

The Fostering Foundation

46-47 Brook Street, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0HE

Assurance visit

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is an independent fostering agency based in the south-west region of England. The main branch office is based in Tavistock, with one smaller office operating in Bristol.

The service provides a range of fostering services, including short-term, long-term and emergency care, for children and young people who may have complex care needs. There are currently 51 foster carers looking after 64 children.

Visit dates: 2 to 3 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 30 September 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Requires improvement to be good

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

Many children have lived with their foster carers for a long time, have a sense of permanence and feel loved. Foster carers strongly advocate for the children in their care to obtain the services that children need. For example, foster carers regularly challenge placing authorities to obtain therapeutic or educational services for children.

Foster carers benefit from having clear guidance about how best to care for children, which is contained in up-to-date care plans and safer caring plans. However, the voice of the child is not always clearly documented in these plans to evidence that the child's views and wishes are being heard and acted on if possible.

Children make progress with their education. Foster carers ensure that children continue with their education through COVID-19 restrictions when schools are closed, or when children are self-isolating, by supporting the children in their care with home schooling. Children and foster carers report that they use this opportunity to spend time together, learn together and develop their relationship.

Foster carers receive support from their supervising social workers either virtually or face to face following an assessment of risk. Support groups and training for foster carers are continuing virtually to ensure that foster carers have the skills and support required to offer quality and nurturing care to children.

Foster carers, leaders and managers know the children in their care well and are knowledgeable about the progress they are making. However, this information is not always documented by the supervising social workers in outcome trackers and used to inform placement planning meetings.

The safety of children

Foster carers are trained in accredited safe holds to ensure that if a child needs to be held as a last resort to keep themselves or others safe, then this is achieved safely and effectively. Any incidents of a child being held are comprehensively recorded, the child's safer caring plan is updated and the record of the hold is evaluated by managers for any learning.

Incidents of children going missing from care are rare. When this does happen, foster carers confidently use the agency's missing-from-care procedures. Professional curiosity is shown when a child goes missing and all children are offered a return-to-home interview to find out where they have been, what they have been doing and who they were with during the time they were missing.

Foster carers benefit from having an up-to-date and comprehensive safer caring plan which offers them guidance on how to safely manage the behaviour of children in their care. Household safer caring plans are reviewed annually to ensure that foster carers' homes meet health and safety regulations.

The agency's parent and child placement policy has recently been updated. Children are no longer placed alongside parent and child placements, as it is recognised by the agency that this arrangement potentially could put children at risk.

Foster carers' recording logs are sent by foster carers to the agency. Depending on the needs of the child, the logs will be sent daily, weekly or monthly so that supervising social workers are kept informed of any difficulties or the progress that a child is making. However, some foster carers are not always submitting logs regularly. This shortfall is not always challenged in supervision sessions.

Safeguarding concerns are not always reported in a timely manner to safeguarding professionals in accordance with the agency's safeguarding procedures.

Foster carers and children know how to complain. Complaints are promptly and comprehensively investigated and resolved in accordance with the agency's complaints procedure. However, on one occasion, a young person was not informed about the outcome of their complaint.

Leaders and managers

Foster carers and staff report that management oversight has improved. They comment positively about management arrangements and support. A new information technology system is in place and is supporting managers to easily access the information and data that they need to further improve management oversight, in accordance with the agency's action plan.

Staff recruitment procedures are effective and ensure that only suitable people are employed by the agency. Recruitment for new staff has successfully been undertaken in response to a lack of consistency for foster carers, due to staff vacancies and changes in supervising social workers. There is now a consistent and stable staff team and no vacancies.

The agency's statement of purpose is regularly updated and is published on the agency's website. This document contains clear guidance to placing authorities, staff and foster carers about the functions and aims of the agency.

Leaders and managers are undertaking extensive monitoring of how COVID-19 restrictions are impacting on foster carers and children. Managers produce detailed weekly reports for placing authorities evaluating how the restrictions are impacting on children and foster carers. For example, it was found that some children are finding the restrictions very hard to cope with, which has resulted in frustration, anger and an increase in risk-taking behaviours. In response, a risk assessment is

quickly undertaken by the agency and extra support for the foster carers and children is provided if necessary.

The fostering panel provides a comprehensive quality monitoring function. Panel meetings are being held virtually. The meetings are recorded. However, reasons for decisions where concerns have been raised by panel members are not fully and comprehensively recorded, to fully evidence decision-making processes.

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 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>The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for—</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)(e))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that leaders and managers report safeguarding concerns to safeguarding professionals in line with the agency's safeguarding policy and procedure, and promptly make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service if necessary.</p>	18 January 2021

Recommendations

- The registered person should develop and implement outcome trackers so that the progress of children is evident and clearly recorded so that this evaluation of progress can contribute to the child's placement plan review. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 31.7)
- The registered person should ensure that children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support and that the voice of the child is heard and recorded in all plans and documents. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 1.3)
- The registered person should ensure that the 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)

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 1378486

Registered provider: The Fostering Foundation Limited

Registered provider address: The Fostering Foundation, 46-47 Brook Street, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0HE

Responsible individual: Geoffrey Lewis

Registered manager: Georgina Dunk

Inspector

Tina Maddison, Social Care Inspector

Tracey Ledder, Social Care Inspector

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