

Foundation Fostering Limited

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Acorn Business Centre, Office 7, Roberts End, Hanley Swan, Worcester WR8 0DN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The responsible individual has operated the agency since 2013, when he was the sole provider. This agency is now owned by a small private company. It was re-registered in December 2017.

There are currently 24 fostering households caring for 31 children. The agency offers short- and long-term, emergency and planned placements.

The manager was registered in December 2017.

Inspection dates: 9 to 12 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's welfare is not promoted.

Date of last inspection: 2 July 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Widespread failures in the effectiveness of leadership and management in this agency place children at risk of harm. Inadequate responses to resolve concerns about standards of foster care mean that the agency does not always support children's welfare.

The agency does not ensure that supervising social workers meet children to understand their experience of foster care. In a few cases, supervising social workers have not seen children for up to six months. Supervising social workers attend looked after child reviews but fail to action agreed plans. For example, a key task for the agency that was identified in a child's looked after review was to arrange psychological support with life story work. This has not been progressed three months later, and the registered manager was unaware that this support was needed. This lack of managerial oversight does not prioritise children's experiences.

The agency does not make a record of decisions when children share bedrooms with their brothers or sisters. This means they cannot demonstrate that the wishes of children have been fully considered or that each child is adequately safeguarded.

The registered manager has not always investigated and responded to children's complaints, including those involving extreme distress. Consequently, children do not feel that their concerns are taken seriously.

Despite these negative issues, children's daily individual experience is generally good. Foster carers take good care of children's health. They help children keep in touch with the important people in their lives. The agency's skilled educational advocate keeps track of and helps children to achieve at school.

Some children settle into their placements and form strong relationships with their carers. Consequently, some children make emotional progress, which helps them in all areas of their lives. A few have stayed in placements into young adulthood under 'staying put' arrangements.

The organisation celebrates children and foster carer achievements. Support for difference and diversity means that children are appropriately matched both culturally and religiously with their foster homes. Children lead active busy lives with their foster families.

Foster carers are well supported. Regular support groups have begun again. Training has substantially improved, and at approval all foster carers have already completed core training in addition to their preparation training. Foster carers appreciate the regular, helpful visits by the agency's supervising social workers. They feel part of and valued by the agency.

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

The organisation's child protection procedure is ineffective. The registered manager has not put the procedure into practice, and his records are poor. He failed to implement plans to reduce the risk for children until two weeks after a significant incident had occurred in the home. This does not safeguard children or foster families.

Placement decisions do not always protect children. The registered manager has overseen placements of children with foster carers, despite significant unresolved concerns about the quality of care they provide, including financial mismanagement, and allegedly transporting children in an uninsured car. In addition, these placements were contrary to the express direction of the agency decision maker that no children should be placed with the carers. Children have gone on to experience further poor care and made a further allegation about abuse by these carers.

Managers confuse complaints and safeguarding issues. The registered manager does not conclude allegations and internal investigations effectively to learn lessons and improve children's life in foster care. This lack of skill hinders monitoring, delays action and jeopardises children's safety.

The agency has worked cooperatively to keep safe children who are at risk because they run away from their foster homes or who self-harm. It helps children to stay safe online and when developing independence in the community.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Ofsted judged the agency to require improvement at a full inspection in July 2018. This inspection found further decline and significant failures in how the service safeguards and takes care of some children.

Management systems for monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality of care are ineffective. The formal review of the quality of care has not been successful in improving the agency. This is a repeated weakness from the last inspection. A further range of monitoring tools and reporting systems have missed safeguarding issues and complaints by children. The agency does not put safeguarding or children's experience at the heart of its service review or development.

The agency relies on a committee of external consultants for safeguarding scrutiny and advice and for quality assurance to fill gaps in the knowledge of managers. Significant safeguarding concerns have not been notified to Ofsted. This prevents the regulator from having oversight and taking any necessary action.

The registered manager has failed to identify, record and act on issues that matter in children's lives, including complaints and safeguarding concerns raised by children and professionals. He has failed to show any professional curiosity or review incidents effectively to learn lessons to improve practice, including after serious safeguarding incidents.

Managerial oversight still does not ensure that finalised assessments of foster carers are of a consistently good standard. This is a repeated weakness from the last inspection.

The agency fails to ensure the quality of foster homes. For example, key risks of violence in a prospective foster home were not adequately assessed, and essential household gas safety checks were missed at an annual review. The last three fostering panels have identified shortfalls in half of all reports about foster carers' suitability.

