. Some records are incomplete or of poor quality. For example, in one case there were no progress summaries or recorded outcomes of the looked after child's review. In another case, the foster carer's daily logs were not written in English. Both these practices make it difficult to understand children's journeys or to gauge their progress and to plan for them.

Although the fostering panel is well established, the central list is missing key areas of expertise. For example, currently there is no independent foster carer or a formerly looked after child on the fostering panel. Panel members are not provided with training, and annual appraisals do not occur. The responsible individual is currently the agency decision maker. She is not a qualified social worker and so should not hold this position.

The fostering agency has not forwarded an updated statement of purpose to Ofsted. The current document requires revision. The children's guide is available in the written word only, and not pictorially. This means that not all children are able to access key information about the service.

Children and young people do, however, make progress while living with their foster carers. Placements are secure and stable; children and young people's individual needs are met. Children and young people have influence on the day-to-day care they receive. Foster carers are part of a team working with the child, and they contribute to care planning and decision-making. Partnership working with placing authorities is good.

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 the fostering service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. (Regulations 3(5))	01/04/2020
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times.</p> <p>(Regulation 11(a))</p> <p>In particular, the provider should ensure that staff and foster carers maintain comprehensive records about children.</p>	29/02/2020*
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to persons working for the fostering service in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20(3)(c))</p> <p>In particular, this relates to the safe recruitment of staff and panel members.</p>	29/02/2020*
<p>A fostering service provider must maintain a case record for each foster parent approved by them which must include copies of the documents specified in paragraph (2) and the information specified in paragraph (3).</p> <p>The documents referred to in paragraph (1) are—</p> <p>the report prepared under regulation 26(3)(b) and any other reports submitted to the fostering panel,</p> <p>any recommendations made by the fostering panel,</p> <p>the notice of approval given under regulation 27(5)(a),</p> <p>the foster care agreement,</p> <p>any report of a review of approval prepared under regulation 28(4), and</p> <p>any notice given under regulation 28(12).</p> <p>The information referred to in paragraph (1) is, as the case may be—</p> <p>a record of each placement with the foster parent, including</p>	29/02/2020*

<p>the name, age and sex of each child placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated, and the circumstances of the termination,</p> <p>the information obtained by the fostering service provider in relation to the assessment and approval of the foster parent, and in relation to any review or termination of the approval.</p> <p>A local authority must maintain a case record for each person with whom a child is placed under regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations (temporary approval of relative, friend or other person connected with the child) which must include in relation to that person—</p> <p>a record in relation to the placement, including the name, age and sex of each child placed, the date on which the placement began and, if the placement has been terminated, the date and circumstances of the termination, and the information obtained in relation to the enquiries carried out under regulation 24(2) of the Care Planning Regulations.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must compile a record for each person whom they do not approve as a foster parent, or who withdraws their application prior to approval, which must include—</p> <p>the information obtained in connection with the assessment, any report submitted to the fostering panel and any recommendation made by the fostering panel, and any notification given under regulation 27.</p> <p>(Regulation 30(1)(2)(a– f)(3)(a)(b)(4)(a)(b)(5)(a)(b)(c))</p> <p>In particular, this relates to the safe recruitment of foster carers and foster carers' nominated persons.</p>	
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. (Regulation 35(1)(a)(b)(2))</p>	29/02/2020
<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. (Regulation 17(1))</p> <p>In particular the registered provider should provide comprehensive training to foster carers and staff should conduct regular supervisory home visits to foster carers.</p>	01/04/2020

<p>The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider consider it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. (Regulation 28(1)(2))</p>	01/04/2020
<p>The registered fostering provider must ensure that all persons employed receive appropriate supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21(4)(a))</p> <p>Effective action must be taken if shortfalls identified during supervision remain unresolved.</p>	29/02/2020*
<p>The fostering service provider must— keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide, notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days. (Regulation 4(a)(b)).</p> <p>In particular, the children's guide should be made available in pictorial form.</p>	01/04/2020

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- Implement an effective strategy to ensure that there are sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service, as outlined in the service's statement of purpose. (NMS 13.1)
- Ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval. (NMS 20.3)
- Ensure that staff and foster carers understand the nature of records maintained and ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed (NMS 26.2). This relates to risk assessments, foster carers' assessments, foster carers' daily records and progress summaries.
- Ensure all staff's work and all fostering activity are consistent with the 2011 Regulations and NMS and with the service's policies and procedures. (NMS 25.3)
- 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 (NMS 15.1). To support this, the registered provider must ensure that placement planning meetings are held

and that records of these meetings are maintained.

- 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 carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided. Foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings. (NMS 21.8)
- 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 into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for (14.8). In particular, the fostering panel should include an independent foster carer and an adult who was previously in care.
- The fostering service's decision-maker is a senior person within the fostering service or is a trustee or director of the fostering service, who is a social worker with at least three years post-qualifying experience in childcare social work and has knowledge of childcare law and practice. (NMS 23.12)

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: 1239887

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Inspector

Sandra Jacobs-Walls, social care inspector



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