

Attachments Fostering Limited

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2 Lenvale House, East Street, Snodland ME6 5BA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Attachments Fostering Ltd is an independent fostering agency, based in Snodland, Kent. Qualified, permanent staff are employed, and the agency also uses a regular bank of qualified independent social workers for additional assessment and review work. The agency has its own established fostering panel, chaired by an independent person.

The agency currently has nine approved fostering households supporting 14 children and young people situated across a small area within the Kent region. Services offered include emergency, short-term and bridging placements, long-term and parent and child placements.

Inspection dates: 11 to 16 March 2020

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/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded, and/or the care and experiences of children and young people are poor, and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 12 March 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Over the past year, senior managers have accepted several referrals in an emergency, with little or no information about the child, and without considering the full impact of their decisions on the child, the foster carers and other children living in the home. This includes accepting children who have very specific and complex needs that fall outside of the expertise of the agency and the staff. As a result, some foster carers have been put in situations where they have had to look after children in unmanageable and unrealistic circumstances.

Poor matching practice has resulted in some children being placed with foster carers who do not have the relevant skills or knowledge to meet children's needs or to keep them safe. The staff and managers who are responsible for making these judgements and decisions lack the relevant experience and qualifications to assess whether a placement is suitable. Poor information and analysis from the start means that children's exact needs are either not known or minimised. As a result, children's futures are put at risk along with the lack of opportunity for them to form secure attachments with their foster carers.

Foster carers spoken to during the inspection say that they are not fully involved in the decision-making and matching process. In some cases, they say that they have felt pressured to take children and either that information is withheld or that they do not receive enough information or support, from the staff and managers, to look after the children properly. This has led to foster carers having to say that 'The child does not fit with their family' and/or that they are 'no longer able to look after them'. This practice has also contributed to some foster carers resigning from the agency and children having to move unnecessarily. In instances where children's placements have broken down, managers have failed to learn lessons from this.

Poor record-keeping makes it difficult to know exactly what children's experiences are like on a day-to-day basis. For example, monthly reports written by the staff for local authority social workers lack detail. The information shared in these reports does not evidence whether the children's needs are being met and/or if children are making progress. The latest report for each child states that all children have up-to-date safer care plans and risk assessments. However, according to a recent audit of children's files that was carried out by the registered manager, this is not the case. Despite this, there are some good examples of children being very settled with their foster carers and doing well.

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

Safeguarding is not fully embedded into everyday practice. Foster carers do not have the necessary guidance and support to care for children safely. The absence of basic written plans and risk assessments means that foster carers must use their own initiative when managing difficult situations. In some cases, this had resulted in internal policies and procedures not being followed. Examples of this include foster

carers bypassing the agency and reporting incidents straight to the police or using the on-call system to seek basic advice before taking any action.

Significant gaps and shortfalls were identified with regards to children's case records. For all 14 children currently placed by the agency, there was an absence of many, and in some cases all, up-to-date documents such as local authority plans, essential information, risk assessments and safe care strategies.

These serious omissions are exacerbated by the records for foster carers that show numerous gaps and non-attendance at core training, such as child protection and safeguarding.

Safeguarding practice is poor. Senior managers do not have enough insight or oversight of safeguarding incidents or concerns to satisfy themselves that children are safe. Poor record-keeping makes it difficult for them to know exactly what has taken place, what action, if any, has been taken and what the outcome is. Examples of this include one foster carer repeatedly sharing and reporting concerns about a child being at risk of child sexual exploitation and another foster carer reporting that a child had gone missing. In both cases, there was no written audit trail of what had been done by the staff to safeguard the children and to prevent it happening again.

The agency does not operate within a culture of safety. The continual failure to notify Ofsted of all significant events, along with the absence of a central recording system for incidents and concerns, means that there has been no opportunity to monitor situations to identify patterns or agree strategies to manage them. As a result, senior managers and staff have a poor understanding of the children's risk factors. There is also an over-reliance from them of 'knowing' the children and the foster carers and accepting things at face value, which places them at further risk of harm.

The process for managing complaints is ineffective. Several foster carers have recently expressed their unhappiness about the way that they feel they have been treated by senior managers and about the lack of support they have received from the staff. However, there are no written records to evidence this, despite it being widely known within the agency. As a result, some foster carers have not felt listened to and feel that they had no other option but to write to Ofsted and complain as well as resign from the agency.

Unsafe recruitment practice means that the proper processes are not followed to ensure that the staff are suitably vetted and qualified to work with the children. Senior managers dealing with recruitment have not had relevant training in safer recruitment. This, along with a lack of attention to internal processes, has led to significant shortfalls in pre-employment and ongoing checks being carried out.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Since the last full inspection, significant events and disruptions throughout the senior leadership team have undermined and destabilised the agency. The breakdown in relationships between senior leaders, and the impact this has had, is cited by foster carers as their reason for giving notice to leave the agency.

Since February 2020, two directors have left, leaving the registered manager and the responsible individual as the remaining leadership team. Despite recent conflict, there is no formal contract or written agreement in place to set out a clear structure or process to follow in the event of any future disputes or disagreements. There are no added safeguards, other than a verbal undertaking that 'they intend to work together' to protect the agency. This concern is exacerbated by both individuals providing the inspectors with very different ideas of how they each see the future of the agency.