The fostering panel has sometimes provided an effective gatekeeping function. However, panel members do not always withdraw from discussion and recommendations when they have personal knowledge of applicants. This presents a potential conflict of interest.

Panels have not been appropriately advised by the registered manager in his role as panel adviser.

Staff and panel members lack good-quality training related to their roles. For example, not all panel members have had panel-related training. No social work staff, including managers have had training in undertaking assessments of foster carers. The responsible individual and registered manager have not had safeguarding training at a level commensurate with their roles.

Supervision of social work staff by the registered manager is also not of good quality. Examples of 'cut and paste' staff supervision lack a true child or staff focus. High rates of staff turnover have been unsettling for some foster carers. However, the agency has now recruited a full permanent staff team.

The agency's published statement of purpose describes roles and services which it cannot provide. Placing authorities may be misled by the publicised offer. Information for children does not tell them what the agency will do in response to any complaint. Children do not know what to expect.

New electronic recording systems are not yet fully used. Records do not show children's respite placement history with foster carers. Information about the range of people who currently work for the agency was not available during the inspection. This places children and carers at risk.

Weaknesses overshadow the positive aspects in the agency. Recruitment checks now ensure that all staff are safe to work with children. Placing authorities reported good communication and that they are pleased with outcomes for their children. One local authority told the inspector, 'We have always found them to be helpful.' New arrangements to consult with children about their views, wishes and feelings and facilitate involvement in agency matters at 'Young ambassador' groups are encouraging.

Ofsted will carry out an inspection visit within eight weeks of this inspection to monitor the agency's progress.

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 provider must provide a copy of the statement of purpose to the chief inspector, place a copy on their website, produce a written guide to the fostering service ('the children's guide') and ensure that the fostering service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. (Regulation 3(1)(2)(3)(5))</p> <p>Specifically, ensure that information about services, facilities and types of placement is accurate, and that the children's guide tells children what the agency will do in response to any informal or formal complaint.</p>	01/04/20
<p>The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill.</p> <p>The registered provider must ensure that where the registered provider is an organisation, the responsible individual undertakes from time to time such training as is appropriate to ensure they have the experience and skills necessary for carrying on the fostering agency. (Regulation 8(1)(a)(b)(2)(b)) *</p>	02/02/20
<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>This relates to delivery of actions in each child's care or placement plan and management of risk in foster homes.</p>	01/04/20
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which is intended to safeguard children placed</p>	02/02/20

<p>with foster parents from abuse or neglect and 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 written records to be kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect, and of the action taken in response. (Regulation 12(1)(a)(b)(3)(d)) *</p>	
<p>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))</p>	01/04/20
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate training and supervision. (Regulation 21(4)(a))</p> <p>This relates to good-quality staff supervision, training in safeguarding and assessment for the manager and social work staff and appropriate training for the panel in panel functions.</p>	01/04/20
<p>The fostering service provider must maintain and keep up to date the records specified in Schedule 2. (Regulation 22(1))</p> <p>In this case, this refers to a record of each child's placements with foster parents and a record of each person working for the fostering service provider.</p>	01/04/20
<p>Ensure that panel oversees the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider. (Regulation 25(4)(b))</p> <p>This is with regard to panel ensuring the good quality of foster parent assessments and reviews.</p>	01/04/20
<p>Ensure there is a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35(1)(a)(b))</p> <p>This is with regard to monitoring all the required matters in sufficient detail to meet the needs of the agency and Ofsted.</p>	01/04/20
<p>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)(2))</p> <p>Specifically, notify Ofsted of any serious complaint about foster parent and child protection enquiries.</p>	02/02/20

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- Ensure that appointees to the role of registered manager who do not have the management qualification enrol on a management training course within six months, and obtain a relevant management qualification within three years, of their appointment. (NMS 17.3)
- Ensure that the decision-making process and outcome of a bedroom sharing assessment are recorded in writing. (NMS 10.6)

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: 1264335

Registered provider: Foundation Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: Acorn Business Centre, Office 7, Roberts End,
Hanley Swan, Worcester WR8 0DN

Responsible individual: Nicholas Eadon

Registered manager: Dean Temple

Telephone number: 01684 311555

Email address: nick@foundationfostering.org

Inspector

Christy Wannop, social care inspector



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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

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