

Flowers Fostering Limited

Ability House, 121 Brooker Road, Waltham Abbey, Essex EN9 1JH

Assurance visit

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned fostering agency provides long-term, short-term, emergency and parent-and-child placements. At the time of this visit, the agency had four fostering households and were providing foster placements for three children.

The registered manager's position has been vacant since 20 July 2020. A new manager is in post and has not yet applied to register.

Visit dates: 24 to 25 November 2020

Previous inspection date: Not previously inspected

Previous inspection judgement: Not previously inspected

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

Children are doing well in their foster homes. They are supported through good relationships with their foster carers. Some children have additional support provided by the agency. This includes, in one case, an identified person to undertake activities with, although the second COVID-19 national lockdown period has limited this.

Foster carers meet children's health needs. They have ensured that the children are registered with routine health services. Children also have their emotional needs met by their foster carers.

Foster carers are encouraging and supporting children with their education, including, for one child, additional tuition. One child, who is now living closer to her school, can spend time with friends outside of school hours.

Children who see their families have been able to continue with this despite the COVID-19 pandemic. This helps them to develop and maintain these important relationships.

One child has been helped by her foster carers to understand her identity. She was placed with foster carers of the same religion. Her placing social worker said that because of this help from the foster carers the child has flourished.

The safety of children

The manager is currently undertaking the role of supervising foster carers. In this role, she is supporting carers to set appropriate boundaries for children. This is helping children who are testing boundaries to develop appropriate behaviour.

Foster carers and the manager respond appropriately when children go missing from their foster home. This helps to safeguard children. For one child, the frequency of episodes of going missing or returning home late is beginning to decrease.

A placing social worker said that foster carers had made a child feel safe and, as a result, she was able to disclose historic abuse. The foster carers and the agency worked well with the placing authority to respond to these allegations and support the child.

Some parts of health and safety checklists for foster carers' homes have not been completed or need to be reviewed. Without these processes being undertaken, managers cannot be assured that all foster carers' homes are as safe as they could be.

Risk assessments are not being undertaken to identify risk for individual children and to identify ways of reducing or managing those risks. While there is no clear indication that the children are unsafe, the lack of a clear process to identify, review and reduce risk does not safeguard children effectively.

Leaders and managers

The staffing arrangements in the agency are not sufficient to ensure good practice across all of their functions. The manager is undertaking too many tasks and has not had time to ensure that basic records, such as supervisions of carers, are written up. Not only does this prevent clear evidence that supervisions are taking place, it prevents carers from receiving clear records of what has been discussed and agreed. An additional member of staff has been identified and is due to start work at the agency soon.

The manager knows what needs to happen to develop the agency and to make sure that it is meeting the required standards. Her ability to address the issues has been limited by the immediate priorities of having to supervise foster carers and recruit a new foster panel.

The foster panel minutes for one foster carer are lacking. At the start, they cover issues for this carer and then change to those for another carer. This does not provide evidence that the carer's suitability has been appropriately assessed and questions the processes of monitoring these records. There have been significant changes to panel membership. A new panel chairperson has been appointed and is planning for the first meeting of the new panel.

There is good communication and joint work between the agency and placing authorities. This helps to promote good outcomes for children.

A parent and child are living with a foster carer who has not had any training or preparation for this type of placement. Although the placement is going well for the parent and child, the foster carer was not aware of what it would entail and is feeling pressured. Another foster carer has undertaken a very limited amount of training. They have not had any training on managing child exploitation, despite this being a possible risk for the child due to their behaviour. This does not safeguard the child effectively.

The parent and child placed with one foster carer are not in line with the carer's terms of approval. In addition, foster carer agreements do not all have the correct terms of approval in them. This limits the safeguards to make sure that there is good matching and that foster carers are able to meet children's needs well.

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 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))	29/01/2021
<p>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—</p> <p>the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it, and</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 19 (a)(b))</p>	29/01/2021
<p>If a fostering service provider decide to approve X as a foster parent they must—</p> <p>give X notice in writing specifying any terms on which the approval is given, and</p> <p>enter into a written agreement with X covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (the “foster care agreement”). (Regulation 27 (5)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the foster care agreement accurately states the terms of approval.</p>	31/12/2020

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. In particular, ensure that the potential risks to children are assessed and preventative measures are identified. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 4.5)
- The panel chair should ensure that written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 14.7)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 21.8)
- The registered person should ensure that, other than in an emergency, a child is only be placed with a foster carer whose terms of approval match the child's circumstances, although in an emergency a child may be placed for up to six working days with any foster carer who has been approved under the 2011 Regulations. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4, paragraph 3.3)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are supported to ensure that their homes are free of avoidable hazards, in keeping with family life. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4, paragraph 3.82)

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 2551006

Registered provider: Flowers Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: AW House, 6 to 8 Stuart Street, Luton, Bedfordshire LU1 2SJ

Responsible individual: Susan Coley

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Clive Lucas, Social Care Inspector

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