Ofsted has not received the company accounts in order to fully explore the agency's financial viability. Inspectors spoke with the accountant by telephone. The verbal assertion of financial viability was based on the information the accountant has considered up until October 2019. Since that time, the total number of foster carers who have given their intention to resign has risen. At the time of this inspection, there were three fostering households who said that they intend to remain with the agency. Leaders were unable to produce a convincing or evidence-based plan in relation to continuing financial sustainability.

In the last 12-month period, the registered manager failed to notify Ofsted of her extended absence. Consequently, Ofsted was unable to consider the impact of the arrangements that were put in place. The registered manager said that she was able to complete certain tasks remotely while abroad, such as the quality assurance of assessments. However, during the inspection inspectors did not find evidence to support that this happened in practice.

The agency has a limited amount of suitably qualified and experienced staff. The registered manager returned to the agency in January 2020. A newly qualified social worker is the allocated supervising social worker for all fostering households. An independent social worker has just been recruited to act as a mentor and supervisor. However, there is no full recruitment evidence, written agreement or job description for this individual or for the role. The records that were produced for the supervising social worker's induction, supervision and probationary period are scant and do not demonstrate sufficient frequency or content, in line with her professional development needs.

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 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.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster parents are familiar with, and act in accordance with the policies established in accordance with regulations 12(1) and 13(1) and (3).</p> <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, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17(1)(2)(3))</p>	30/04/2020
<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, and</p> <p>before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given to the child's—</p> <p>wishes and feelings (having regard to the child's age and understanding), and</p> <p>religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. (Regulation 11(a)* (b)(i)(ii))</p>	30/04/2020
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which—</p> <p>is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and</p>	30/04/2020

sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12(1)(a)(b))	
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))	30/04/2020
The fostering service provider must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, having regard to— the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it, and the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 19(a)(b))	30/04/2020
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, or 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. For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person— is of integrity and good character, has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform, is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform. (Regulation 20(1)(a)(b)(3)(a)(b)(c))	30/04/2020
The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them— receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal, and are enabled from time to time to obtain further qualifications appropriate to the work they perform. (Regulation 21(4)(a)(b))	30/04/2020
The registered person must maintain a system for— monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the	30/04/2020

<p>purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b)(2)(3))</p>	
<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))</p>	<p>30/04/2020</p>
<p>The registered provider must carry on the fostering agency in such manner as is likely to ensure that it will be financially viable for the purpose of achieving the aims and objectives set out in its statement of purpose.</p> <p>The registered provider must—</p> <p>ensure that adequate accounts are maintained and kept up to date in respect of the fostering agency, and</p> <p>supply a copy of the accounts, if requested to do so, to the Chief Inspector.</p> <p>The registered provider must provide the Chief Inspector with information requested for the purpose of considering the financial viability of the fostering agency, including—</p> <p>the annual accounts of the fostering agency, certified by an accountant,</p> <p>a reference from a bank expressing an opinion as to the registered provider's financial standing,</p> <p>information as to the financing and financial resources of the fostering agency. (Regulation 37(1)(2)(a)(b)(3)(a)(b)(c))</p>	<p>30/04/2020</p>
<p>Where the registered manager proposes to be absent from the fostering agency for a continuous period of 28 days or more, the registered person must give notice in writing to the Chief Inspector of the proposed absence.</p> <p>Except in the case of an emergency, the notice referred to in paragraph (1) must be given no later than one month before the proposed absence is to start, or within such shorter period as may be agreed with the Chief Inspector, and the notice must specify—</p> <p>the length or expected length of the proposed absence,</p> <p>the reason for the proposed absence,</p>	<p>30/04/2020</p>

<p>the arrangements which have been made for the running of the fostering agency during that absence,</p> <p>the name, address and qualifications of the person who will be responsible for the fostering agency during the absence, and</p> <p>the arrangements that have been made or are proposed to be made for appointing another person to manage the fostering agency during the absence, including the proposed date by which the appointment is to start.</p> <p>Where the registered manager has been absent from the fostering agency for a continuous period of 28 days or more, and the Chief Inspector has not been given notice of the absence, the registered person must without delay give notice in writing to the Chief Inspector specifying the matters mentioned in paragraph (2).</p> <p>The registered person must notify the Chief Inspector of the return to duty of the registered manager not later than 7 days after the date of return.</p> <p>(Regulation 38(1)(2)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(4)(5))</p>	
<p>The registered person must give notice in writing to the Chief Inspector without delay if any of the following events takes place or is proposed to take place—</p> <p>where the registered provider is an organisation—</p> <p>the name or address of the organisation is changed,</p> <p>there is any change of director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of the organisation.</p> <p>(Regulation 39(1)(e)(i)(ii))</p>	30/04/2020
<p>The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency,</p> <p>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—</p> <p>where the registered provider is an individual, that person,</p> <p>where the registered provider is an organisation, the responsible individual,</p>	30/04/2020

where the registered provider is a partnership, one of the partners,

undertakes, from time to time, such training as is appropriate to ensure that they have the experience and skills necessary for carrying on the fostering agency.

The registered manager must undertake from time to time such training as is appropriate to ensure that they have the experience and skills necessary for managing the fostering agency. (Regulation 8(1)(a)(b)(2)(a)(b)(c)(3))

* This requirement is subject to a compliance notice.

Information about this inspection

Ofsted is aware of the challenges that Covid-19 is currently posing to those we regulate. During this visit, the inspectors took into consideration the impact of any measures being taken to slow the spread of Coronavirus by the agency. This has included the effect these have had on staffing arrangements.

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: SC061808

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Inspectors

Amanda Harvey, Social Care Inspector

Sophie Wood, Social Care Inspector

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