

Pilgrims Corner Fostering Ltd

185 Sea Street, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 8JY

Monitoring visit

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency currently has 25 fostering households and offers short-term, long-term, respite, emergency, and parent and child placements.

The manager registered with Ofsted in August 2020.

Inspection date: 29 September 2020

Date of previous inspection: 29 October 2018

This monitoring visit

Ofsted received notification of a significant event from the agency on 22 September 2020. Ofsted determined that a monitoring visit was necessary in order to: examine the incident more closely; be assured of the safety and welfare of the children concerned; establish whether the agency was acting in accordance with the regulations.

Two regulatory inspection managers conducted this visit in one day. They met with senior leaders and the agency staff responsible for the supervision and support of the fostering household that was the subject of the notification. A case-tracking exercise was undertaken. This included the transfer and assessment process followed by the agency, foster carer supervision records and case records for the children accommodated. External agency professionals involved in the events surrounding the notification were also spoken with.

The inspectors identified a range of concerns and shortfalls in the agency's safeguarding practice. Potential preventive measures had not been identified before or after the event, and senior leaders had not taken decisive action in the best interests of the children.

Since its last full inspection, the agency has significantly increased its number of fostering carers, by way of 18 fostering households transferring from other independent fostering agencies. Through reviewing records and by interviewing

staff, inspectors identified gaps in the quality and content of the Form F assessment that was examined. For example, despite children already living in a fostering household, their own experience of being there was not sufficiently explored. Consequently, the children's feedback, which would have provided reliable information, was not used in the assessment. This omission was not identified by the registered manager in her quality assurance role and, although it was noted by the panel, no remedial action was taken. Inspectors also noted that the assessor who completed this assessment, also completed the previous one, when the supervising social worker and the foster carer belonged to another agency. This was a missed opportunity by the registered manager to use a different assessor, as an added layer of reassurance and impartiality.

Poor supervision practice by the agency has not addressed foster carer training or support needs. Despite significant clues and indicators in a foster carer's daily records, the opportunity to amend and improve upon the support provided was not taken. Three consecutive sets of a foster carer's supervision records contained significant gaps and omissions. Despite rising concerns, the agency continued to conduct supervision visits in accordance with its prescribed guidance on regularity. The need for and value of increasing the supervision contact with the household were not considered, nor was the decision taken to conduct an unannounced visit as an added safeguard. Supervision records did not contain evidence that the views and opinions of children had been sought. This demonstrates that the agency did not actively seek to be assured of their welfare, safety and lived experience of being in care.

The same poor quality was found with regard to safe care guidance and children's risk assessments. None of these documents formed the basis upon which to deliver safe, effective care and support to the children or the foster carer. Despite the signs of escalating concerns, these records had gone months without review or update. The foster carer's daily records contained emotive language and stigmatising terminology that will not be helpful for children if they read their records in later life.

When a serious incident occurred that caused harm to a child, the immediate actions of agency staff were indecisive and unnecessarily slow. The agency's failure to take immediate action to assure itself of the safety and welfare of the children is a serious failing of senior leadership. Senior leaders, including the registered manager did not lead the initial dialogue with safeguarding professionals, and Ofsted was not notified until eight days after the incident, by a supervising social worker. The absence of senior leadership involvement throughout the journey of this incident raises serious concerns about managerial understanding, responsibility and oversight.

As a result of this monitoring visit, a range of regulatory breaches were identified. Ofsted will continue to monitor the agency's progress in addressing these.

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>Independent fostering agencies – duty to secure welfare</p> <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 (Regulation 11(1)(a))</p>	20/11/2020
<p>Arrangements for the protection of children</p> <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> <p>sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>(3) The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for—</p> <p>the prompt referral to the area authority of any allegation of abuse or neglect affecting any child placed by the fostering service provider;</p> <p>notification of the instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiries involving a child placed by the fostering service provider, to the Chief Inspector;</p> <p>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)(4)(b)(c)(e))</p>	20/11/2020

<p>Behaviour management and children missing from foster parent's home</p> <p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>(2) The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that—</p> <p>no child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable. (Regulation 13(1)(2)(b))</p>	20/11/2020
<p>Support, training and information for foster parents</p> <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). (Regulation 17(1)(2))</p>	20/11/2020
<p>Review of quality of care</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. (Regulation 35(1)(a)(b))</p>	20/11/2020
<p>Notifiable events</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>	20/11/2020
<p>Registered person – general requirements</p> <p>The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to—</p>	20/11/2020

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. (Regulation 8(1)(a)(b))

Recommendations

- The wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account when monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 1.7)
- There are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This includes the financial viability of the service, any serious incidents, allegations or complaints about the service and ensuring the quality of the service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.1)

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this visit was to assess the action taken by the agency in response to a serious safeguarding incident and the agency's compliance with the regulations.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC376060

Registered provider: Pilgrims Corner Fostering Ltd

Registered provider address: Suite 5, Enterprise House, The Links, Herne Bay,
Kent CT6 7GQ

Responsible individual: Sarah Norman

Registered Manager: Caroline Newman

Inspectors

Lead inspector: Sophie Wood, regulatory inspection manager

Team member: Lee Kirwin, regulatory inspection manager

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